

# A PROMISE FULFILLED

## PROLOGUE

*[Voice of Uly Adair]*

It was the year 2220 - station time. We were our fifth year on the planet and summer was approaching again. Our group reached New Pacifica before the second winter set in; several of the cargo pods had landed right on the dot, so by the time the colony ship arrived we'd built quite a settlement. Out of the almost 250 children 229 survived cold sleep...

The Terrians expressed their willingness to heal all the surviving children during the first Mooncross after landing. But many of the parents were put off by the outlandish cure my mother had found. And a lot more were just plain scared of the native population of this planet, unprepared to put their kids in the hands of these strange silent creatures. No matter how often my mother tried to explain, no matter how many arguments Julia put forward or how I tried to tell them it wasn't scary or painful, about half of the families refused to let the Terrians heal their children.

Over 300 people returned to the stations when the colony ship left. Mom felt it as a personal failure but dedicated all her energies to setting up a thriving community with the remaining population.

The differences in health and points of view of those who stayed caused a deep rift in our small community. Some distrusted the Terrians and considered the children that were healed freaks. And the humans that put their faith in the aliens struggled to maintain a peaceful coexistence of both species.

A lot of the colonists were scared of the Terrians. Maxwell Taggert led them. Taggert was a politician, he once ran for Section Governor on the stations. He played into people's fears, arguing that the Advance group struck a deal with the Terrians. He also claimed we knew of valuable resources that we kept to ourselves.

I worried about the politics. My mother tried ceaselessly to mediate between the various factions, but she wasn't very successful in convincing the colonists of the Terrians' good intentions. A power struggle between the different parties was imminent and I feared that it would be the Terrians who received the short end of the stick. And the Terrians were my friends...

## [CHAPTER ONE]

*[Year 5 - Day 110 (New Pacifica calendar); the first days of spring]*

"Ulysses Adair!" With a start the stern voice shook Uly out of his musings.

"Are you at all listening to me?" his teacher, Mrs. Robbins asked, her face only inches from his. She was so close he could count the hairs growing out of the large mole on her chin.

"Uh, yes," Uly tried.

"So, what is the answer to my question?" she demanded to know.

"Uh, what question?" Uly asked sheepishly.

The class laughed.

"Can't your dream friends help you now, huh?" Max Taggert Jr. mocked.

Uly shot the other boy a murderous look.

"Ulysses," his teacher sighed, "you will deliver a paper tomorrow on the reasons for the '81 skylift. Maybe that'll teach you to pay attention in my class."

Uly sighed. If someone had told him at the time he'd never have believed it, but he missed the school hours with Yale, before the Colony ship arrived.

Yale... His thoughts went back to his first teacher. The death of the old man had been a serious loss to the colony. His mother was devastated, losing father, teacher and advisor all at once when he passed away. Uly was glad that John Danziger decided to stay in New Pacifica instead of going back with the colony ship. The gruff mechanic turned out to be a great support to his mother.

Thinking of Danziger reminded him he was supposed to meet True after school to help her with the Kobas. Uly and True had gotten very close during the past couple of years. The two youngsters drifted towards another more every day, both feeling they were different from the other kids. After all, they'd survived all kinds of hardship during the long trek across G889, while the others landed in a sheltered settlement.

Young True never got her cat, but nowadays she tended to a stable of Kobas instead. They used the poison in the creatures' nails to synthesize various pain blockers and

sedatives. True spent most of her time in the hospital these days, acting as Julia's apprentice, learning from the young doctor all she could.

oOo

True waited impatiently for Uly. Where was that boy? He was supposed to meet her here after school. They were going to the Koba farm, but she'd been waiting half an hour already. Boys! You couldn't trust 'em one bit. And just when she had something very exciting to show him too.

But finally she heard the hum of an ATV. Uly steered towards the girl. As the vehicle pulled up next to her, she climbed on behind him.

"Where were you?" she demanded to know.

"Sorry I'm late," he apologized, "Mrs. Robbins got on my case again."

"Uly, then don't provoke her," the older girl counseled.

"I didn't," he protested, "she just got it in for the healed kids."

True shrugged, though he couldn't see her. He was right; Mrs. Robbins was very suspicious of the Terrians and the cured children. True figured she was one of those narrow-minded folks that couldn't see a good thing if it bit them on the nose. But she also realized that maybe that wasn't fair; the woman lost her little girl to cold sleep.

"Uly, you won't believe what I got to show you," she changed the subject to more appealing matters.

"What? What is it?" the boy asked, caught up in her excitement.

"Oh, you'll see," she teased, not wanting to give away the surprise. Propelled by curiosity, the boy pushed the ATV to its limits.

A few minutes later they arrived at the Koba farm. Farm wasn't exactly the right word, but everybody called it that. When they found out the toxin in the Koba's nails had incredible pharmaceutical uses, they'd wanted to have ready access to the creatures. But no one was prepared to lock them in cages.

So instead, they dug a Koba warren a little away from the town and left food there. It wasn't long before several of the small rodents found their way in. The creatures were quite content to let the humans provide food and shelter in return for getting their nails

clipped once in a while.

"Uly, come on, let's look," True yelled as she hopped off the ATV. Uly climbed out and quickly followed her. She crouched near a hollowed tree and gently pushed away some branches that covered the opening to the Koba nest.

"Uly, look," she whispered breathlessly.

He bent to look over her shoulder. His breath stocked for sheer wonder. Inside, their mother hovering protectively over them, were five very small Koba babies, their eyes still closed.

"Wow...", " was all he could say.

"Aren't they beautiful?" the girl asked him, fascinated.

"Yes, they are," he replied. "Maybe we should let 'em be, not disturb 'em anymore," he remarked a little worried. After all, getting stung by one of the creatures was pretty nasty, even if it wasn't fatal. He sure didn't feel like losing a couple of days of his life to a dreamless coma.

"It's okay," True assured him, "they don't mind us watching."

But she pushed back the branches nonetheless.

As they walked away, he wondered out loud. "This is the first time they've had babies, isn't it?"

"As far as I know, yeah," she replied. "Isn't it amazing?"

## [CHAPTER TWO]

In disgust Devon Adair pushed the screen away from her. She closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to dispel an imminent headache. She hated paperwork, especially if it dealt with the endless demands of the colonists for more land, claiming a larger and larger piece of the New Pacifica area for mankind. She understood the need for expansion but also knew she was treading a fine line between the colonists' demands and the Terrian benevolence.

The native population had been remarkably tolerant so far of their ever-increasing construction works. The small settlement now stretched across a fair-sized part of the

Pacific coastline, and more claims were staked all the time. Forests were cleared and fields cultivated for agriculture.

Alonzo's concerns about encroaching on the Terrian domain increased daily; the building activity already caused one of the aliens' tunnels to cave in. That time they'd backed off from the area but Devon knew the next time the colonists wouldn't budge so easily.

Without bothering to knock, someone entered her office. Startled, she opened her eyes to see Maxwell Taggart standing in front of her desk. He scowled at her venomously.

"Adair, what's this with denying our claim to the area near the Upper Morgan River? You may be our Administrator-in-Chief, but don't you think this is something the whole settlement should decide on?"

She sighed tiredly. Why wouldn't he understand she was just being cautious?

"Maxwell, you know the Upper Morgan River is near Terrian territory. We can't start blasting away there to clear the terrain, it'd make the tunnels collapse."

"Adair, you know we *must* have control over the Morgan river! It's our only secure water supply."

"We've no trouble obtaining water, now do we?" she replied as she stood up. "We don't need the Upper part of the river. The Terrians have turned a blind eye to our diversion of the lower branch. But that'd change if we caused their tunnels to cave in."

Outside, John Danziger passed Devon's office. Alerted by the loud voices drifting out, he entered the small building.

"Devon, everything okay?" he asked with a dirty look directed at the other man.

"I'm calling a town meeting," Taggart ignored Danziger. "That's where we'll decide the matter," and with that promise he barged out of the door again.

Devon sighed as she sat back in her chair.

"I'm fine, John, thank you. I just wish that man wouldn't make it so damn hard to run this settlement." She smiled wanly at him.

He grinned back.

"He's worse than I ever was, huh. But now you understand why I refused a seat on the Administration Committee?"

oOo

On the veranda running along the front of the hospital building a table with several chairs had been set up. This is where the members of the town's Administration Committee took their seats.

Devon Adair, as Administrator-in-Chief sat in the middle. On her left sat two members of the pro-expansion faction: Maxwell Taggert and Mrs. Robbins, the teacher. On her right sat two members of the former Advancegroup, Morgan Martin and Dr. Julia Heller. Devon knew these two would support her, having both experienced and learned a lot more about the planet than the other colonists.

In the falling darkness the full population of the outpost gathered on the open space in front of the hospital. Lumalamps were set up to light the square. Absently Devon noted they should start officially naming the streets soon or get hopelessly confused in their own town. Hospital Square didn't really have an attractive ring to it.

When everyone was more or less settled, Devon called the meeting to attention.

"Thank you all for coming," she began. "As you may know, we've got to decide on the issue of developing the area near the Upper Morgan River. This is an important issue as the Upper River is very close to the Terrian dwellings."

Maxwell Taggert stood up, pushing his chair back. With a loud voice he declared, "It is not such a hard decision. We \*need\* to have access to the Upper River. As you all know the river is our only reliable source for water. And I don't have to tell you what happens to us without water!"

The crowd was silent for a moment. They all recalled their second summer on the planet, when a lasting drought nearly killed off all their live stock and caused most of their crops to fail. If it hadn't been for the cryogenic embryos aboard Colony, they would have famished. They barely made it as it was.

"You're right!" someone yelled from the crowd. "We can't risk that to happen again."

Concurring murmurs rose from the gathered colonists.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Devon tried. "We solved the water problem by diverting the Lower Morgan River. We've got a steady water supply now, no matter how long the

summer lasts."

"That's true," Taggert conceded. "But the Terrians still have control over the water. What if they suddenly decide to withhold it from us?"

"They won't do that," Julia replied into a chorus of concerned shouts.

"How can you be so sure?" Mrs. Robbins, the teacher asked her. "What makes you think we can trust these creatures? I know you don't want to have anything to do with them yourself!"

For a moment Julia was at a loss, searching for a reply. Devon realized the teacher was right. Julia did steer clear of the alien species, even if Alonzo was always acting as middleman between the humans and the aliens. But both knew the Terrians wouldn't harm the humans, not unless they were seriously provoked.

"As long as we respect the Terrians' territories and wishes, we're safe," Morgan declared.

"Oh, come on," Taggert interjected. "We don't know that. We don't have clue what those diggers want from us! All we got is his word," and he pointed to Alonzo, standing a little off to the left of the crowd.

"And he could get it wrong any time. Or maybe even misunderstand on purpose, to keep any wealth of this planet to himself," Taggert insinuated.

"Woa there," Julia wanted to come to Alonzo's defense, but a brief shake of the pilot's head stopped her short.

"There's nothing of value on this planet," Morgan said instead. "At least nothing besides clean air, healthy land and pure water. Which I find a great improvement over the stations," he added. Devon smiled to herself at hearing Morgan's words. He'd improved quite a lot himself since leaving the stations, she thought.

"Why do I find that hard to believe?" Taggert answered sarcastically. "You know, I'm sick and tired of you Advancers pretending to know it all so well. Your superior attitude really irritates me. Just because you crisscrossed the planet, you think you've seen it all! And I'm thinking maybe that's why you don't want us to go to the Upper Morgan River."

He turned towards the gathered colonists. "Maybe they've found something there. Like Morganite. Or iron ore. Or maybe even gold!"

At the reference to the archaic but still valuable metal several eyes began to gleam with

greed. Though everyone had come to G889 looking for a cure for their children, some stayed hoping to find riches and fortune here as well. A soft murmur rose from the crowd.

"You can't go off mining this planet," a woman's alarmed voice yelled. It was Bess, Morgan's wife and born and raised on earth. She'd seen with her own eyes the devastation mining could cause. "You'd kill it just like we did old earth!"

The square erupted in a cacophony of shouts and exclamations. Some colonists were supportive of the former Advancers but a lot proclaimed their distrust of both their fellow men and the Terrians. Neighbor shouted at neighbor, and here and there shoving matches took place.

Devon tried desperately to make herself heard over the din and call the meeting back to order, but no one listened. Until John Danziger jumped up on the porch and roared in his deepest voice, "Everybody shut the hell up!"

As the crowd slowly quieted he continued less loudly, "Why don't we call it a day for now. We'll all go home and think about it. Then, tomorrow, when we're all calmed down, we can put the matter of the Upper Morgan River to a vote."

Slowly the crowd dispersed. Alonzo jumped on the veranda, crouching next to Julia. She squeezed his hand and apologized for her fellow Committee member.

"Lonz, I'm sorry," she said, with a disgusted look at Maxwell Taggert's receding back.

"It's okay," he replied. "I know who's talking."

Devon turned towards the couple.

"Alonzo, any word from the Terrians on this?" she asked him.

"No," he replied. "But there's something else you need to know."

oOo

They didn't want to be seen conversing amongst themselves so shortly after the heated meeting, so instead several members of the former Advance team gathered later that night in the small cabin Alonzo and Julia shared.

Alonzo silently gazed around at this group of people that had come to mean a lot to him. They'd been through so much together during their long trek across the planet. They

suffered hardships and misfortune, but it molded them into a close knit family that would trust each other with their lives unconditionally. And they'd all changed so much. Morgan, who started out the ultimate bureaucrat, was now a valued member of the community. Devon was a lot less commandeering, instead listening to various opinions before making a decision. John Danziger also mellowed a lot. And Julia... he turned to observe her. She'd probably changed the most of them all.

"Alonzo, what is it you want to tell us?" Devon came to the point. "You heard from the Terrians?"

"Yes, I did," he replied. "I'm not completely certain I understand them right, but they said the time of change is near."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Morgan interjected impatiently. Bess silenced him with a look.

"Morgan, I'm not sure. But from what they tell me, it seems the planet goes through a major change once every couple of years. You know, another of those cycles. Like the Terrian cycles of going into the earth at Mooncross and being reborn again. When we got here, one planetary cycle just began. And now it's time for another."

"Lonz, what are you trying to say," Danziger asked, not quite understanding the pilot.

"Hell, I don't know." He threw up his hands in frustration. "The Terrians show me everything in images and I've to put it into words. It's not always easy."

Julia moved to stand behind him and patted his arm in support. She knew how hard it was for him to translate for the aliens.

"I think the planet somehow renews itself. They keep showing me a cave, about a week's travel northeast of here. It's like that's where the planet's core, its soul, resides. That's where new life starts."

"Hey," Morgan said, "isn't that where we've been picking up those pulses from lately?"

"Yes, it is," Alonzo confirmed. "Somehow the planet throws off its old self."

"Like shedding its skin?" Julia asked.

"Yeah, kinda... I don't really know how to explain it. But it seems like a violent process."

"Alonzo, what are you saying?" Devon asked, a worried frown appearing on her face. The

lines around her mouth showed more prominently as they always did when she was concerned.

"I'm not sure. But I think we'll experience some of the violence here. The magnetic pulses are only the beginning."

"So, what can we expect?" Danziger, always the practical one, asked next.

"Probably stronger pulses, disruption of the comm system and maybe some minor earthquakes."

"Earthquakes?!" Bess gasped, having experienced a planetary upheaval on earth once.

"Yes. Nothing really strong, I think," Alonzo answered. "But I think we should be prepared."

"And what about this place, this cave you mentioned," Morgan wanted to know.

"No one can go there!" Alonzo exclaimed in alarm. He stood up and paced the small room. "Devon, the Terrians were adamant. We can't go near that cave. It's forbidden."

"Okay, okay," Devon soothed the pilot's obvious agitation. "We won't go there. You tell the Terrians they have my word. We'll inform everyone at tomorrow night's meeting."

oOo

The following night the New Pacifica population gathered near the hospital again. And though it was impossible, it seemed as if the turnout was even larger than the night before; everyone wanted to take part in the voting.

Once more Devon called the meeting to attention.

"Before we vote," she began, "there's another issue that I need to inform you about. Alonzo tells me that the Terrians contacted him. Not about the water rights to the Upper Morgan River," she forestalled any comments, "but about something completely different."

She continued to tell a captive audience all Alonzo told the small group the night before.

"So, we better be prepared for some unexpected events," she concluded. "And one more thing, I promised the Terrians we'd respect their wish: the northeastern cave and a 5-mile radius around it is off limits."

"Adair, who do you think..." Taggert began on her left, but she cut him short.

"And now to the vote about the Upper River..."

Subdued by the news Devon told them, the vote went against developing the Upper Morgan River region, at least for now. Most colonists remembered the holovids they'd seen about earthquakes and volcanic eruptions so they decided they'd better not antagonize their strange neighbors right now.

As the meeting closed and the Committee dispersed, Maxwell Taggert took Devon aside.

"Don't you dare think this is over, Adair," he threatened. "My time will come..."

### [CHAPTER THREE]

*[Year 5, Day 143 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

Julia looked dumbfounded at the diagnosis her glove read. This couldn't be right! She punched a couple of buttons, slightly adjusted the position of the diaglove on her abdomen, but the result remained the same. Part of her wondered if the glove was faulty. But the more practical side of her mind told her that that wasn't really possible. She'd only recalibrated the instrument this morning...

While she sat staring at the blinking contraption, Alonzo barged into the hut.

"Hey Doc, you gotta..." he began, but one look at her face stopped him short.

"Julia, what's wrong? You look as if you just saw a ghost," he said. Then, upon seeing the diaglove on her hand, his concern deepened.

"Are you okay? I know you've been very tired lately..."

"No, no, nothing's wrong," she assured him, "I'm fine."

Then, almost as an afterthought she added, "I'm pregnant."

His eyes widened and he was silent for a moment. Then, a slow and quite goofy grin crept over his face. His eyes sparkled and the dimples in his cheeks had never looked more appealing as he exclaimed, "But that's great!"

"Isn't it?" he added upon noticing the tiny frown between her eyebrows.

"I don't know. I guess so," she answered slowly. "But I don't understand how it's possible. You've been taking your suppressors, haven't you? I guess I must've done something wrong during the synthesizing process..."

She faltered as he began to laugh.

"Doc, please," he exclaimed, grinning broadly. "Stop analyzing everything to death. Just let things happen once in a while. Leave nature to take its course."

"But Lonzo," she began, to be stopped short when he took her in a close embrace.

"Julia," he said seriously, "this is a wonderful thing. And I really don't have to know exactly how it happened. Although," he added with a mischievous grin, "I do have some idea..." and he bent slightly to take possession of her mouth with his own, hands roaming down her back as she leaned into him.

oOo

A couple of days passed. Julia still couldn't believe she really was pregnant and in the colony's hospital building she ran some more tests on herself to make absolutely sure her glove wasn't wrong. But the results remained the same: she was expecting what appeared to be a very healthy baby.

"Wow, Julia" True remarked, busying herself with clearing away the test samples. "I didn't know you and Alonzo were planning on having children."

"We weren't," Julia answered while she bowed over the gen-scope trying to make out the baby's genetic fingerprint. It was too small yet to have a clearly discernable composition; the only thing she could conclude was that it was definitely of a separate genetic make-up.

"Oh," True answered, surprised. "But then, how..."

"I don't know," Julia cut her off. "Alonzo assures me he has taken his suppressors faithfully so maybe we botched up that last batch we made."

"It's weird," True mused. "Bess has wanted a baby for years... And now all of a sudden you're all expecting babies!"

"Yeah," Julia replied absently, while her mind started racing down another track.

True was right, Bess and Morgan had been trying for a long time to have a baby, and so had Walman and Magus. Julia could think of a few more couples that had come in the past years to see one of the doctors about not taking the suppressors anymore. But despite the fact that nearly seven hundred people lived here for four or five planetary years, no babies had been born. And now she was the fourth woman in three weeks who discovered she was expecting a child...

"What does Alonzo say? Is he happy?" True's inquiry stopped her train of thought.

"Yes, he's ecstatic," Julia smiled, thinking of the happy grin that hadn't left Lonzo's face since she told him he was going to be a daddy.

"And what do the Terrians say?" True asked next.

Julia's head shot up and she threw the girl an alarmed look.

"Leave 'em out of this, 'kay? I don't want them involved with my baby..."

The Terrians frightened her; she couldn't understand them. She tried to stay out of their way as much as possible. She didn't so much mistrust their intentions like some of the colonists did, but she knew they could be dangerous due to their lack of understanding of human nature.

Alonzo felt different. He communicated a lot with the aliens, mediating between the humans and the indigenous species. He trusted them, even considered them his friends. They'd had some serious arguments over the years while he tried to make her see his point. But gradually he accepted that his bond with the Terrians was one of the subjects better left alone in their relationship, for the sake of peace and quiet.

oOo

"Lonz," she asked that evening as she climbed onto the bed.

"Hmm," he replied, already half-asleep.

"Didn't you say the Terrians told you the planet was renewing life?"

Julia mentioning the Terrians fully woke him up again; she tried to evade the subject as much as she could. He propped himself up on his elbow, head resting in his hand.

"Yeah, kinda. Why?" he wanted to know.

"Well," she said, "I've been thinking."

The serious expression on her face stopped him from formulating a teasing 'uh-oh' and she continued undisturbed.

"We've been here five years, six in station time. And now all of a sudden we've got four pregnant women in the colony. The Kobas have dropped litters and several of the cows and horses are with calves or foals. I don't think that's a coincidence."

He thought it over for a moment.

"I think you got a point there," he replied. "Maybe it's not just the planet that's renewing, but is this also the time for all other life to start a new cycle. Come to think of it, aside from the crops and cryogenic live stock Sheila brought in on Colony, we've seen no new life come about, have we?"

"Nooo," she answered slowly. "The plants are budding every spring, but..."

"No new seedlings spring up," he concluded.

He moved over to her and gently kissed her still flat stomach. With a smile he asked her, "Happy now, Doc, that you've got the explanation?"

"Yeah," she replied with an apologetic smile. "But have you realized what this means, Lonz?"

"No," he said, wondering what she had in mind.

"I think it means the planet accepted us as being a part of it..."

## [CHAPTER FOUR]

*[Year 5, Day 235 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

Over the next three months life in the New Pacifica colony went on as before. Maxwell Taggart continued to try and make Devon's life as administrator as miserable as he could; he protested her every decision as a matter of principle. The colonists continued to add to their small town and improve the buildings already constructed. Several Zero units and the abundance of sheets of metal and other building materials they unloaded from the colony ship a few years before made construction relatively easy. The hard part was

making the metal cabins into a real and cozy home.

The crops on the fields were growing more abundant than ever and it was going to be a good harvest. The life stock was going to be increased with several natural born calves and foals and it appeared Julia's theory was right. Even the Grendlers were having young.

Morgan and Baines set up a monitoring system to keep an eye on events in the faraway cave where Alonzo said the planet resided. The magnetic pulses radiating from continued to get stronger and it wasn't long before they began interfering with the colony's systems.

Baines' perimeter scanners triggered so many false alarms that finally Devon decided to have them turned off and fall back on human night watches. This decision and the lack of sleep that followed it didn't do much to improve the mood of Maxwell Taggart and his followers.

So early one day, Taggart stormed into Devon's office just as she was having a meeting with Julia and Dr. Vasquez. In the past couple of months several more women discovered they were pregnant and the two doctors felt special measures were needed, for all women would give birth around the same time.

Taggart was red faced with anger and he was followed shortly by an equally flushed Danziger. Neither of them paid any attention to the two surprised doctors, but immediately turned their attention towards Devon.

"Adair, this... this... drone refuses to assign me a DuneRail," Taggart proclaimed in a loud voice.

When she heard the derogatory term used to describe the mechanic, Devon's eyes narrowed. She never liked the class distinctions that existed on the stations and worked hard to make sure they weren't made in the new society they formed on G889.

"I don't like you using that tone or those words in my office," she stated. "And you know very well that John has full authority as far as the vehicles are concerned."

"He wants to lead a scouting party to the forbidden area up north," John informed her.

"What?" both Julia and Devon exclaimed.

"Devon," Maxwell tried to placate the woman by using her first name, "I think we need to go check out that so-called forbidden zone. Things're happening there, things that

might affect us. We need to know what's going on. And we can only find out by going there."

"We promised the Terrians we wouldn't," Julia interferred.

"Yeah, and why did we do that?" Taggart turned towards her. "Only because your fly boy lover says it's what the Terrians want."

He returned his attention back to Devon.

"I say it's time we stop giving in to their every whim and start taking control again on this planet."

"We can't control this planet," Julia interjected before Devon could reply. "The planet controls itself. The Terrians are only its... caretakers I guess. And \*we\* are just barely tolerated," she concluded vehemently. The man's attitude towards the planet and Alonzo's connection to the aliens really irritated her.

"Heller, don't tell me you really believe what these guys say," he swerved to face her again. "You're a Councilwoman's daughter for God's sake. You of all people should understand the importance of being in control."

She paled at the reference to the station's governing body. She thought none of the colonists knew about her past or her parentage. Her history as a spy for the Council was one of the things the Advance group decided they'd better keep for themselves. Those days were long gone anyway. Julia'd proven where her loyalties lay over and over again.

"Oh yes," she replied, seemingly calm. "I know all about that..."

Then her composure shattered and she hurried out the door.

"You dirty..." Danziger growled through gritted teeth but he was interrupted by Dr. Vasquez.

"Let's all calm down," he admonished them. "We are only a small community and we should try to remain civil with one another."

Devon took a deep breath.

"Thank you, doctor," she said. "You're right. Let's look at this calmly."

"What's there to look at?" Danziger wanted to know. "Nobody's going up there. At least

not with one of my vehicles!"

"Adair..." Taggert began but before he could finish the ground heaved with a low rumble.

"What the hell..." Danziger started to say and the next instant the office building began to shake. The monitor on the desk shattered to the floor and several cases of VR modules fell off the shelves on the wall. Devon tried to catch them but lost her balance and tripped over her own feet. As the metal wall plates squeaked and bolts came loose, Danziger grabbed her.

"Out!" he yelled, as he shoved her to the door. "Out! Quick! Before the whole thing shakes apart!"

oOo

After the ground settled again, they assessed the damage. Fortunately, aside from a few cuts and bruises everybody was okay. The material damage was more extensive, but nothing they couldn't repair or replace.

"I guess we got lucky," Devon said to her friends from the Advance crew. They all gathered in Devon's cabin at the edge of the beach in the evening. The group of friends naturally gravitated towards each other in times of a crisis, having formed an invisible bond in their early days on the planet.

"You call this a \*mild\* earthquake?" Morgan complained to Alonzo, referring to his warnings a couple of months earlier.

"Hey, I don't know," Alonzo defended himself. "What do I know about earthquakes?"

"Alonzo, can we expect more of these?" Devon wanted to know. But before the pilot could reply, Danziger barged in, slamming the door behind him.

Startled, they all looked up at him.

"That damn bureaucrat," the mechanic swore. Morgan took a step back, opening his mouth to proclaim his innocence of whatever deed Danziger was so worked up about. But John continued without even looking at him.

"He took one of the DuneRails. They must've gone to the cave."

Devon looked at him uncomprehendingly. Julia was the first to understand.

"You're talking about Maxwell, aren't you? He's gone to the forbidden zone, right?" she asked.

Danziger nodded. "Yes, him and three of his buddies. Blair Heywood, Morton Updike and Tony Solinger."

"Morgan, go to the comm hut and get them on gear now. Tell them to turn back immediately," Devon commanded. Morgan hesitated.

"Devon, gear reception's is sporadic these days. And the comm disk was damaged in the quake..."

"Try it anyway," she ordered.

But they couldn't raise the missing quartet on gear. They couldn't even locate them. The colony's population was in an uproar. Numerous colonists declared their support for Taggart's expedition, especially since the earthquake. They felt they should know what was happening in the remote part of New Pacifica, the Terrians be damned. But others thought another party should follow to bring them back, forcefully if needed.

The expedition nearly had a day's head start. They couldn't be tracked, so there was no telling which route they took. And the colony couldn't really spare another vehicle to go after them, especially not with all the repairs that were needed in the aftermath of the quake. So it was decided to leave the expedition up to its own devices. Taggart and his friends would have to fend for themselves.

## [CHAPTER FIVE]

*[Year 5, Day 248 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

For the sixth night in a row, Julia woke up by Alonzo's thrashing and moaning. He was having another nightmare. She sighed to herself. Should she wake him up? He refused to talk about the dreams, even denied having nightmares when she asked him in the morning. But every night he spent tossing and turning in his bed, flailing about and mumbling incoherently. And every day he looked more withdrawn, his dark eyes standing out in stark contrast with his pale face.

She didn't really dare to wake him, she wasn't sure if he was having a regular nightmare or was on the Dream plane. And it could be dangerous if he was communicating with the Terrians.

She drew up her knees, arms clasped around her legs and her head resting on her chin. She waited and watched him fight whatever demons he encountered in his dreams, sensing his anguish. After a few moments she couldn't stand it any longer. Still not sure whether to wake him, she got up off the bed and walked towards the window. The two moons illuminated the main square of the small colony they'd build. Several windows in the hospital building across were still lighted.

Suddenly, behind her, Alonzo sat up with a yell. She whirled around and was relieved to see him awake, though shaken and his face wet with sweat. She rushed over to him.

"Lonzo, you okay?" she asked.

He didn't answer right away, but took a few deep breaths.

"I guess so... Julia, I feel so helpless. It is just like when we first got to the planet. I have no control over the dreams. And I don't understand them anymore either."

He got up and padded barefoot to the window, gazing out. She sat on the bed and waited. They'd been together long enough for her to know he wasn't finished but was just gathering his thoughts.

"The Terrians, they are trying to tell us something. And it has to do with Uly and with this rebirth of the planet in the forbidden zone. But I don't understand what they're saying. The Dream plane is..." he hesitated, looking for the right word to explain the imagery.

"Dimming... It's not clear, everything is distorted and breaking up. It's as though the Dream plane is extinguishing." He turned and looked straight at her. She was taken aback by the stark hopelessness in his eyes.

"I think the time is near, the time to fulfill our promise to the Terrians."

oOo

*[Year 5, Day 256 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

Uly woke up shivering. He struggled with the sheets that were wrapped around his legs, leaving his upper body exposed to the cool night air. He'd had a dream. He couldn't remember exactly what it was, but a feeling of urgency lingered, a sense of the planet itself calling out for help.

He thought it over. The best thing would be to go see Alonzo in the morning. And not tell his mother until he was absolutely sure what the planet wanted; otherwise she'd throw a fit, he thought disgustedly. It was years ago that the Terrians healed him and the other children. They'd all grown to healthy teenagers, but his mother still acted sometimes as though he were eight years old and suffering from the Syndrome.

His thoughts returned to Alonzo. Since their fateful crash-landing a special bond had formed between the boy and the Advance ship's pilot. Since Alonzo communicated with the Terrians so much more than the teenager did, he understood them a lot better. But it was only through hard work and experience the former pilot was able to translate for the aliens. Uly, with his natural connection to the planet grasped things more intuitively

o0o

"Alonzo, can I talk to you for a minute?"

The man looked up from the chart he was working on. They were still improving on the old Council maps of the New Pacifica continent. It was slow work due to the lack of aerial surveillance; all landmarks had to be charted through ground patrols.

"Uly, aren't you supposed to be in school?" he admonished.

"Uh, well..." the boy faltered. "Yes, but this is important. I've had a dream," he continued more confidently.

This got the pilot's undivided attention. Alonzo switched off the monitor and turned to the kid.

"What about?" he asked.

"I don't really know," Uly admitted. "I know I'm supposed to go somewhere and do something, but I've no idea where I've to go or what I've to do when I get there. I hoped you knew," he finished in a rush of words.

Alonzo was silent, mulling over the boys' words. Damn, so that's what happened when he ignored the Terrians' message, they tried to contact the boy directly. For the past two weeks he'd pretended he didn't comprehend the Terrian signals; only Julia knew he was having dreams. A good thing Uly wasn't yet as adept at interpreting the images as he was, or the boy might have gone off all by himself.

"Yes, Uly, I do know," he admitted. "There's a place in the forbidden zone, a cave. It's like the soul of the planet. But something's wrong and you need to go to this cave to heal

the earth." Alonzo recalled the promise Devon made to the Terrians years ago. He still hoped to divert its calling-in.

"I'm not sure what it is you must do," he lied, "but you'll probably find out if you go there."

The boy was silent for a moment.

"My mom won't let me go," he mentioned. "But Alonzo, this is important, right?"

"Yes, Uly, it is," the man replied simply.

"Will you go with me to the forbidden zone?" Uly asked next, making up his mind about defying his mother on this issue.

Before Alonzo could answer, they heard a noise, a gasp, near the door. As they turned, they saw Julia standing in the opening. Her eyes were wide with dismay and her hands rested protectively on her stomach. She stood there for a moment, then turned and left without a word.

"Julia, wait!" Alonzo called after her but she didn't stop. Well, he thought to himself, it looked like Devon wasn't going to be the only obstacle in their way.

## [CHAPTER SIX]

"Julia, please," Alonzo pleaded. "I have to go. Uly needs me. The Terrians need me!"

He was with her in her office in the hospital, where she'd been hiding out ever since she overheard the two dreamers discussing plans for their future.

"That's what it's always about, huh? The damned Terrians. Let them take care of themselves for a change. Have you ever considered I might need you too?"

"Julia..." he replied helplessly. He knew fear more than anything else caused her anger.

"Please understand. I *have* to go."

"Oh really," she said, sarcasm dripping from her voice. "And it just *has* to be you, right? Why can't someone else go with Uly? Why you?"

"Julia," he tried again but she interrupted him.

"Alonzo Solace, \*I\* need you \*here\*! Not off on yet another trip."

He could feel his own anger beginning to rise. It always came down to the same thing. After all these years, after he gave up flying for her, she was still insecure about his feelings for her.

"Julia, I don't want to talk about this now."

He struggled to remain calm as he grabbed his jacket of the chair he'd put it on and headed for the door.

"Sure," she cried at his receding back. "Walk away. It's what you've always done best!" In reply he slammed the door behind him.

oOo

As he stormed out the hospital, he tried to regain his composure. She was wrong, he told himself. He did \*not\* walk away from a problem. He walked away from his own anger. He could feel it boiling inside. He left her before it could blow and turn the current argument into a full blown fight that would leave them both hurt and exhausted.

He didn't mind a good fight once in a while; making up again made them worth a few heated words. But he hated these particular arguments. Damn Julia and her insecurities.

During their trek across the continent, as their relationship slowly took hold, she worried about him leaving on the Colony ship, his heart set on flying. He gave it up though, opting for a stationary life on the planet instead. But she often accused him of volunteering for any scout party he could to make up for the loss. And so far he'd managed to keep it from her but when she got this way, yes, he did miss flying. Missed it a lot, in fact. Missed the freedom of going wherever the next consignment took him. Missed the experience of waking up years in the future and the excitement of discovering the changes made to the world. He could never tell her that though, it'd destroy her.

As his anger dissipated, his heart softened towards her again. He couldn't really blame her; growing up in the household of a Council member wasn't exactly helpful in learning to love and trust.

oOo

When he walked by the Adair cabin, Alonzo heard raised voices drifting out. It seemed

Uly was having as much trouble convincing his mother as Alonzo was having with Julia. He walked towards the door.

"Ulysses Adair, you're still a child and I'm still your mother. And I tell you no!" Devon declared.

"Mom, you can't control fate!" Uly yelled back.

The door was thrown open and Uly stormed out; his eyes blazed with anger and determination was etched on his face. Alonzo managed to jump aside just in time to avoid being run over as the boy stormed off. He walked in to find Devon shakily sit herself down at the table.

"Devon," he began, "Uly's right. We've got to go, we promised. I'm sorry..."

She looked up at him, tears in her eyes. But she shook her head adamantly.

oOo

Julia stared at the door Alonzo just left through. Tears pricked behind her eyelids. She regretted her last words. She knew it wasn't true. But sometimes she just got so afraid of losing him that she needed to lash out and create some distance. Her rational mind told her she was being silly. But with a baby on the way the fear grew even stronger and hormones caused her emotions to go haywire.

She wrapped her arms around her belly, hoping to feel the baby move. But she didn't feel anything. Come to think of it, these last few days she hadn't experienced any of the tiny flutters she'd come to associate with the life growing in her.

A cold fear clamped around her heart and she stood up to get her diaglove. As she scanned her abdomen and the glove beeped out the baby's heartbeat she heaved a sigh of relief. But she frowned again as she realized it wasn't as strong or regular as it should be. At that moment True ran in.

"Julia, Julia," she yelled. Tears streamed down her face.

Her own worries momentarily forgotten, Julia hurried over to the clearly upset girl.

"True, what is it? Is something wrong with your father?" she asked, concern in her tone.

"No," True managed between gasps. "It's the Koba's. Oh Julia, they're dead!" and she broke down sobbing.

"Okay, calm down True," she tried to soothe the crying teenager. "What are you talking about?"

"The Koba's," True sobbed. "You know, the two nests that were born only last week? All those Koba babies are dead. I went to the Koba farm to feed them and they're lying there all cold and stiff." Again she began to cry.

oOo

"What do you mean, Walman," Devon demanded from the man who shuffled his feet uncomfortably, reluctant to meet her gaze. Despite all their years together, he still felt intimidated by her ardor. Walman couldn't understand where Danziger got the guts to stand up to her as much as he did.

"Just what I said, Devon. The crops are dying on the fields. I don't know why, I'm not a farmer, but the plants are just withering."

"That's not possible," Devon stated. She just couldn't believe what the man was telling her. "We were going to have the best harvest ever."

"Yeah..." was all Walman knew to say in reply.

"Mom?" Uly joined her when Walman left. The man only delivered the bad news; it was up to Devon to decide what to do. She looked up at her son.

"Something's wrong with the planet. That's why the plants wither. That's why the little Kobas died. And Julia says there's something wrong with the babies."

She widened her eyes at his last remark. That was news to her.

"Oh my God," she breathed.

"Alonzo and I have to go," Uly continued. "We have to fulfill our promise. Or the planet dies. And then we all die."

Devon stared at her son, his words wise way beyond his 15 years. Recognizing the inevitable, Devon nodded reluctantly.

oOo

Although she was loath to let her son go off on an uncertain field trip, once she'd made

up her mind, Devon was a determined woman. She decided the fewer people knew about the quest the better, to prevent endless discussions with the colonists. Only Danziger was filled in; he promised to spend the night to check the Rail extensively. They agreed to tell the town that Alonzo and Uly'd gone to the Upper Morgan River to speak about the water rights with the Terrian tribe that resided there.

Before sunrise the next morning the man and the boy were ready to go.

"Julia, don't do this. Let's not part in anger," Alonzo pleaded. But her back remained turned to him, her stance filled with stiff stubbornness. He smiled to himself. She had to be the most pigheaded woman he'd ever met. But that was one of the things that attracted him to her. From the day he met her, he felt challenged to break down every barrier she threw up. Over time a much deeper feeling had evolved, but he still enjoyed sparring with her.

He walked over to her and put his hands on her shoulders. She trembled beneath his fingers and as he turned her around he noticed the tears standing in her eyes, threatening to overflow. His heart filled with love for her. He realized she was just scared, trying to stave off the fear through anger. She wasn't really mad at him, he knew.

"Hey Doc, what's with the tears," he asked lightly. "I'll be back before you know it."

"Oh Lonzo," her resolve broke and she hid her face in his jacket, clasping the lapels desperately. "Come back to me, 'kay?" she whispered.

"I will," he promised and sealed his promise with a lingering kiss. She clung to him and he gently pried her hands loose from around his neck.

"Take good care of Junior here," he grinned as he patted her stomach. Through her tears she smiled weakly.

He turned and walked to the DuneRail. Uly was waiting at the wheel, already having said his good-byes to his mother. As Alonzo jumped in the shotgun seat, he grinned at the boy.

"Hey partner, let's move out before someone comes along and wonders what we're up to."

Uly grinned back and gunned the vehicle to drive off at a breakneck pace.

Alonzo looked back at Julia, but she was already gone back inside the small cabin they shared. He chuckled to himself. She hated emotional displays, her own more than

anyone's.

## [CHAPTER SEVEN]

*[Year 5, Day 260 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

It was a few days later when excited shouts sounded in the camp. Julia rushed out of the hospital hoping Alonzo and Uly were back, although she knew it was way too early. They lost gear contact two days after they left the colony; the planet's pulsation interfered with the transmissions. But even if the two travelers pushed it, they'd barely had the chance to reach the far away cave, let alone do whatever they were supposed to do and get back to the Pacifica colony.

She stopped in her tracks as a battered DuneRail pulled up near the hospital's entrance. The men in the vehicle were as disheveled a bunch as she'd ever seen. They were covered with dust, dirty and unshaven, with their clothes nearly in tatters. In the backseat a single man lolled unconsciously. Dried blood caked the right side of his head. The professional in her took over.

"Get him inside," she ordered one of the hospital aides that'd hurried outside with her. "Anyone else in need of immediate medical attention?" she asked the other men. They tiredly shook their heads, not meeting her eyes. "Good," she said. "Clean up a little, then go see Dr. Vasquez for a check up."

Inside she pulled on her diaglove and turned her attention to the wounded man. According to the glove, his heart rate and blood pressure were well within acceptable limits. But he was unconscious and probably suffering from a concussion. She cleaned his face to take a closer look at the inch long gash on his temple. Blair Heywood, that was his name, she remembered. He was one of the men with Maxwell Taggart on the unauthorized scout. Guess things didn't go quite as planned, she thought to herself. Serves him right, she decided unsympathetically. They'd been warned enough not to mess with the planet.

As she was finishing up on the unconscious man, Devon walked in.

"How's he doing?" she asked

"He'll live," Julia said. "He's got a concussion and forty stitches, but as far as I can tell, he'll be fine. Have you heard from the others what happened?"

"Not yet," Devon answered. "Vasquez hasn't finished. But Tony Solinger's dead. I'm

calling an emergency meeting at my place as soon as Vasquez's done. Can you make it?"

Julia thought quickly. She couldn't do anything more for Heywood now. And nothing urgent waited for her in her lab. Besides, she was itching to know what happened.

oOo

So it was the full Administration Committee that gathered in Devon's small office an hour later. John Danziger was also present, as was a much cleaner but exhausted looking Morton Updike, the fourth member of the Taggart expedition team.

"What's he doing here?" Maxwell demanded sullenly, nodding in Danziger's direction. But none of his earlier fieriness showed in his challenge and he refused to meet Devon's gaze.

"He's here cause I asked him to," Devon snapped. "And unless one of the other Board members objects, he stays."

She turned a questioning look at the others. Neither Julia Heller nor Morgan Martin objected. Devon directed her gaze at Mrs. Robbins, the person most likely to object. But the schoolteacher remained silent. Though suspicious of the Terrians and thus often in Taggart's camp, she strongly disapproved of the man's solitary action to go to the forbidden zone.

"Maxwell, Morton, you want to tell us what happened?" Devon asked in a softer tone.

The two men exchanged a look and Maxwell took a deep breath.

"The first few days after we left here, we made good speed. But as we got closer to the center of the zone and near the cave we were forced to slow down. It's weird out there," he said, then was silent for a moment.

"Devon," he continued, "it's as though the earth is alive, like it's breathing. You can feel those... ripples going through the ground. It made travel difficult, cause we could never be certain if the Rail'd hit a hole or bump next, the surface changed continually."

Julia nodded. It fit in nicely with Alonzo's theory of the earth shedding its old skin and renewing itself.

"Anyway," Updike took over the narration, "we finally approached the center. The ripples got stronger and more violent as we came closer and by the time we reached the cave it was hard to stand up, let alone walk. But we went inside the cave. It was

incredible...so beautiful..." He stopped to collect his thoughts.

"The whole cave was filled with Morganite. Thick veins of the glowing rock covered the walls, the ceiling, disappearing deeper into the earth. The place was warm and the veins were pulsating, rhythmically, like a heart beat. It was amazing."

"He said," and Updike pointed at Maxwell Taggert, "that the stuff would be worth a fortune back at the stations. If only we could get it out..."

Morgan Martin shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He remember clearly how he once felt the same way about the glowing rocks that the Terrians made with their staffs.

"Though the stones weren't hot to the touch, they burned our hands and equipment as we tried to cut 'em loose," Maxwell continued. "So we looked for a way to secure the rocks until we could get back with more powerful digging tools."

The two men exchanged another apprehensive look. Then Updike said softly, his voice so low they could hardly make out the words, "We set a Geolock..."

oOo

A stunned silence fell in the room. It lasted a couple of seconds, then Danziger, Devon, Julia and Morgan all cried at the same moment, "You did what?!"

Morgan slouched in his chair, his face as pale as a bed sheet, and he whimpered softly, "Oh God, not again. We're doomed... we're all doomed."

Danziger's response was more violent. He grabbed the nearest man, that happened to be Taggert, and shook him vehemently.

"Are you out of your mind? Do you know what a Geolock does to this place?"

Devon laid a placatory hand on his arm. "John, please. This doesn't solve anything."

The large mechanic hesitated a moment. Then, with a disgusted snort he let the other man go. Taggert took a step back, just in case.

Mrs. Robbins, taken aback by all the commotion asked, "Can somebody please explain what's a Geolock and what's so terrible about it?"

"A Geolock," Julia lectured, "petrifies the earth. It's mostly used in mining industries, to ensure no one but the owner of the Geolock can mine a claimed area. The Morganite is

... let's call it the planetary nervous system, for the sake of analogy. The veins transport messages from one part of the planet to another. Much like our nerves transport commands from our brains to our limbs to make them move."

"So when you freeze the Morganite," Mrs. Robbins caught on, "you paralyze the planet."

"Exactly," Devon confirmed. "And the planet starts to die."

oOo

The room was quiet for a long time. Mrs. Robbins mulled over the information she'd just received. The two men were reluctant to look up and meet anyone's eyes, so they continued to stare at the floor. And the Advance crewmembers recalled the day Morgan set off a Geolock, during their first winter on the planet. It'd nearly cost three human lives and they were lucky they found the unlock code to undo the damage.

Then Devon cleared her throat. She turned towards the two men and asked them, "What happened next?"

Grateful that the oppressive silence was broken Updike hurried on with the story.

"For a few moments nothing moved. We carefully walked towards the petrified area. Then suddenly, at its edges the earth moved and Terrians swam up from the ground. Dozens of Terrians, their staffs crackling with energy. They shot at us and we ducked and ran back to the DuneRail. Heywood fell and hit his head. And Solinger..." His voice trailed off.

"Solinger grabbed the Mag Pro," Taggert continued the story only slightly more sure-voiced. "He got off a few shots at the Terrians, then their lightning hit him. They... eh, they pulled him into the earth."

"It was horrible," the other man exclaimed, choking back tears. "He was screaming and kicking but we couldn't reach him..."

Mrs. Robbins wiped a sympathetic tear from her cheek. Taggert scraped his throat and continued softly.

"There was nothing we could do. Heywood was bleeding badly and Solinger was gone. We turned the Rail and came back. It took forever, the vehicle broke down once and we got lost several times..."

## [CHAPTER EIGHT]

"Devon?" John called softly. But she didn't turn; instead she continued to stare out of the window at the dark waters below. They were alone in her cabin overlooking the Sea of Antheus. The Board meeting dispersed a while ago, agreeing to keep the story from the colonists for now, but without any further plan of action.

"Devon, Uly'll be okay," John ventured. He understood her concerns very well; he was a parent too. And he knew Devon. Behind all the veneer and bluster she exhibited while in charge of the colony she was hiding a woman that knew the same insecurities every parent did. Probably more so in her case, since her only child suffered from the Syndrome for the first eight years of his life.

"Uly's a big boy now," John continued. "And Lonz is with him. They'll be fine."

Devon heaved a deep sigh.

"God, I hope so," she whispered. "I should never've let him go..."

With a few large steps Danziger moved to stand behind her. Gently he took her shoulders and turned her around so she faced him. Her eyes large with worry she looked up at him.

"John, how could I've been so stupid? I should've known what Maxwell was up to."

"Adair, stop beating yourself over the head about it," he advised her sternly but not unkindly. "No one could've predicted the fool'd use a Geolock! The man's a loose canon."

"I promised the Terrians it wouldn't happen again when Morgan set off the lock. You were there; I gave 'em my word. And now again the earth's been frozen. At the worst possible time and place too. How can I ever make them understand?"

"You can't," John said softly. "It's beyond them to understand our individuality..."

"Danziger, the last time they planned to kill Yale in revenge!" she lashed out.

She turned away from him and started pacing. "If it hadn't been for that girl he'd have died. Our relations with the Terrians are very fragile as it is. Don't you wonder what they'll do now that we hurt their earth again?" Her voice was high-pitched with fear.

"Devon, I don't know what the Terrians'll do. And yes, it scares me. But there's nothing we can do about it. If anyone can stop the Terrians from taking revenge, it's Alonzo and

Uly. They understand 'em best and they can make the aliens see our side. You've got to believe that."

oOo

When he left Devon's cabin, Danziger decided to go and check up on Julia. With Alonzo gone, he felt obliged to look after her. He knew she'd laugh at him if he told her and she would probably explain to him she was quite capable of taking care of herself, thank you very much. But still...

As he walked towards the doctor's cabin, he found her sitting on the small porch they'd recently added to the low hut. She was staring up at the stars, a wistful look on her face.

"He'll be okay," Danziger repeated the assurance he'd given Devon.

Startled, she looked up.

"Oh, hi, I didn't hear you coming," she said and patted the floor next to her, inviting him to sit down.

"I know he's okay, I can feel him. Does that sound strange to you?" she asked. "I look up at the stars, thinking he's doing the same thing, wherever he is. And it helps me when I miss him so much..." She let out a heavy sigh. John was silent. He'd never experienced such strong emotions from the doctor who was usually so composed and he didn't know how to respond.

But she didn't expect a response. They sat in silence for a long time; both were immersed in their own thoughts. Just as Danziger decided she'd be okay and started to get up, the ground in front of the cabin broke and a single Terrian swam up. Julia jumped to her feet, surprise clear on her face. She backed away from the creature that slowly advanced on her.

"John...?" she called out, a scared note creeping in her voice.

Danziger grabbed her and pulled her protectively behind his large bulk. He held out his arm toward the Terrian to ward it off.

"What do you want?" he asked, noticing the slight quiver in his own speech.

The creature didn't reply, but steadily moved forward. Danziger and Julia continued to back away but soon came up to the cabin wall. They stared at the towering creature as it approached them. Slowly the Terrian held out his hand and trilled softly. Behind him,

Danziger felt Julia relax slightly.

"John, I don't think it means us any harm," she said as she moved away from him. "It wants to tell us something."

She held out her hand and before Danziger could stop her, the creature grabbed it and she slumped to the ground. Danziger hurriedly crouched next to her, but as he touched her, he felt a large hand descending on his head...

oOo

And the next instant he was transported to a cave. He looked about him and saw Julia standing near the other end. He walked over to her.

"Julia, are you okay?" he asked concerned. She nodded, then gestured around her.

"John, I think this is the cave Alonzo was talking about. The cave Taggart petrified. Look at the walls. You can still see the veins of Morganite. But it's all dead."

He looked around and saw she was right. The whole area'd taken on a dull gleaming grayish color, nothing like the caves they'd seen during their travels across the planet.

"What are we doing here?" he wondered. "How did we get here?"

"I think we're dreaming," she whispered. "It must be urgent if the Terrians took us to the Dream plane. Especially with the difficulties Alonzo was having when dreaming recently."

"But what do they want?" Involuntarily he whispered back.

"Shh, I hear something," she motioned him to silence. He listened carefully. Yes, she was right. A soft noise came through an opening on their right. It most resembled the regular hiss of static the gear emitted when they were beyond reception range. Cautiously they moved toward the opening.

"Oh my God," Julia gasped. Alonzo was sitting in the middle of a small cavern, his eyes closed and his hands securely placed on both sides of the Geolock cube that stuck up from the ground. He looked like hell. A two-day stubble gave his face a sunken, hollow look. Dark circles had formed below his eyes and his hair was plastered across his forehead. Occasionally a shiver rippled through his body.

Her blood seemed to turn to water as she realized what he was doing. He tried to decrypt

the unlock-code much like Morgan had years ago. Except where the government agent used his VR gear and the Morganite stones to interact with the machine, Alonzo was doing it without these aids, using the power of his brain alone.

"It'll kill him," she whispered in horror.

Danziger moved to the other side of the cavern. A large tunnel led off deeper into the mountain.

"Julia, come on," he called, "we've got to find Uly. God knows what he's up to."

With a last pained look at the unmoving pilot, Julia followed Danziger into the tunnel. They moved through the darkness hesitantly, feeling their way forward. As they rounded a corner, they saw a glimmer in the distance.

"See that?" John whispered.

She didn't answer, but hurried forward in the direction of the small light. They entered another blackened chamber. Terrians lined the walls in all directions. In the middle a human figure stood.

"Uly!" Danziger exclaimed. But the boy didn't respond. Instead, he slowly took a knife out of his backpack and unsheathed it.

"What's he doing?" Julia wanted to ask, but before the words could form, the boy slashed his wrists and blood spouted across the floor...

"Nooo!" both spectators screamed and Danziger rushed forward...

oOo

Only to find himself crumpled on the ground in front of Julia's cabin, the doctor next to him. In the pale light of the twin moons they saw no sign of the Terrian.

Julia stared wide-eyed at Danziger, who returned her look of dawning horror.

"Oh my God," she whispered. "They're both gonna die... John, we've got to stop them!"

Without bothering to reply, Danziger strode toward the comm shed, Julia hurrying to keep up. Morgan was on watch and he squealed as John threw open the door and stormed in.

"Geez, Danziger! You could've given me a heart attack, barging in and frightening me like that," he bristled. But then he caught the look on the mechanic's face. And Julia looked pale and shaken.

"What's going on?" Morgan asked much more subdued.

"Martin, move your butt and get Solace on gear now!" Danziger ordered him.

For a second Morgan hesitated, but he realized something was seriously wrong. The mechanic never seemed the friendliest of people, but tonight he was even more brusque than usual. And Julia wasn't one to be shaken easily. So he turned towards the comm equipment and threw the switch that turned on the powerful transmitter.

"You know we haven't made contact for days, right?" he asked as he worked on the equipment.

"Yes," Danziger grunted. "Try anyway."

"Base to Solace. Alonzo, come in please."

But instead of a reply all they heard was static. Morgan tried again, fiddling with the buttons to broadcast on as many frequencies as possible.

"Base to Solace. Alonzo, if you can hear me, please answer. This is Morgan."

The only response was more hiss and crackle.

"Let me try," Julia said, looking really worried now.

"Lonz? It's Julia. Please answer me."

As before, they received no answer.

"Morgan, can you track 'em?" she asked the former government agent.

"I don't know..." he muttered absently as he played around with some more buttons and switches.

Despite the seriousness of the situation Danziger smiled inwardly. The old Morgan Martin would've objected, demanded explanations and generally made a nuisance of himself. The planet had worked wonders, the mechanic thought. This Morgan didn't hesitate, but got to work immediately. And as far as communications were concerned, he

was good, John admitted to himself.

"Hmmm, lemme see..." the comm specialist mumbled. "Come on, come on... Yes!" he exclaimed. "I've got them. At least their gear's still tracking."

"Where are they?" Julia asked while a glimmer of hope reappeared in her eyes.

Morgan called up a map of the New Pacifica continent. A bright red dot blinked quietly on it.

"That's where they are," he pointed, rather satisfied with himself.

Danziger squinted at the display, attempting to make out the coordinates.

"But that's not near the Upper River!" Morgan exclaimed as he pushed Danziger aside to take a closer look. "That's the middle of the forbidden zone..." he finished, his voice trailing off as the implications dawned on him.

"What are they doing there? We promised the Terrians we'd stay away. And they're breaking our word. Julia, did you know this?" Morgan asked the petite doctor.

She didn't answer him. Instead she turned to Danziger; determination showed clearly in her eyes.

"John, we got to go there. They need help."

Danziger nodded.

"I'll leave first thing in the morning, I'll take Walman..."

"No!" Julia interrupted. "No one must know. And we've got to hurry. If we leave now and really push it, we could make it in five days."

Danziger thought for a moment. Then he agreed.

"Okay. One of the DuneRails is set for a scouting party tomorrow. We can take that one. But Julia, I don't think you should come along, you know, now that you're..." his voice trailed off while his gaze lowered towards her protruding belly.

"Pregnant?" she asked. "John, Alonzo needs me. Nothing could keep me away. I know what I'm doing. I'll be okay."

Danziger hesitated a moment longer. But he realized they'd need a doctor if they got to the cave too late to stop Alonzo and Uly.

"Lonz'll have my head," he muttered to himself. Then, more loudly, "Okay then. Let's go."

He turned towards Morgan.

"If somebody asks..."

"My lips are sealed," Morgan promised as he made a zipping motion across his lips.

## [CHAPTER 8 A]

Early the next morning, just before Morgan was to be relieved from his watch, Devon marched into the communications room.

"Morgan, can you get Danziger on gear for me?" she asked without preamble. "The Rail that was readied for today's scouting party is missing and I can't seem to find John."

"Uh, sure, I can try," Morgan answered a trifle nervous. But Devon was too preoccupied with this latest incident to notice. He pushed some buttons and called for Danziger to come in, but there was no answer.

"Sorry, Devon," Morgan said after a few attempts. "The planet is disrupting the transmission again."

"You haven't seen John, have you?" she asked.

"Uh," Morgan began to reply, fidgeting uneasily, twiddling his fingers until at last he put his hands securely in his pant pockets. "No, I haven't seen him. Not since last night." He breathed an inner sigh of relief. At least that much was the truth.

Devon hesitated for a moment, for the first time noticing Morgan's odd behavior. But then again, the man often acted nervously. She had just decided to let it slide when True came running up to the com shed.

"Devon, have you seen my father?" she asked, a slightly worried tone in her voice. "His bed hasn't been slept in; I don't think he's been home at all. And I can't find Julia anywhere either."

"Maybe they eloped together," Morgan remarked with a nervous giggle.

"Morgan, don't be ridiculous," Devon snapped. "This is serious."

"Sorry," Morgan muttered, his eyes downcast.

Devon thought for a few seconds. "Morgan, you keep trying to get either John or Julia on gear. I'll go and organize a search party."

He shuffled his feet. "Uhm, Devon,"

"What?" she asked impatiently. Then she took a closer look. Guilt and indecision were warring in his eyes.

"Is there something you want to tell me, Morgan?" she asked dangerously calm.

"Uh, no... yes, uhm," Morgan stuttered.

"Morgan, if you know anything about where John or Julia are, you better tell me now," Devon threatened. "Did they take the Rail?"

"Eh, yes," Morgan answered softly, "but I promised not to tell."

Devon sighed. "Morgan, this is *me* you're talking to. Not just anybody. I'm sure they didn't mean me when they asked you to keep quiet. So, what do you know?"

"Devon," Morgan pleaded, "I can't..."

"Morgan, if you don't tell me what you know, I'll have you locked up for obstructing me in my duties as Administrator," Devon threatened, setting her voice in a formal tone. Morgan swallowed. Obedience to figures of authority was ingrained in him from the day he was born and not even the planet was able to root it all out.

"Okay, but don't get mad," he agreed.

Devon refrained from mentioning she already *was* mad as hell. Obviously Julia and Danziger had gone off on a quest of their own without even informing her where they were going or why. She could think of only one thing that would make her friends shut her out like that: it had to do with Uly.

"Late last night they came here," Morgan started, motioning about him to indicate the communications room. "They were pretty shook up about something and asked me to get Alonzo on gear. When I couldn't get him, they asked if I could track 'em. I did and found

them..." he hesitated, not knowing how much he should tell Devon. He decided against telling her where exactly he located Alonzo and Uly.

"Julia said they should go after them right away, without telling anyone in the colony. So they took the DuneRail and left... Devon, they didn't tell me what was going on, but they were very worried about something. I'm sure they only tried to protect you..."

He stopped as she moved abruptly.

"Morgan, where exactly did you find Alonzo and Uly?" she asked, indicating the display that showed the New Pacifica area. "Did they reach the forbidden cave?"

Morgan was dumbfounded for a moment.

"You knew they were going there?" he exclaimed. When she nodded he silently displayed the red dot that indicated Alonzo and Uly's location. "I think that's where Danziger and Julia are headed," he said.

Devon pondered the red dot for a few minutes. Then she made up her mind.

"True," she turned to John's daughter who had remained silent during Morgan's story, "prepare a DuneRail for a two week expedition. I'm going after them. And get Walman; I'm taking him with me. Morgan, you'll take over my administrative duties while I'm gone."

Morgan began to protest that it wasn't a good idea for her to go out on a wild chase across the continent. He also didn't fancy the idea of butting heads with Max Taggert while Devon was gone.

But impatiently she motioned him to silence. "Morgan, they've gone after my son; something must be wrong with Uly. I can't let them go alone. End of discussion."

## [CHAPTER NINE]

*[Year 5, Day 266 (New Pacifica calendar)]*

A few days later Julia wasn't so sure anymore that it'd been a good idea to go with John. She worried about the baby; the constant bucking of the DuneRail across the rough terrain was a torture. And the nights spent sleeping on the ground didn't do much for her battered body either.

But she didn't complain. She knew the minute she opened her mouth, John'd turn the Rail around and take her back, leaving Uly and Alonzo to fend for themselves. She couldn't allow that to happen. Alonzo needed her; she felt it. So she gritted her teeth as the Rail bounced over yet another rock, sending a jarring shock along her spine.

They didn't speak much along the way; both of them occupied with their own thoughts. Danziger pushed the Rail to its limits; they only stopped when the vehicle threatened to overheat or when it got too dark to see where they were going. And in the mornings, they were up and moving at first light. Neither of them said a word about their excursion to the Dream plane. But both were torn by unspoken anxiety about what they'd find in the cave.

On the morning of the sixth day of travel, Julia rechecked their position against the last known location of Uly and Alonzo.

"We should reach the petrified area today," she stated.

Danziger glanced over at her briefly and nodded as he turned his attention back to driving the Rail. He looked a mess, Julia thought. His wild manes were all tangled and matted with dirt. An unkempt beard covered his chin and cheeks, adding to his madman appearance. John's eyes were red and bleary from squinting into the flying dust continually. Julia suspected she didn't look much better herself.

An hour later her earlier prediction came true. Suddenly the rough terrain turned a grayish hue. The trees and scrubs stood immobile, the same stony color as the earth. They both remembered - this was what fossilized land looked like. Danziger stopped the Rail.

"From here on we go on foot," he said. "I don't wanna risk our only means of getting out of here."

Julia nodded in understanding and they packed some basic necessities in a backpack. Some semolina bars, water flasks, rope and various other odds and ends. Julia also grabbed her medical bag and they set out on foot. They knew the cave wouldn't be far, the outer range of the Geolock being one kilometer.

But the rough terrain made walking very difficult. Sharp rocks jutted up at random as though pushed upwards through the skin of the earth. In other spots deep gashes gaped and they were careful not to step into one. One wrong step could easily result in a broken leg and that's all they needed right now.

John set a brisk pace, his concern for Devon's son pushing him forward. Julia, with her 5-

month pregnant belly, struggled to keep up, but failed.

"John, wait," she called after him. "Danziger...!"

Her voice shook him out of his thoughts and he turned back to her.

"Julia, I'm sorry," he apologized. "We'll take a short break here."

"No," she panted, short of breath. "There's no time."

Seeing her struggle with the medical bag, he took it from her. "Okay, but let me carry that," he said shortly. "You concentrate on yourself. It won't be far now."

He was right. As they crested the next hill, they noticed the dark gaping mouth of a cave down below.

"There!" Julia pointed. She started to hurry down the slope, but Danziger grabbed her arm.

"Careful now," he admonished. "We haven't come this far to fall down this hill in our haste."

A little more cautious they climbed down the slope. The cave was dark, the outer chamber opening up in several tunnels. Danziger turned on one of the Lumalights at his belt. He passed another one to Julia.

"Be careful," he warned her. "Those rocks look pretty sharp, don't cut yourself."

Switching on the lamp he gave her, Julia saw he was right. Sharp edged rocks stuck out at all angles from the floor and walls. The ceiling of the cave was cracked in places, the edges also looking razor sharp.

"Gee, what happened here?" Julia wondered out loud. She answered her own question. "I guess this is what they meant about the earth constantly moving and changing. We were right, the earth does shed its skin."

In the meantime Danziger was peering into the tunnels. He called out to her, "Julia, here, this one I think."

She walked over to him, squinting into the darkness. But she couldn't see very far, the black walls seemed to absorb the Lumalight's glow.

"The others appear to be dead ends," John explained. This is the only tunnel going further than a few meters."

They both hesitated for a moment. It was always a little scary to wander into a tunnel deep in the earth without knowing what to expect at the other end. But they didn't have much choice.

"We've come this far..." Danziger said and he hefted the backpack plus Julia's medical bag.

The young doctor hastened to follow him, her light bouncing off the walls. Soon the glow cast by the Lumalamps was the only light they saw. In front of them, blackness awaited. And the daylight behind them at the exit of the tunnel disappeared as they moved deeper into the earth.

The tunnel seemed to go on forever and Julia wondered if they picked the wrong one after all. But then the tunnel took another turn to the left and they saw a small shimmer of light in the distance. They hurried forward. As they neared the light, it got brighter. Suddenly John stopped and Julia nearly bumped into him.

"Listen," he said. And she heard the same sound they'd heard in their dreams. A regular static buzz, soft but distinct.

Julia winced as she recognized it.

"Oh God, he already started," and without further regard for her own safety, she rushed forward.

When she entered the underground room, she saw the same scene she'd witnessed in her dream. Alonzo slumped near the Geolock, his hands resting on the machine. His eyes were closed and a tiny shudder jolted through him every time the Geolock hissed. She rushed over to him, motioning for Danziger to hurry and hand her her bag. She crouched next to Alonzo, pulling on the Diaglove.

"Lonzo?" she called softly. But no reply was forthcoming from the pilot. She scanned him with the glove, her left hand moving slowly over his body.

"How's he?" Danziger asked anxiously.

"Not good," Julia answered, adjusting some buttons on the glove. "His blood pressure is way up and his heart is beating like crazy to keep up. He's unresponsive to both touch and sound. He can't keep this up much longer..." Her voice broke on the last word and

she choked back a sob.

Danziger inspected the display of the Geolock. "He's got five numbers down, only one left to go," he commented.

Julia hesitated. She wasn't sure about her next course of action. Part of her simply wanted to tear Alonzo away from the lock before he killed himself. But another part of her said to wait, he was about to break the unlock code. And separating him from the machine forcefully could also result in brain damage.

But the decision was made for her. With a final hiss the last digit of the unlock code blinked on the display. A mechanized female voice asked coldly for a countdown time. As Alonzo's hands slipped off the tube, he fell aside unconsciously.

Danziger answered the questioning voice.

"Three seconds."

"Please enter range. Please enter range," the voice demanded.

"One kilometer. Confirmed."

"Counting down... three... two... one." On the display the numbers changed from red to green. Then with an ominous sizzle a vibrating wave emanated in widening circles around the tube. Where it cleared away, the earth returned to the brownish red dirt that they'd come to associate with the planet.

Danziger breathed out in relief.

"I'd better go find Uly," he told Julia. But she wasn't paying attention to him.

Danziger hesitated for a second. There wasn't anything he could do here and if the dream was correct, Uly was still in great danger. So while the Geolock's noise receded in the distance he returned to investigate the tunnels until he found one that led deeper into the earth. Quickly he entered it, with a last look at the busy doctor.

She hunched over the pilot's unconscious body, scanning him continuously with the glove as she rummaged through her medkit for a derm injector.

"I've got to get his blood pressure down," she muttered to herself as she injected the man. She breathed a little easier when the medication took hold and his blood pressure dropped steadily to more normal levels. A soft moan escaped his lips.

"Alonzo?" she called in a low voice. "Can you hear me?" In response his eyes fluttered, then opened. Slowly they focused on her.

"Julia?" he asked, confused. "What're you doing here?" Cautiously he tried to sit up and she helped him lean his back against the Geolock tube.

"How're you feeling," she asked, her diaglove moving from his neck down his body once again.

"Like I've been hit by an ore-freighter," he smiled weakly.

"That doesn't surprise me," she smiled back, satisfied with the glove's diagnosis. "Your brain suffered numerous small electric shocks from the Geolock's security system. But Alonzo, you did it, you broke the code and we reversed the fossilization."

For the first time since he regained consciousness, his eyes moved away from her face to scan around the cave.

"Yes," he breathed in satisfied wonder. "It worked."

Then he frowned.

"How come the Morganite isn't glowing yet?" he asked her. She shrugged.

"The reversal only began a moment ago. Maybe it takes a while for the energy to start flowing again," she ventured. Just then a slight quiver rippled through the earth, followed by a stronger shock. Dust and small particles fell from the ceiling and rattled down along the cave walls.

"Lonzo?" she wanted to ask, but before she could get the words out a violent pain shot through her stomach. A low moan escaped her as she bent over, hands clasped around her belly. The diaglove, which she still wore on her left hand, blinked wildly, beeping in alarm.

"Julia?" Alonzo asked and he sat up straighter, a concerned look on his face.

Another spasm wracked her body and she fell to her knees in agony.

"Hurts," she hissed between clasped teeth.

Alonzo rushed to her side. He motioned uncertainly, not knowing what was happening

or what to do.

"Julia, what's wrong?"

"Don't know," she gasped. "The baby, I think. I need my bag," and she pointed weakly with one hand towards her medical bag. He grabbed it and pulled it near.

"What do you need?" he wanted to know as he rifled through its contents.

"Pain blocker," she answered and pushed him aside. The pain diminished for a moment, only to return more violently as another shock traveled through the earth. She dropped the capsule she'd just dug up from the bag when her hands flew involuntarily to her stomach again. Panic showed in Alonzo's eyes as he watched Julia writhe in agony.

He heard a soft noise behind him. He whirled around to discover a lone Terrian standing near one of the tunnels. It trilled softly.

The alien kneeled next to Julia. She looked at it, fear and desperation warring in her eyes but one look at Alonzo told her it should be okay. The Terrian placed one of his large hands on her belly and immediately she felt the pain abate. She moved to find a more comfortable position; the Terrian's hand, firmly placed on her stomach, followed her every movement.

"Alonzo? What's he doing?" she asked the pilot. The woman in her was immensely grateful that the pain was gone, the analyst wondered what was happening.

"He says it's the Mother doing this to you. When the Mother was made to stone, all life was frozen. But when we lifted the petrification the Mother began to die. And with it all new life it created... "

"The Mother?" she asked, not understanding what he was talking about.

He was silent for a moment, his eyes closed, clearly listening intently to what the creature was telling him.

"The earth. The earth is their Mother. The shocks we just felt are her death throes." He looked at her, his dark eyes bright with despair.

"Julia, unlocking the Geolock wasn't enough. She's still dying. And so is our baby. The Terrian can only halt the process for so long. Julia, we've got to do something to help the earth!"

## [CHAPTER TEN]

Danziger was stumbling through the dark tunnels when the first of the shockwaves hit. He stumbled and fell to his knees. He dropped the Lumalight and it went out, leaving him in utter darkness. He swore softly to himself as he felt around for the light. His hand slid over its cold metal feel and he breathed with relief. He turned on the light again and moved forward even more cautiously now, braced for more quakes.

A few moments later he saw a glimmer in the distance. He grunted with satisfaction; it appeared the dream was right. But as he remembered the rest of the dream, his satisfaction dissipated and he hurried towards the light.

He staggered into a large cavern. As they had in the dream, unmoving, silent Terrians lined the walls. In the middle of the cavern Uly stood in front of a blackened circle in the rocks.

"Uly," Danziger called. The teenager turned to him, a sharp looking knife clasped in his right hand.

"Don't try to stop me, John," he said calmly, his voice and tone more grown up than Danziger had ever heard from the 15-year-old. The Adair determination was evident in his stance. But Danziger wasn't discouraged; he butted heads with the older Adair many times and wasn't fazed by the kid.

"Uly, don't do this. Think about your mother, think what she'll feel," Danziger implored.

"That's exactly what I'm thinking about," the young man smiled sadly. "John, I have to do this. The earth needs \*my\* blood to live; I'm the only one. It's the fulfillment of the promise mom made years ago, when the earth helped me heal."

For a moment Danziger was stunned. Then he found his voice again.

"Your mother would never make a promise that costs you your life," he declared.

Again, Uly smiled.

"That's the point. She didn't know what she promised. Alonzo discovered it later, but he never told her. It doesn't matter really. If I don't do this we're all gonna die anyway."

And with a quick motion the boy slit his wrists, just as he had in the dream. Danziger screamed and plunged forward. One of the Terrians moved faster than he could see and

stepped in his way. He tried to dodge around the creature, but a crackling staff stopped him in his track.

"Please," he pleaded, his voice breaking as he saw the blood pour out of Uly's wounds onto the black stone circle.

"Let me help him. He'll die. This can't be what you want. This isn't what his mother promised."

But the creatures remained immobile, blocking his path, their faces expressionless. Beyond them he saw Uly slump to his knees as the boy's life flooded out of him.

Suddenly another violent spasm moved the floor. Danziger couldn't keep his balance and dropped to the ground. The Terrians all disappeared. A soft glimmer emanated from the black stone and the cave brightened as the Morganite began to glow. The stones burned brighter and brighter until the light became so white it hurt his eyes and he had to avert his gaze.

oOo

Alonzo hovered protectively over Julia, trying to prevent her getting hit by the small pieces of rock that the quake loosened from the cave ceiling.

"Alonzo, look," she pointed excitedly to the walls from beneath him. He turned to look and noticed that the Morganite veins shone their soft pulsating glow once more. The Terrian trilled once and as it removed its hand from Julia's stomach it sank in the earth. Alonzo turned back to Julia.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes," she answered slowly. "The pain's all gone... How can that be?"

"The Mother lives," he simply stated, a huge smile breaking on his face. But the smile faltered and his face fell when his happiness scattered on the realization that young Uly must've done what was destined.

"Oh God, Uly," Julia recalled the dream images she and Danziger experienced. "It's Uly who did this, right?" He nodded in reply and they both sat in horrified silence for a moment.

Then they heard huffing sounds coming from the tunnel that Danziger entered earlier. His gruff voice called out to them.

"Hey, I could use a hand here," and he shuffled out of the tunnel, Uly's body in his arms.

Julia rushed over to him, glove on her left hand as he lowered the boy's body to the floor.

"He's still alive," she said. The boy's face was utterly devoid of color, so pale it was nearly translucent. "He's lost a lot of blood," she concluded. "He'll die if we don't replenish it quickly. Lonz, hand me my bag. I packed a few bags of artificial blood in there somewhere. That'll do the trick."

## [EPILOGUE]

*[Voice of Devon Adair]*

A wise man once said that a promise made is a debt unpaid. I found out the hard way what he meant. Years ago, when the Terrians took my son and returned him healed from the Syndrome, I made them a promise. I didn't know what it was and despite Alonzo's warning I said I'd make it again. I'm not so certain anymore...

**Disclaimer:** This story is based on the Amblin Entertainment/Universal Television series Earth 2. The original creators own all original characters. The story is meant for entertainment purposes only and does not have the intention to infringe on any copyrights.