

Jaypeg III

Prologue

When Apple woke up, she could not recognize the place she was in. She was still in a standing position which she found was very odd. She blinked and looked down and saw the Earth spinning through the gaps on the ground. Taken aback, she walked backwards, knocked into something solid and heard a scream. She screamed as well and turned around and saw Yu Ping.

“We’re back in Seron,” said Yu Ping happily. Esther, George, Peter and John ran towards them from their right.

“What happened? I heard screams,” said George.

“No, I just scare Yu Ping and she scared me back,” explained Apple.

“We’re back in Seron!” repeated Yu Ping to the four boys.

There was a weird atmosphere in the air. It was one that made them nauseous. They looked around them in an attempt to find out what was wrong but they could see no sign of it. It was as though just a second ago they were battling against the confusion that would now never exist. It was as though just a second ago that they were working together with a person named Ray whom they went down to meet.

Then it all came back to them. The drop from the fuvia-heq of Seron to the landing patch on Mount Everest on earth, the shaky feeling of the elevators to the magic shows on television on earth, the amazing food to the people on earth, made them feel out of place now that they were back on Seron. They knew they were still on Earth but not so much on the earth now as only a few weeks ago had they found out that they, the fuvias, do not exist on earth and never existed in the eyes of the people down below them.

Yu Ping was feeling happier than ever. She had never had any friends since she was born and other than Uncle H, there was no one else she could talk to. That was her reality until recently when she found her place within this group of another five wonderful people.

“This feels so comfortable,” said a voice suddenly from their left. Yu Ping jumped and looked to her left. There was a man sitting in a large colourful high-back chair, the colours spun around in a beautiful mosaic on the chair and the man sitting on it

was leaning backwards on it with one leg bent across the other. There was no doubt about who this man was as he had been the reason for their adventures the past few weeks from home.

“Ray!” cried Yu Ping.

Ray smiled, stood up and walked towards the table behind him. Jaypeg ran towards him, almost tripping as they found that their footing felt a little strange. Perhaps it was the feeling of being so far away from the center of the earth and knowing that so many miles below them, the sight of the Earth spinning at snail’s pace, around and around. Yu Ping was the first to notice it but they noticed it soon enough. Ray’s shirt was changing colour to a colour that could have allowed him to camouflage himself in the high-back chair. Ray looked at where they were staring as well as giggling at and raised an eyebrow. When reality hit him, he raised an eyebrow at them.

“You used the Loider to make that chair, didn’t you?” asked Yu Ping as calmly as she could while the rest of them broke out into laughter at the sight of Ray’s colourful apparels.

The mood began to lighten up until George interrupted, “I miss my father. Do you think they realized we were gone?”

“That’s right! We’ve got to get home right away and George, we have been away for weeks. They will definitely realize that,” said Apple.

“Come on,” said Yu Ping and ran towards the arrival patch. They crossed a few of the streets, the corridors adjoining the different platforms that formed the Fuvia-heq, and they positioned themselves around the arrival patch. Yu Ping pushed a button on the control and the lights went off. Immediately, there was a rush of wind and something big fell in front of them. The lights were turned on lightly and five of them strapped themselves into the pink car in front of them. The lights went of again and they felt a pressure pulling them down as the car rose through the door above them that led to the basement car park of the grand shopping complex at the corner of the main square in Seron. Yu Ping left to pick up George and Ray.

The situation was getting out of hand.

Saturn's rings have never seen a day like this in history. All they had seen was heated exchanges that led to fights and crimes but none so much like this war.

It was genocide on both parties- the Ragens and the Schnits. The Ragens own the land in most part of the fuvia-wheel and the Schnits worked for them. There was however, no unity, even in between the groups themselves. At first, the line drawn between these two races were clear and no one crossed the line or wanted to cross it at all because it meant total elimination of themselves and their families.

Chapter 1

Something did not feel right the moment they stepped out into the sun. Yu Ping thought that it was probably that everyone had accepted the fact that they were sent down to earth and had gone about their daily lives as usual. There had been no change to everyone since the moment they had left. Somehow, their footsteps slowed down and there was a silence between them that no one could fill the gap of.

"Dad?" said Apple softly and tears began to well up in her eyes but she did not cry. Yu Ping turned to look at where she was pointing to and she saw Apple's mother and father, Mr. Yong and Mrs. Yong and they were fussing around a baby trolley. Apple broke into a smile and a widening grin. She ran towards her parents and when she reached close to them, she outstretched her arms as she cried "Mum and Daddy!" Mr. Yong looked up at her and then mumbled something to Mrs. Yong and they moved the trolley away from her. Apple's welcome was not well-received. Mr. Yong bent down in front of Apple and said, "Young lady, it's not right to go around picking people to be your parents. Get it?"

Mr. Yong stood up straight, placed his arms around Mrs. Yong, who turned to smile at Yu Ping, and they walked away with the trolley. Apple did not give up. She ran towards the front of her parents. John started to chase after her and the rest of them followed. Apple ran in front of them and opened up her arms again, only this time, it was not to embrace but to block and stop. The Yong family stopped to look at each other. There was a sudden cry from the trolley which made Apple tear her gaze from her parents to look at the precious little baby in the trolley right in front of her. She squatted down in front of the baby and her mind went blank. Yu Ping stood behind her and was just as

amazed by the baby but mostly because she had not seen one before. For a moment, Yu Ping started to think about herself being once at that tiny size of the baby and she smiled.

Apple however, could not bring herself to smile. "This is our son, Jerry and he is four days old," said Mrs. Yong. That was impossible, thought Yu Ping; they had been gone for six days which means that the baby had to be born just two days after they had left.

"Yu Ping, the baby's not real," said Peter as he placed a hand on Yu Ping's shoulder. Yu Ping was very confused and yet, the baby did seem rather unreal. It was moving, it was blinking but somehow, it all seemed pretty mechanical. "It's one of those preparation robots new parents use to get use to having a child in the future."

Mrs. Yong said gently to Apple, "You didn't think it was real, did you?" Apple was still stunned as she looked up at her parents. Had they gone mad? "Little girl, I will have my first baby in about nine months time and my husband and I are very nervous so we borrowed this babybot from the hospital. Isn't it just adorable?"

Apple was still speechless. Mr. Yong said softly to his wife, "Come on, let's go." Mrs. Yong looked back at Apple and then smiled and said "Good bye." Mr. Yong wrapped his right arm around his wife and they walked away. Apple stood up and waved at them blankly. Yu Ping placed her hand on Apple's shoulder and there was nothing she could say to make anything better. Yu Ping felt very sad for Apple and at the same time, she was confused. When she looked up at the rest of the group, almost all of them ran off home, except for Ray who walked over to Yu Ping and Apple. Yu Ping suddenly felt afraid as Apple had silently started to cry and then it became louder and louder. She grabbed hold of Ray and shook him.

"Why don't they remember me? Did they even know they had a daughter? How can they do this to me? How could they?" she shouted. A few people walking along the streets around them turned and glanced at her then walked away. Ray held her with his large hands and said as calmly as he could, "We'll find out why, ok? We'll find out. I know your parents did not mean it."

"I don't care if they meant it or not but they did it!" shouted Apple. Then she muttered to herself, "They don't want me anymore. They don't remember me. How could

they? How could they? Was I not a good enough daughter to them? How can they do this? They cannot do this, they can't."

Yu Ping looked up and saw all of the others walking back towards them. There was no spirit left in their eyes. John was dragging his feet, his face expressionless. George was sobbing as he walked towards them and Esther was mindlessly twiddling his fingers and Peter was shaking his head left and right continuously. Ray decided that he should start taking charge of matters. "Come on, we'll get back to the Fuvia-heq and we'll find out what is going on." They nodded as much as they could and followed Ray like aimless zombies.

It was as though no one recognized them as they walked back, not even the shop owners whom they knew so well and not even their friends from school. They were treated like tourists, like just simply someone they had never seen before which was weird as almost everyone in Seron knew each other. Some of the shop owners, however, waved to Ray and shouted at him, "Hey! You've been gone for so long, what brings you back? We heard that you had a new job somewhere else!" Ray just smiled at them and minded his own way.

There was something so weird down at the Fuvia-heq. Yu Ping was the first to feel it. "Where's Uncle H? He should be minding the Fuvia-heq at this time. There was a sound of rushing water and Uncle H stepped out of a toilet cubicle not far from them. "Uncle H!" shouted Yu Ping. Uncle H turned and looked at her incredulously. It was as though they had never met and Uncle H thought that she was a loony. Uncle H walked up to her and tried to chase them out.

"Children are not allowed in here. Get out. How did you get in here anyway?" Yu Ping kept her cool as her brain continued to work. The computer had still remembered her. They were in the right dimension and in the right place which was their home. They existed here before. The people had just totally forgotten about them.

Yu Ping immediately ran for the Fuvia-heq's database and typed in Apple's name.

"Full name: Apple Yong

Siblings: Jerry Yong

Family of Oscar Yong

Attending Goldfields High elementary school."

“I have a sister named Casey,” said John blankly.

“I have a sister named Megan,” muttered Esther.

“My parents came back to Seron and I have a sister named Laura,” said Peter.

George said bitterly, “My dad can’t give birth on his own.”

“My grandma couldn’t remember me at all,” said Peter softly.

Then, he turned around and asked Yu Ping to send him out of the Fuvia-heq as he needed some air. Yu Ping agreed and brought Peter up and left the rest of them hovering around the computer.

Now, it is all different, both races have crossed the line at the same time, together, talk about unity... They formed three smaller teams, consisting of both races. They did not pick their teams just because they were friends or families but because they thought that they were the best scientists or fighters. They grabbed every opportunity to blackmail and obtain these great minds. Resorting to underhand means, every side tried to get what they wanted.

Chapter 2

Peter was silent on the way up. Much more silent than Yu Ping was comfortable with. It was not as though Peter used to talk a lot, which he did not, but it was as though the person sitting beside her was a changed person. Yu Ping followed him up and out of the car park. They took a lift up to the ground floor. Peter placed his arms over the railing looking out at the Garden just outside the main square. “Could you leave me alone for a while?” said Peter. Yu Ping shrugged and went back to the car park. Her mind was full of thoughts. She began to feel sad about Uncle H not remembering her. When she got back to car park, she found the rest of them walking towards her. “They kicked us out,” said Ray immediately. Silently, they took the lift up to the ground level and George dashed out immediately. He ran towards the nearest building and dashed into the lift as it opened. Peter, had seen George dash by him, followed swiftly after. He did not manage to get into the same lift but he took the next one that came.

Yu Ping was the next to follow, followed by Ray then by John and Esther. They had to wait for Esther’s lift to come down as there were only two lifts available. They

saw that it had reached the top storey before coming down and they followed. Peter had obviously figured out that George was heading to the top floor and had stopped at that tenth floor as the four of them got into the first lift.

On the top floor, George had taken the stairs and went onto the roof and the rest of them had swiftly followed. When they finally caught up with him, Yu Ping ran over to George quickly but he pushed her away. He grabbed hold of the half a meter height railing around the roof and sat down in front of it.

“What are you doing?” shouted Yu Ping.

“You don’t know what it is like to lose your mother and then lose your father. I hate it. I hate my life!” shouted George back.

“I don’t even know my parents!” shouted Yu Ping.

“But I knew mine. It is much harder to lose something that you already have then to never have it in the first place.”

“Come to us. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t, George,” said Ray.

“George, Uncle H said your mother was still alive. She’ll remember you. She’s still around, you have not lost her yet,” said Yu Ping.

“He was lying wasn’t he? He made us go down to earth and come up to find that everyone had forgotten about us. Uncle H probably planned the whole thing,” said George.

Yu Ping shook her head agitatedly, “He wouldn’t do that. He had no reason to.”

George ignored her and stood up. He swung his legs with ease over the railing. His tears had dried a long time ago but they came out again. He looked down at the roads as he sat with his feet dangling over the side of the building. He did not care that many fuvias will start to gather around under the building soon enough. He could not care that the police will come to get him down. He would not care even if his friends will have to live without him. He only cared about ending everything there and then.

Then it occurred to him, one other thing he cared about. What if his mother was still alive? What if Uncle H had not lied to him, he had been so sincere. He hesitated. He could make a decision to die and never find out. He could also make a decision to stay and do.

Just that short moment of hesitation had saved his life as Peter dashed forwards quietly and carried George back to the rest of them. George did not struggle as he had thought it through. When Peter put him down, he looked seriously at the rest of them. He said, “We cannot just let all these happen. We’re going to make everyone remember us and we’re going to find my mother and help us.”

Yu Ping was both amazed and happy. George placed his hand in front of him. “Well? I can’t do everything by myself you know,” he said. Yu Ping immediately placed her palm on the back of George’s hand. Peter was the next to put his hand in. Ray joined as well. Peter looked at Esther and Esther placed his hand in. John smiled and followed and beckoned to Apple. Apple looked at all of them, sighed and then placed her hand in.

“We’ll find out what happened and fix it. We’ll do it together. And we’ve nothing to lose,” said Ray.

“Ok, on the count of three, say, “Promise”,” said George.

“One,” said Ray.

“Two, three,” said all of them in unison, “Promise!”

What is worse is the fact that the army was right in the middle of all these. We have the best army in this fuvia-system, gold awards every year and we had to be the first to break out into war. The soul of this city was unity. Before everything was created, it had been established in the core of this planet that unity comes before everything. It was the unity of the soil that kept the ground together, the sky together and the air together. It was unity that we built our city upon.

This unity is now falling apart after generations. Thoughts have evolved ever so dangerously and the only sense of unity now is in each and every one of us, the unity that keeps our bodies together to fight against everything else.

Chapter 3

They dashed back towards the car park. The only way they could find out anything about what was going on was definitely from the headquarters. In two batches, they made their way down again. This time, Uncle H was waiting at the bottom for them.

Yu Ping stepped out into the dim light but before her eyes could adjust to the light, she felt someone grab her tightly by the shoulders. She jumped and looked behind her. It was a man in uniform and in dark shades. “Just where are you people from? And Ray, what are you doing here? You’re supposed to be on a mission.” They turned around towards the voice as the light became much brighter. It was Uncle H. Yu Ping was beginning to feel uncomfortable. It was like one of those times when she was itching somewhere but she could not scratch it.

An image suddenly flashed through her mind. A door slid open and a woman dressed in a black long-sleeved shirt and in a pair of jeans stepped out. Her hair was long and as curly as George’s and she walked out. There was a sort of ginger-ness in her steps as though afraid of something. The woman waved to something in front of her, she was waving to Yu Ping. Immediately, Yu Ping snapped out of it and remotely tuned in to the commotion now happening around her.

Uncle H had held all of them captive and Ray was negotiating with Uncle H who had no idea what he was talking about. “We’re from Seron!” shouted John.

“That’s impossible boy,” said Uncle H coldly.

“It’s true, honest!” said Esther as he squirmed in the arms of the uniformed man holding onto him but he did not budge.

“Why would we lie to you?” said Apple.

“I don’t know, you tell me,” said Uncle H.

Ray said, “They are just... um... from this planet far away called Seron and looked exactly like what we have here. Haven’t you heard of a mirror-world?”

Uncle H obviously was interested as he turned towards Ray. “Tell me more,” he said. “Well...” said Ray and glanced at them for a while, “They live on this planet which is about the size of Seron. The people there are exactly the same as they are here. They are not exactly from there or a copy of them would be found here but they’ve taken this planet, Seron, to be their own. It’s just a small misunderstanding, honest!”

Yu Ping nodded discretely at Ray and Ray let out a huge breath as Uncle H seemed to be pondering over the credibility of his story. There was a moment of silence as he considered and then he asked, “How did you get in here anyway? You’re not personnel of the Fuvia-heq so how did you get in?”

“Well, because...” said Ray, hesitantly.

“I am able to break into any security areas,” said Yu Ping immediately.

“You are from P.F.A?” asked Uncle H.

“No, sir, I just have a special talent for it. I’m sorry if it caused any inconvenience,” said Yu Ping carefully.

Uncle H looked about purposefully and then shut his eyes for a second or two. When he opened them, he said, “Lock them up.”

“No!” said a voice immediately.

Once again, they did the voice searching game and saw a woman with long, curly hair walk towards them. Yu Ping saw that she was dressed just like in her vision, black, long-sleeved shirt, and a pair of jeans. Her hair was tied in a simple ponytail at the back of her head. There was no aura of mystery around her as one would have expected but there was a simple, calming peace around her.

“Janice, what are you doing out here? Go back to your room!” said Uncle H, alarmed. He looked at the seven of them and then at Janice, “They see you!”

Yu Ping raised an eyebrow. “Of course we can see her, what’s wrong with that?” she retorted.

Janice looked at them and smiled. She told Uncle H, “They’re with me.” Janice beckoned to them with her right hand and it was unmistakably, a signal for them to take along behind her. The man in uniform hesitated and then let them go. Yu Ping rubbed her shoulders as she trotted along behind this woman named Janice. Who was she? Why did she demand so much respect around here, even Uncle H had to bow down to her?

She led them towards the transporter. They hesitated before following her onto the platform. Did this mean that they have to go on another adventure? Yu Ping was not sure if she was ready for anything big to happen now but it did.

“Wow, George, how much you’ve grown!” she turned and hugged him. George was so surprised at this gesture but he liked it anyway. “How’s your dad? Is he fine?”

George stopped breathing and he broke into a slight grin. “Mum?”

The woman hugged him tighter and then let go of him. It was as though they could see through each others’ eyes as they gazed at each other for about a minute before George said, “Is that you?”

The woman nodded slowly. George grabbed the woman's hands and then held them close to himself. There was another moment's silence and then George burst out, "Where have you been? Where did you go? What are you doing here?" He asked these questions with excitement in his eyes and he did not even care if the woman now standing before him had a good answer to give him. He could not care about anything else but for that moment.

The woman smiled and then looked at the other six of them who had been amazed by this reunion of mother and son. Yu Ping said, "Mrs. Singleton? It's a pleasure to meet you at last." She held out a hand and Yu Ping shook it.

Suddenly, George's mother said in a serious tone. "The people had been hit but some unknown disease that made them forget all about your existence. However, in Penato city, the situation is much worse. The people there initially could not remember you six but then they started to forget the people in their family. They started to forget practically everything that mattered to them. They're now like mindless souls just walking aimlessly around for the past few days and this had been enough to drive the city crazy. Penato city is probably the most populated city around here and everyone goes there. Now, a few of the cities closer to hem have become affected as well. The disease is contagious. The last thing we need is for it to become widespread all over this Fuvia-wheel."

She turned towards George and hugged him again, she said slowly and sadly, "I have to stay here. I cannot go with you. You are the only people now that would be able to believe what I am saying now and you'd have to do everything you can to help. Take these; it'll protect you from contracting the disease." She took out from her pocket seven pieces of blue paper. She stuck them one on each of their arms. She explained, "In all my years here, I've come out with a few of this stuff just in case."

"Had this problem happen before ma'am?" asked Ray.

"Yes, this is not the first time. I based all my research on pass incidences whereby this has happened. This patch will only last you a week. That's how much time you'd have to finish the job and come right back here. Ok?"

Ray nodded silently. Yu Ping's heart started to pound. She had been under so much stress lately and this had come as a sudden blow to her. Part of her just hoped that she had never become involved in this. "What do we do now?" asked Yu Ping.

"Go to Penato city and find out what is causing this and solve the problem. Ok?" asked George's mother.

George suddenly placed his hand in front of him and smiled at his mother. Yu Ping placed her hand on top of George's and John, Esther, Apple, Peter and Ray followed one after another. George then placed his other hand on top of the deck. Yu Ping placed her other hand in as well. Quickly, all of their hands were in. Ray nodded at George.

"One," said George.

"Two, three," they said once again, in unison, "Promise!"

The three small teams are the Sneaks, the Brains and the Strongs. The Sneaks depended on all the underhand methods and robbed houses every single night, kidnappings rose and they were probably the most annoying group to us soldiers. The Brains are the biggest group around. With all their scientific inventions, which they definitely went past the little model stage to become big and massive weapons of destruction, they terrorized the cities like no other. The Strongs simply went around lobbing off enemy's body parts and there is nothing one can do but run but that never worked. The safest policy was to join one of the other groups.

Everyone seemed to know that so there is a clear segregation in the society. The three main groups and the army. No one was safe from all these and everything had stopped to function. The food supply could only last a while and no one was doing anything but attempt to produce food for their "team". Now, it seemed as though this unity in these groups is strengthening and this may not be such a good thing. In an attempt to stop them from fighting, the army had already stopped distributing food and resources. Our fuvias are smart so they got around the crisis very easily.

Chapter 4

Penato city was most probably the most amazing place Yu Ping had ever been to. However, it was not the most amazing thing she had ever seen as she had probably

traveled the world in her dreams. There were skyscrapers, at least a hundred storeys from the ground. There were no signs of them toppling as all the buildings were joined together by a large chain of corridor which stretched for what seemed like miles to join every single building in the city in a large circle. The streets seem as normal but there was a sort of strength in the air that seemed to dissipate every now and then.

From every corner of the city, fuvias were working on their lives, walking here, walking there, walking everywhere but not walking anywhere. The one freaky thing of all these was that everyone walked alone. Not one couple could be seen with their hands together, not one child could be seen with a parent. A few people handed food to children in the streets as well as some money but the children did not seem to care. A small little boy of about five years of age simply walked into a store picked a packet of biscuits and an ice cream from the freezer and just as simply walked out. It was as though no one actually cared about them. Not that the store keeper will take the responsibility to watch them as well. Yu Ping thought that the store keeper's children would most likely be doing the same thing, which was why he did not stop him.

Ray said, "The store keeper most likely just have to take care of himself and there's no need to bring the bread home."

Yu Ping found that that probably made more sense than her theory which she still thought it to be right as well.

A sudden inspiration made Yu Ping look towards the sky. The sky was yellow. She tapped Apple gently on the back and she looked up as well. Soon, everyone knew one more thing about this city. The sky here was yellow. "What's going on?" asked Yu Ping to no one in particular.

"I think it's because of the disease," replied Ray softly.

They nodded in agreement and walked slowly towards the obvious main square. There was the most enormous fountain right in the middle of it. Three tubes sprayed out the colours red, green and blue towards the center of the fountain. Where the three colours intersected, the water was white. The colours green and blue intersected to form a light blue colour. The colours green and red intersected to form yellow and the colours blue and red intersected to form a reddish-purple colour or purplish-red colour. Whatever colour it was, it was still beautiful. Many people were walking along purposefully

throughout the main square but other than the odd separated feeling between the fuvias, business seemed to go on very well. There were people taking stock in the stores, the security guards were on patrol, store keepers seemed to be doing their jobs as though nothing had changed.

It was as though this was a whole new country whereby everyone came in from many different parts of the world and have settle here without their families but with their various businesses. Yu Ping could find no other word to describe it except that it was probably the oddest thing she had ever seen.

Something caught her eye on her right and she turned. It was a woman in her twenties and what caught Yu Ping's eyes was her rainbow-coloured wardrobe. Her shirt was red with random yellow and orange stripes; her knee-length skirt was a light shade of blue with faded streaks of green and purple. Her hair was brown with streaks of black and gold and a slight tinge of light brown in it. Her sunglasses were large, rounded at the bottom and pointed at the sides. They were a sort of silver colour, complimented by the many white little crystals sparkling around the lens. Nothing, however, seemed to be connecting the shades to her head. They were just floating in front of her face. It was hardly possible as well to see behind the dark brown shades which changed colour every now and then. It would, after a few seconds, switch to red, then a few seconds later, to blue and then back to brown. It stayed brown for awhile as though its owner have decided to keep it that way for a while.

Suddenly, the shades just disappeared and Yu Ping could see the woman's eyes. They were beautiful and there was a sort of youthful spring in them as compared to the rest of the serious bunch at work around her. Her eyes seemed to be caught by something. Yu Ping tried to see in the direction of where she was looking at and saw nothing. After a while, she locked her eyes on a young man, also in his twenties, walking towards the woman. The two smiled as they saw each other and they walked towards each other. They seemed to not realize that they were being watched by seven watchful eyes and just realize that they were in the company of each other.

The man reached out to touch the woman's hair and the woman looked away shyly for a while. Then the man asked, "Would you like to go for a coffee? It's my treat."

The woman looked up, apparently surprised and glad, and nodded her head. Then, they held hands together as they walked away together. Yu Ping could have sworn that the ground looked much whiter where they were standing. However, the happy scenario did not last long. The moment they moved three steps away from that spot, their hands disconnected and the man walked right and the woman walked left and they acted like the other had never existed. Yu Ping could not shut her mouth as she watched the would-be couple become a has-been. Once again, she swore that the ground on which they had stood on turned a pale yellow again.

“Now, that’s serious,” said Ray seriously.

I knew from my gut that this unity would not be for long. Soon, as always, they would fall apart and the only way to speed this up is to remind them of their families. Still, I am not sure it would work at all...

Chapter 5

The scenery at night was beautiful. Lights shone up from every corner of the city, blasting up into the night sky blocking off all the stars. Every minute, a song will blast from different speakers from every shop and house, each time the song will start on the same beat and end on the same beat no matter how different the songs were.

*“And so we were on the same road,
With nothing to hold...”*

Yu Ping had never felt so excited in her life. There she was in a city that she believed she had gone to in her visions and seen the most of it but she had never seen it after night falls. There was, however, something very odd about this night scene that she could not understand. Just a few hours ago, they had been walking around in this city and every time, the situation was the same. Everyone walked alone.

*“There was nothing real to grasp onto
And slowly we were told...”*

Ray walked into a hotel. Yu Ping knew that almost a few hundred meters away as the bright blue light scaling the side of the building screamed, “HOTEL!” The hotel was probably the biggest as well as the tallest building around. It was so high that Apple did

not think that it would be possible to reach the top that easily. The difference about these skyscrapers as compared to the ones they met with on Earth was obvious. On Earth, every one of the buildings was separated or joined by a simple corridor. All the housing apartment buildings just look insecure crowding around on a small base. Here in Penato city, the buildings, joined by the numerous thick corridors between them, revolved in large circles over a wide open space in the center of it. The base of every building sloped gently towards the center, and the part of the building facing outside of the circle sloped outwards.

“That it doesn’t really matter

Who your friends were...”

“Room for seven please,” said Ray to the counter. Apple tried to jump and look over it but there was simply no one at the table. Behind the counter, there were different cubicles, each holding a different set of keys. Two keys suddenly flew from the cubicles towards them and into Ray’s hand. “Welcome to the only hotel in central circle Penato city. Enjoy your stay. We’ll collect payment when you come down for the inclusive breakfast next morning.”

“It’s more than that in truth

It’s what they are that you should hold dear...”

The rooms were small. There were three small beds in one room and four small beds in the other room. Each bed lined one side of the room and the one opposite the door managed to just touch the side walls. The other two beds were lined along the walls at the side of the room and in one of the rooms, the extra bed laid diagonally across the center of the room, fitting snugly into the space available. Each bed was only as wide as an average adult, leaving not space to turn. Apple, Yu Ping and Esther decided to sleep in one room while the others slept in another. Yu Ping walked slowly towards one bed and sat down. She looked at Ray quizzically. “Don’t worry,” said Ray, “These beds are designed to knock you off once your head touches the pillow and there’s no way you will wake up or turn about until the wake-up call time. So, that’s it and we’ll see you in the morning at 7am.” With that, Ray turned around and left for the room next door.

“They may not be from this planet

Nor from this fuvia system

*They may not have any purpose
Or immunity to any germ..."*

Yu Ping did not want to sleep yet and placed her hands under her head above the pillow so that her head did not touch the pillow. She started to feel kind of sad. The only person whom she had known so well all her life, Uncle H, could not even remember her. What if he had a hand in this? Why had he wanted to forget them in the first place? He had been her first friend. Loneliness came over her in a way she had never felt before and she started to tear. "Pat! Pat!" A soft sound made Yu Ping jump slightly in the darkness. Through her tears, she could see a figure slowly walking towards the door and the door opened. Light from the corridor flooded in and Yu Ping saw Esther walking out. He shut the door behind him and all was silent again.

*"You just have to tell them
You just have to say
You just have to sincerely tell them
We love you anyway!"*

I have been with the army for many years now and my main job was to recruit army officers that have the potential to serve this city from the bottom of their hearts. The only reason I joined the army in the first place is the thought that the job would be so admirable, so exciting and my dad had been a soldier as well but he was killed in another land. Mum had never been able to tell or she had never wanted me to know. Judging by my character, I would have brought a bomb and bombed the city that brought the death on my father. That was why I respect my mother's decision.

My mum was killed as well, after the riots started many years ago. The Ragens had broken into the house in a kind of mood to test out their new technology and it blasted the house apart. I was out with a friend when it happened. I have never found my mother's remains. That was the last straw. I joined the army in hope of manning this circus but it was of no use. It is still of no use now. We have been trying to suppress these hooligans but they always take over us. I have never seen a riot escalate so much so suddenly that in a year, it had burst out into a full-fledged war.

Chapter 6

Things did not look too well the next day. Yu Ping was rudely woken up at seven in the morning. The sky was still dark outside the ceiling. The ceiling? Yu Ping realized that from above her head, on the ceiling, she could see the night sky and the soft dark grey clouds that were swirling around. She could tell that it was only seven as there was small digital clock reading at the corner of the “night ceiling”. Apple sat up as well and rubbed her eyes. Esther promptly rolled off the bed and groaned.

Yu Ping got up and went outside of the room. The corridor looked the same as it was last night. Groggily and aimlessly, she walked towards the lift which opened on seeing her with its camera eye. Yu Ping went in, pressed for the lobby and went down. She knew she was in an early-morning mood, which meant that she did not care or bother about what exactly she was up to, except that she needed to walk and move around for a while before fully waking up. She walked again after the lift doors opened and found herself in the lobby. She walked mindlessly out of the hotel and into the streets.

There were many fuvias in the center of the streets. Things did not seem right for a morning scene. There was simply too many fuvias awake and doing nothing. Most of the lights from shops and buildings have disappeared and only the lights lining the street shone to illuminate the pathway. Apple and Esther followed closely behind Yu Ping. For a long while, they sat and stared at the scene in front of them.

The fuvias just sat around, looking as disoriented as a penguin in a desert or a mammoth on the streets. Yu Ping suddenly became afraid about what was happening. She ran into the hotel again and into the next room to wake Ray and the others up. She knocked on the door but no one came to answer it. Figuring that they are most probably asleep and dreaming at the moment, she quickly ran down again to meet Apple and Esther. She walked towards the counter at the lobby and asked, “Can you wake those in room 917?” It felt awkward talking to the air but it was not that awkward until the counter did not respond. “Any suggestions?” asked Apple.

Esther walked behind the counter and disappeared under it for a while. Before Yu Ping could look over the counter at Esther, the lift door opened and Ray came out with Peter John and George dragging their heels behind him. “Something is wrong,” said Ray.

Esther got up from behind the counter and walked out. “Come, you’ve got to see something,” said Yu Ping.

“Something is wrong,” said Ray. The seven of them walked out of the hotel and looked around at the scene of disoriented individuals. “Something is wrong,” said Ray again.

Yu Ping looked at Esther then looked at Apple and they said to Ray in unison, “We know something is wrong already!”

“What is wrong?” said John with his eyes half-opened.

Ray walked towards one fuvia, reached out cautiously and then pulled a wallet from one of their hands. The fuvia looked at his hands, acted as though nothing had happened and continued to sit there like a rock in deep thought.

Ray looked at them and shook his head. “What’s that supposed to mean?” asked Apple. Yu Ping knew they had forgotten everything, to these fuvias, nothing mean anything at all anymore.

“It means that they are a bunch of air-headed cases, or simply...mindless,” replied Ray.

“Did the disease do this? Does this mean that Seron is also in this situation?” asked Yu Ping. She began to worry about what her home now would be like and whether the fuvias could return to normal again, like they used to.

“Yes and no,” replied Ray, “The disease is more evolved here. In Seron, the problem may not be as serious yet. The more people it infects, the more terrible it grows.”

“What can we do?” asked John.

They watched helplessly as someone stood up, walked around and then looked lost. He looked around, saw the many fuvias seated on the ground, and joins them. After a while, another person gets up and they do that again.

“I’m hungry,” said Esther. Ray opened his back pack and took out seven individually wrapped cream buns and passed it to them.

They walked quietly back to the town center and they decided to go back to Seron the same way they came, through the Fuvia-heq. Yu Ping could access the Fuvia-heq here as well and they made their way down. They walked towards the transporter and Ray

pressed the button of transfer to Seron. He slipped into the transporter before the door closed.

There was a slight shake in the transporter and the door opened but they were not in Seron. They had not moved from Penato city.

“What’s going on?” asked Yu Ping. Someone was standing outside the door. Ray got up first and the rest of them did so more reluctantly. The person outside the door had rather dark skin, shorter fingers than usual and was rather tall. What took Yu Ping by surprise was however, his lack of hair and eyebrows. What surprised her next were the person’s colourful hand paintings of seemingly abstract art all over his arms and neck.

“What can I do for you?” asked Ray politely.

“I need water. Get me some,” said the stranger coldly.

Ray replied just as politely to this seemingly impolite request. He said, “Sorry, this is not by turf. I would gladly refer you to the fuvia in charge.”

“Show me!” growled the stranger almost impatiently and pointed towards the chain of streets that joined the Fuvia-heq. Ray walked out with his eyes on the floor and the stranger followed behind. Jaypeg looked at each other, shrugged and then followed as well.

Simply seeking the help of our fuvias to join the army was not enough. They did not have the spirit of unity and they ever will.

Chapter 7

They walked slowly across the fuvia-heq. There was nothing that made Yu Ping feel the littlest comfort. Simply to say, there was little or nothing she could feel about the stranger. She knew this could only mean one thing. This stranger was not from Earth.

Ray said nothing but kept his head bowed in front of the stranger. Slowly and silently, they reached a corner of the fuvia-heq where there was a metallic tube sticking out of the wall. Ray reached over and pressed the tube downwards and water flowed out. He released it and politely said to the stranger, “Here’s the water.”

The stranger growled and hollered, “I need more water! Give me a thousand liters of your earth water.” Yu Ping felt that that would probably be the weirdest request she

had heard yet. Ray's face fell and he said softly, like he was afraid of something, "You cannot take away more than a liter. I would have to consult our boss."

The stranger became even stranger as he tapped his left ear with his right hand. Immediately, his nose closed and his eyes closed. Under his breath, he mumbled something. Suddenly, his eyes snapped open and he glared at Ray and said, "We would have to take the water by force." Yu Ping felt the world slip from her finger tips as she fell quickly into unconsciousness.

When she awoke, she found herself in a room without windows, doors, or anything. There was no light but she could see what was around her. The eight walls were dull silver and next to her, everyone else she had been with seemingly moments ago awoke. The stranger was not there anymore. "What happened," asked Yu Ping.

"No idea," said George, rubbing his eyes.

Apple shook her head, lay against the wall and closed her eyes.

Ray sat up straight, stood up and then walked around. "They wanted to take one thousand liters of water and we could not give it to them. Now, they're going to wage war on this place."

Yu Ping was confused. It was just a thousand liters of water. Why would anyone risk a war over that amount of water?

Ray replied to her thoughts, "Water might not seem like a big deal but there are rules governing this water and we cannot remove more than ten liters to anyone from any other fuvia-wheels. What keeps our whole system in balance is the equal amount of water in every fuvia-heq in our whole system. A slight off-balance would be catastrophic."

"But why would they want water from us in the first place?" asked Apple.

"I don't know," shrugged Ray.

John scratched his head and asked, "Why were you so nice to that guy? He was being mean."

Ray chuckled and said, "Well, fuvias as well as the people from their fuvia-wheel believe that they are the king of the universe. Spit on them, offend them and you'd be meeting your ancestors. You see, what keeps everything in order is not smooth technology but more of the sense of righteousness in every one of us. Lose that and you can do anything, especially things that no one likes at all."

“So they’re basically idiotic jerks,” said Esther.

“Mostly,” said Ray, nodding his head.

Yu Ping suddenly came to a realization and blurted out, “So, are we stuck here or do we have to get out?”

“Right,” said Ray, “It’s simple actually, just say as many nice things as you can about that alien and his kind.”

“Very funny,” said Apple with a laugh.

“We’ve got to try. I know about this tribal technology very well. Grade school research.”

“You are the meanest group in the universe!” shouted Ray.

Yu Ping glared at him.

“They like that,” said Ray with a smile.

“Ok, your shoes are the duller in the world!” said Apple.

One by one, they hurled their insults at the walls. Suddenly, a gap started to appear in the wall where they could see the fuvia-heq outside. Excited, they continued shouting Earth fuvia insults at the walls.

“You are so ugly!”

“Big bullies!”

“Bossy!”

“Unreasonable!” shouted Peter when the gap was almost big enough for one of them to squeeze through. At that, the gap reduced in size. Ray took over and shouted, “You are mean! Very mean! Very, very, very mean!” The gap opened just wide enough and all of them squeezed out.

“Never say that they’re unreasonable, they think with all their heart that they are,” explained Ray.

“Wow, they are annoying,” said Apple.

Yu Ping nodded and replied, “That’s such a big compliment.

Ray looked suddenly serious and said, “We need to get back to Seron but first, we’ve got to settle this mess. These alien fuvias may just come and disrupt the peace around here.” He looked around and sighed. He continued, “Not that anyone is at work

governing this place anyway. It's a matter of time survival instincts kick in and we have some caveman-attitude out there."

"Caveman-attitude?" asked Yu Ping.

"It's just my way of saying that they'll go around hitting each other, hunt for food and, well, do something barbaric. Mostly, they'd do something weird. I hope I'm wrong though... There's a reason why we evolved out of that stage."

They will forever see the importance of keeping oneself alive. I think it was what drove this war. Everyone wanted to survive at the cost of other and the groups that they joined were simply for protection. They would never do something for their group if it does not help their selves much.

Chapter 8

They worked through the rest of the day in the fuvia-heq of Penato City. They did not see any of the aliens around although Ray did say they would be planning to make another return trip until someone in charge gave in.

"Three times," said Ray, "It's their custom, when they ask for something they'd expect to get what they want on the third try. Especially when it is something that is unlikely to get."

They worked through that rest of the day constructing human-replacers. In exact sense, it just means that they had created robots to take over the fuvia-heq for a while. These robots are just non-existent and they exist in a non-matter...existence. So, technically, thought Yu Ping, these could not be called robots.

She drew her twelfth stern face on a piece of glittery white paper. Ray took it from her, sprayed it with a purple-coloured liquid that vanishes as it touches the paper. Gradually, the face on the paper disappeared and a floating head appeared next to them in mid-air, alongside other floating heads they had drawn up.

"Okay, so now, we just have to bring these heads up to the surface and they will scare the people into doing nothing uncivilized," announced Ray.

"Huh?" asked Yu Ping sleepily.

“I mean, they’ll help us keep the peace for a while. Keep the fuvias off each others backs.”

“You sure about that?” asked Apple.

“No. This is untested technology that I’ve created while on earth. They should work,” said Ray. He mumbled to himself, “Theoretically.”

Together, they chased the reluctant and grouchy heads up into the city. Once up there, they could smell something burning. Yu Ping could see, or might as well, could not see anything as a cloud of smoke passed by her, choking her. She coughed and then recovered when the smoke has passed, like an opening introduction to what she was about to see right after. The streets were messy with pieces of metal and the robot cleaners were trying to disintegrate as much of it as possible as it piled up.

No matter which direction she turned, Yu Ping could see fuvias fighting with each other over just about anything. Their clothes were torn, their faces screwed up in disgust and aggression. There was nothing in the air that could have made this whole scene comforting. One of the heads shook his head violently beside Yu Ping and Yu Ping jumped. If that head was considered to be something in the air, it had better work to turn things around.

The heads floated silently into the scene. Every time they meet a quarrelling “couple”, they would stare at either one of them in disgust until the fuvia backs off. Slowly, everyone put down their weapons and interestingly, their opponent’s hair or some sort. The heads then went around shouting orders. The fuvias scurried around, in a futile attempt to escape. There was nothing they could do as the heads commanded them to clear up the streets and to fix everything they had broken.

Yu Ping could feel herself chuckle. A big fuvia with big muscles and really messy hair fell in front of her. Yu Ping jumped back in shock, her heart beat increased suddenly and she could even hear it thumping in her stomach. The half naked man jumped up suddenly and yelled “Boo!” at her face. Yu Ping jumped again and ran to hide behind Ray. One of the heads swept in front of the man and yelled at him to go away. The fuvia looked disgruntled but he turned around and lumbered off.

Yu Ping panted like she had just finished a race with a giraffe. Esther was bursting out in laughter. Yu Ping knew that he was being a big idiot and glared at him. Esther shrugged, calmed himself down and almost immediately, started laughing again.

“Ha! You’ve got to love my nobots!” said Ray happily.

“Nobots?” said John and Apple together.

“They’re non-matter; they’re robots, sort of... So, they can be nobots and the name sounds nice, doesn’t it?” Ray explained with a sense of achievement.

It took a while for them to notice but they did anyway. The nobots were shouting everything they could at the fuvias and made them look utterly miserable. No one else was saying anything, beside the floating nobots.

“You! What’s that you’re lapping on your face?”

“You! Drop and give me fifty!”

“You! Pass me that big piece of rock so that I can hammer you!”

The nobots also hurled insults at everyone and anyone.

One short fuvia picked up a rock and threw it at a nobot with a large flowery hat that Apple drew. The nobot turned around and glared at him. The fuvia stuck his tongue out at him and immediately, it was a start of a civil war. The other fuvias picked up slabs of metal and junk from the floor and hurled it freely at the nobots. Although they could not feel a thing, the nobots immediately ordered, or threatened, a few fuvias to do the fighting for them.

Within a few moments, the whole city became a larger mess than it was already. “Stop! Stop!” shouted Ray at the whole city in general. There was nothing they could do except hide behind a wall left standing by itself. The nobots went mad and there was chaos everywhere.

“They’re making things worse,” said George.

“We know!” exclaimed the rest of them.

Yu Ping dodged a small piece of metal and shouted over the commotion, “Any way you can help, Ray?”

“Ya, get them down to the fuvia-heq, ASAP!”

“How?” screamed Apple.

Ray took out a piece of the glittery white paper from his pocket and sprayed the purple-coloured solution on the back of the paper. He stood up from behind the wall and swept it around. Almost immediately, the nobots seemed to be attracted by it and got sucked, literally, back into the paper. Their faces of anguish looked flat on the paper, which they already were. Ray turned around and took off for the fuvia-heq.

So far, the best fuvias in this whole galaxy that we can turn to are those from Earth. They are the closest neighbours we have that we can always count on. We have helped them a lot and they had helped us back.

Believe it or not, all we need is one fuvia from Earth. It had been said that values are contagious and if it affects the whole navy, it will be one heck of a disease, a disease that I welcome. However, this would mean the contamination of our navy. I shake my head. No, this would be the right thing to do. There is nothing else we can do if not for that.

Chapter 9

They ran through to the room that said “Emergency escape” and Yu Ping was the first to note that this could actually be considered an emergency. The nobots did not like the idea of being trapped and squashed within a piece of paper and they struggled. Every time they flinched, Ray sprayed the solution on them and quickened his pace. They were almost at a run when they reached the emergency room. Ray threw the paper into the room and shut the door quickly behind him. Immediately, there was a loud sound as though something has exploded inside.

Ray sighed. He took out another piece of the glittery white paper from his back pack and this time, he drew a large yet rather intricate and real-looking picture on the paper. It was a man in a large dark coat wearing a hat that fit just snugly on his head. In one arm, he carried a cage and in the other, a parrot and a thick stick. Ray sprayed the solution on the paper and the magician came to life.

The nobot smiled and bowed at them. He waved his wand in the air and coloured himself in, from top to bottom and from cheek to cheek. The nobot waved his wand again

and there were more parrots that flew upwards and away. He ran after them towards the exit and floated out.

“You’re a genius,” gasped Esther.

“I know. To think we spent the whole day and it was solved in a matter of seconds,” said Ray.

“By the way, what time is it already?” asked Esther.

“It’s about eleven,” said Yu Ping, the image of the clock from the hotel lobby went into her head.

Esther suddenly looked uneasy. “I’m getting sleepy, if there’s nothing else here, I’ll go back to the hotel,” said Esther and he yawned as widely as he could.

“He’s right. We should all get some sleep,” said Ray.

Yu Ping could feel her eyelids drooping as they sauntered to the hotel. Their rooms were still working although the outside of the hotel has been thrashed and the receptionist was still not around.

On their way to the hotel, the streets were annoyingly silent as though someone had placed a spell on everyone. The magician nobot stood in the center of the entire city and everyone was watching him. No one moved at all. The scene would have been funny but no one laughed. This solution was only temporary and they must get to the root of things soon enough.

Yu Ping removed the pillow from her bed as she laid down her head. After being rudely waken up that morning, she was not going to take anymore chances. A sudden click on the door made her look around and once again, Esther has left the room for a midnight walk.

I ran to the control panel and typed in “Earth” and clicked on “Available persons”, all that came up were seven names. Oh no! They were in some kind of crisis as well. I ran to consult Alicia, our bordout, and she pointed at the name “Esther”.

Isn’t that a girl’s name? I pointed it out but she said that it was a boy and he would be the one that would help us.

There is no time to lose. I found his location and found him on the Earth’s earth and I sent an army of us down to him.

Chapter 10

The next morning, they awoke at precisely the same moment at 7am. It was as though the beds were working. Yu Ping had awoken half an hour ago when she slipped off the bed onto the hard ground. Another day where she was rudely awakened, she thought. Esther was back in bed and he woke up as soon as Apple sat up on her bed.

Ray knocked on the door as Yu Ping opened it. They made their way down and Ray announced in the lift that they were going back to Seron to check on the situation. Three days of their precious week was going to be over. George's mom had said that the patch might last for one week but there was no telling what could happen, thought Yu Ping nervously. Once it loses its effect, they would contract the deadly disease in the air.

Yu Ping tried, again and again, yet, nothing came into her mind as she tried to visualize what was going on in Seron at the moment. Had things become worse back home? The disease had seemed to be more advanced and dangerous right where they were. There was no telling what was going on back at Seron. Yu Ping knew that they would have to make a trip back. She could not put down her worries that something bad was going to happen. She could not tell if it was bad except that it was going to be the unexpected...

"Ray? Can we go back?" asked Yu Ping suddenly, unable to hold her uneasiness anymore.

Ray raised an eyebrow.

"Back to Seron. I feel that something is not right," said Yu Ping, her palms breaking out in sweat.

"Sure! I wanted to go back and check as well," said Ray, "Then we'll come back here. For now, there's nothing we can do for our fellow Penato City fuvias."

There was nothing they could say or feel like saying as they made to the fuvia-heq. The aliens were not there but there were signs that they had returned. There was a sort of yellow powder all around the place, not in tiny amounts but in mountain stacks as high as a table. They treaded carefully in places where there were no yellow residue but Yu Ping knew that she stepped on a lot on the way so she could not care to bother in the end and walked as per normal.

It was as though it was a trip back home after being stranded outside of town for years. Yu Ping could not feel the familiarity in the place. Everything was somewhat cold. Ray walked straight ahead of them. At least, thought Yu Ping, one of them had a good head. Ray had been making all the decisions for them since they had been dragged into this whole fuvia business that would be passed down through millions of years of generation. Without Ray, Yu Ping could barely think about how lost they would have been.

The lights were dimmed in the fuvia-heq. There was not a sound and almost everyone had disappeared. Yu Ping could finally see an image in her mind. A table formed in a large room and around it gathered almost all of the fuvias she knew while living down in the fuvia-heq...She saw the important authorities, the government heads and Uncle H. None of them moved as though mesmerized by something. Above their heads, a swirling mist gather around and well, just swirled around, like the ceiling was not there, like magic.

Suddenly, Yu Ping felt her senses roll back to normal and she blinked hard. She saw Ray walk away from them into one of the toilet cubicles and Yu Ping sat down onto the floor, looking over the side of the street at the Earth spinning down below.

A sudden violent jerk shook the headquarters and the street shook very violent. A loud sound exploded from below them and Yu Ping looked down, distracted. A deep orange glow swept through beneath her and as quickly as it came, it vanished.

They looked at each other, breathless and, therefore or otherwise, speechless. There was only one thing they had in mind to do.

“Ray!” shouted Yu Ping as she ran towards the toilet cubicle. Something weird was going on and Yu Ping knew that if anyone knew what to do, it would be Ray.

Yu Ping thrashed at the door but no one answered. “Ray!” she shouted again. Together, they knocked on the toilet door as hard as they could but there was no response. Yu Ping could feel her heart pumping and her face became red. She knew that Ray was not going to answer.

Peter took over and pulled at the handle of the door and the door came lose after the second tug. It took a third tug to pull it out of its hinges. Ray was not in there but in

the floor, a swirling mist whirled around like the water in the toilet when one flushed it. There was a dark center in the middle of it, like a steep drop that would go on forever...

Earth was a strange place. This place was somewhat familiar, like back at home before all the chaos. No plant was safe from wars but at least at the point of time, at this space, it was. I follow the map on my wrist watch to where a red dot blinked and blinked, indicating the target. A few meters short of the target, I stopped my Earth-designed helicopter in mid air. I had done my research about this planet, their core was magic and we have a lot of skilled magicians in our army. It was like a past time and it keeps us entertained. I sent number 24 and number 27 down to stop time. I suddenly realize that where my helicopter was hovering over was in chaos. It was quite chaotic and confusing, not as violent as a riot but definitely not as organized as a party.

I detected my target very close to me. The people of earth came to a standstill. I leap out of the helicopter as well with my parachute. These slow-falling contraptions are quite cool actually.

Esther brings a small pack to me and I accepted it. "It's the antidote. Would you help us spread it?" This is Esther. He is a boy. He is not a girl and he is a kid. This does not seem well at all. I hand him a note about what was going on in his home at the moment and also, a letter of invitation to the army.

Chapter 11

A chuckle, not yet a laugh, filled the silent air. Yu Ping turned around and saw a tall young man, his eyes a pale pink colour like Yu Ping's. He looked almost tired, like someone after working long hours, sitting down, in front of the table.

He smiled gently at them. There was no menace behind those eyes except that of pure satisfaction. His clenched and unclenched his fist. What made Yu Ping all the more uncomfortable was the way his eyes met with hers and as she glared at the young man's eyes, the young man gazed back. For a while, she felt safe. It felt like something she had never felt before. She also knew that that was definitely not the time to be feeling that way. She felt protected and calm, like there was nothing in her way that she could not overcome.

“Who are you,” she asked.

The silence was finally broken.

“Call me Dalax,” said the young man gently.

“Who are you and what have you done with our friend?” asked Yu Ping furiously.

“Nothing that would hurt him, bud.”

“Who’s your bud,” replied Yu Ping, her face reddening by the second.

“No problem, bud. Ray’s just spinning around in outer space. But don’t worry; he’ll be back once all these have blown over.”

“Why? What have you done to him?” asked John, his voice a little quaky.

Dalax did not shift his gaze from Yu Ping. He smiled and said, “Nothing that you can’t do, bud.”

Yu Ping could feel her stomach turn. Part of her did not know what Dalax had said yet part of her memory said that she did.

Memories passed through her mind in the split second and all time seemed to come to a standstill...

She found herself in her room, in her earliest of memories as a young kid of three. She had kept a lot of her items in a little box, things that she had found around the fuvia-heq and things that Uncle H had given her for her birthday and holiday presents. That day, she opened her box again to look at all the items when a fly flew in and landed in the box. She immediately jumped aside and the cover of the box fell shut. She had closed her eyes then, fearing what would become of her box. She thought with all her heart that the fly be gone.

When she opened up the box, all she could see was an empty space and little swirls of mist gathered at the bottom. She stuck her hand through the bottom of the box, unable to believe that this was happening. Everything that she had held dear had been spurned out into space and she did not know how it had happened.

She cried in between tears that she did not care about the fly anymore and all she wanted was her things to be back where they belong. She was no longer afraid, just anxious and sad. To her, it was as though someone or something was trying to take her whole life away, trying to take away all that had meant to her.

And they all came back. Her hand was pushed out of the box by an unseen force and a fly zoomed out of the box. Yu Ping stared after it in horror and then looked back into the box. There they were. Everything was back where it had belonged. She could not have hoped for more for there and then, everything was perfect...

Yu Ping now knew that the young man was not usual. In other words, there was something strange and unusual about him. It could have been the way that he talked and the way that he had looked into her eyes. It was however the next statement that he made that made her feel really awkward.

“You’ve mum’s eyes, bud.”

“What did you say?” choked Yu Ping.

“Mum’s eyes, bud. I missed them,” said Dalax sadly.

“Just who are you?” asked Yu Ping, her tears welling up in her eyes.

Dalax stopped smiling and blinked. He tore his eyes from Yu Ping and looked around. For a second, it was as though no one else was there except for the two of them. It was like there was a space in between them, yet this space was so small that they could breathe each other’s breath.

“They’ve never told you? They’ve never let you know, huh bud? Ya, that’s what they do, that’s all they know to do. Everything but what they were supposed to do,” said Dalax. He slowly looked at Yu Ping again and said, “Do you know where you are from? Who are your parents?”

Yu Ping could not believe what she was hearing. She was a bordout and that was all she was always going to be, or was planning to be.

“Our home had been destroyed many years ago. They sent every single new born to each existing city in this fuvia-wheel. Somehow, these jerks created a system whereby there could only be one of us living in one of these cities at any one time so the rest of the babies were put into hibernation until there are vacancies.”

“What?” asked Yu Ping, she could feel her mind fog up with what Dalax had just told her. Did she really have a home? Did she really have a family? Who is she?

There was suddenly so many questions she wanted to ask Dalax, this strange man that came in and declared war on the life she knew.

“Who are you?” she asked again.

“Bud, this might sound so funny,” started Dalax and he chuckled.

“What? Just say it already,” said Yu Ping impatiently.

Dalax sniffed and then rolled his eyes like he was bidding his time.

Yu Ping was filled with such an anxiety to find out.

“You sure you want to know?” asked Dalax.

“Yes, I’m sure. That is, if you are really to tell me... bud” said Yu Ping with a slight smile as the safe feeling came back to her.

Dalax reached out to grab Yu Ping’s hand but she instinctively pulled it away.

“I’m your twin brother, bud.”

Yu Ping could have jumped off the street at that point of time. She forgot where she was as nothing else mattered. It was not a dream come true but a dream that could have been true all along.

“You’re lying,” said Yu Ping and she started to cry. Slowly, she backed away from Dalax.

Dalax seemed upset but he did not go after her.

I passed the antidote to number 17 and he immediately went about dispersing it. I order my team to clear up the mess around here and when all was done, we left in the helicopter.

I fill up Esther’s application form in the helicopter while the co-pilot steered. If there was anyone in this world I trust, it was Alicia. She never lies.

Chapter 12

He changed his shape. Literally, he changed into a woman twice his age and shorter than he was. “Mum!” exclaimed George suddenly.

There the woman was standing where Dalax was and they were all very confused.

“I’m a shape shifter. Don’t worry George, your mum’s fine. Once everything is working out, I’ll change everything back to normal.”

“What’s going to work out?” asked George nervously.

“When you fuvias promise to back off from the Earth and let them be.”

“Why? What harm have we done them?”

“Almost all the time, when we have fuvias go down to solve a problem, it makes the problem bigger. Most of the time, we were being detrimental to the Earth.”

“What makes you think everything would be better if we didn’t interfere?” asked Apple.

Dalax changed back to his original form and replied, “Fate. It’s all fate that this is happening now. No matter what you’ve done, everything will follow its natural order.”

“What do you mean?” asked Apple.

Dalax shrugged and walked away. He said in a barely audible voice, “You’ll know, you’ll know.”

Yu Ping shouted at him, “Come back here! You can’t just walk away!”

Dalax ignored her and continued to walk. Suddenly, his image faltered and he simply vanished. “Whoa! Can you do that too?” asked Esther suddenly.

Yu Ping glared at Esther.

“He’s making fuvia cities chaotic so no one would be able to help the people on Earth,” reasoned John.

That was what Yu Ping liked about John, his clear-headedness at a time like this. Suddenly, a flash went through her mind. It was a small black box that had a screen that said very clearly, “Any action to erase memory of anyone or anything will eventually make all memories disappear in a year.” She snapped back into reality almost instantly. Part of her knew that this vision was put into her mind by someone else other than herself but she could not care less.

“This disease was not caused by that machine,” announced Yu Ping.

“What machine?” asked George.

“I saw in one of my visions where Uncle H set a machine to specifically forget our existence. The people should not forget everything if that’s the case because it only makes them forget everything only after a year.”

“So what is going on?” asked John.

“I think we did it,” said Esther suddenly.

They looked at him and then they looked towards the ceiling instinctively.

“You don’t think?” mumbled Apple.

“It was us wasn’t it?” asked Yu Ping, “We went down to solve a problem and another one pops up. Dalax was right.”

They looked at each other and they knew what was going on. The bottle which they had opened back on Earth must have drifted up and into the fuvia cities.

Saturn was in the midst of a great war that had no purpose at all and everyone was barely surviving and escaping by a hair. If there was anything anyone can do, it has to be soon. Training for Esther will have to commence in two days. I know that he will help and I know that he will not leave us to our doom as I could see it in his eyes.

This will be the end of all our troubles, in a few weeks’ time; he would be ready to join us. In fact, whilst in his training, he will be ready to help us.

Chapter 13

They sat down in a circle on the street. Nothing could have described how depressed they were feeling. They had no strength at all in their backbones as they slouched all over the place.

It seemed as though all hope was lost and Yu Ping could tell that Dalax had won the battle. She could somehow accept the fact that Dalax could be her brother, but her twin? That, she could not be too sure of.

Peter got up and walked around but Yu Ping was too busy to notice. Suddenly, there was light knocking sound that sounded like thunder to them in the empty fuvia-heq. It was from one of the toilets. Peter dashed towards the sound without thinking and Yu Ping got up and followed.

The light sound continued like it was never going to end, like footsteps in an empty hallway. Yu Ping felt as though she was going to fall off her feet as she finally realized that it had been a while since any of them had anything to eat.

Still, the sound from the toilet behind the door that said “Out of Order” distracted her pretty much. They looked at each other for a long while and Peter took a deep breath. He pulled again at the toilet door and it came apart almost instantly, like it was never

locked. In the toilet, there was nothing but four walls and a figure that they recognized almost instantly.

“Mum?” said George. He stepped away and laughed bitterly. He said, “Is that you, Dalax?”

“Yes!” said Yu Ping suddenly, looking very furious. She pointed at George’s mother and started scolding, “You! Don’t think you can fool us again! We’re not idiot you know. Stop this and go away, leave us alone to die!” Yu Ping breathed uncontrollably and she could feel herself flare up. Even though, she must admit, this person was definitely not Dalax.

“You’re not Dalax, are you,” said Yu Ping finally.

“No, I’m not. If I was, I would not have tied myself up!” said Mrs. Singleton.

They looked and saw that it was true. Her hands and feet were bounded and her hands were bounded to her body. They could not have seen it if Mrs. Singleton had not pointed it out as they were bound together by an invisible tread that was almost unbreakable unless someone else untied it.

Yu Ping saw George’s eyes turning red. He rushed up to his mother, found the end of the rope and untied her. “Why didn’t you tell us before?” asked George, struggling to hold back his tears.

“I never could. I knew that if I made any sound to ruin his plan, he’d whirl me,” said Mrs. Singleton gently.

“Whirled?” asked Yu Ping.

“Like throw me out into outer space to twirl around until he was happy with it.”

She looked at George suddenly and wrapped her arms around him. George hugged her back and for a while, they held each other so tightly that no one could tell when or ever were they going to break up.

Slowly, she pushed away and looked alarmed. “Did he give you that patch?” she asked.

“Ya, he did,” said George mindlessly.

“When did he give it to you?” exclaimed Mrs. Singleton.

“The afternoon three days ago,” said Yu Ping.

“Three days!”

“What’s wrong?” asked George, wiping the tears from his eyes. Yu Ping dreaded the news that followed.

“The patch will wear off by afternoon today... which is in three hours!”

Yu Ping closed her eyes and smacked her forehead with the back of her hand and sighed. Was there no end to this mess they were into?

Apple quickly tuned into emergency mood. That was what Yu Ping liked about Apple, her way to improvise and adapt in any situation. “Ok, we’ve a disease that we know the origin of, that we know there’s an antidote and we know how we can solve it. It probably overrides the machine as it is stronger,” she said.

The six of them looked at the space in between them and they knew where this was going. “The army!” they said unanimously.

They had passed the antidote to the army down on Earth and there were plenty of reasons why the army would duplicate it. Everyone knew that the army was probably the most serious force around.

“Now, all we have to do is to contact them,” said George’s mother happily.

“How?” asked George.

“Call them!”

They went to the main control station quickly and with a few pushes of the many buttons there, Mrs. Singleton managed to get through. Instantly, a voice asked, “Hello?”

“Mrs. Singleton from Seron, Sir!”

“How may I help you ma’am?” boomed the voice like a drill commander which he probably was.

“We would like to ask about the antidote that you used to cure the people in Singapore the last time. Do you have a duplicate?”

“That’s top secret matter, ma’am.”

“It’s urgent. Penato city and Seron have been infected with it and it’s contagious.”

“Well, that makes all the difference,” the voice said with sarcasm.

Esther interrupted and said, “Yes it does! And we had the antidote before you did.”

The voice became quiet suddenly.

“We’ll be right over once we’re free then, good bye!” said the voice and hung up on them.

“Don’t worry, they’ll come,” said Esther, looking slightly annoyed though.

When I stepped back onto Saturn, there was something wrong. Someone has tried to cause discontent in between these groups. How did I know? When you see two robots of the same size and make fighting each other out in the streets, it is almost common sense.

Something has turned them against each other.

Chapter 14

“One hour more,” announced Esther.

They had been pacing up and down the fuvia-heq aimlessly for two hours yet no one had arrived with the antidote.

“One more hour,” said Esther again thoughtfully, “For our last one hour, who wants to go onto the surface to look around?”

After doing nothing for so long and other than eating the food they could find in the dining hall, they did nothing and were restless. They almost jumped at the proposal and they went up to the surface.

The sun was high up in the sky like any other normal sunny day. It had been a while anyone of them saw such good weather. There was something odd though, everyone were holding hands with their family and walking around in circles around the town square. Apple’s parents held hands as they walked by them, with a baby doll in Mrs. Yong’s arms that were above her slightly bulging tummy. Babies are born quite quickly since someone had invented the womb-speeding machine. They walked continuously, staring ahead of them like zombies. Apple turned and ran immediately indoors. John’s parents and Esther’s parents strolled by as well and Mrs. Singleton shoed them back into the building before they could stay a while longer.

“There’s nothing you can do about it,’ she said.

“What’s wrong with them?” asked John worriedly.

“They’re just lost. Lost in their own thoughts. It wouldn’t be long before they lose it all. At least, their families are still together.”

“Ya, right,” said Apple bitterly.

“They didn’t forget you on purpose, Apple,” said Mrs. Singleton kindly.

“I know, but, it’s just not fair,” groaned Apple.

They slowly made their way back down into the fuvia-heq after that break.

“Forty minutes and counting,” said Esther.

“Thirty minutes.”

“Twenty-five minutes.”

“Twenty minutes.”

“Seventeen minutes.”

“Fifteen...”

A loud sound exploded in the air as a man appeared in the fuvia in a business suit. His moustache looked combed and his stern eyes swept the scene like a cleaner robot. For a split second, his eyes met with that of Esther and he walked over. In his hand, he held a thick bottle that contained a green liquid. He stopped in front of them and without a word, passed it to Esther.

Esther gave the bottle to Mrs. Singleton and said, “Get it into the water supply and then turn on the city-sprinklers. That way, it has got to reach every corner of Seron.” The rest of them nodded and they started to run towards the reservoir. There was an overwhelming sense of relief in Yu Ping as they ran towards the possible end of this battle. Only Peter saw that Esther nodded at the military man and the military man nodded back.

Esther shouted then, “And do keep some for Penato city!”

The Strong’s men fought with the Strong’s men and the Sneaks stopped each other from sneaking. It is so obvious that it is sad.

Something or someone had turned them against each other. Things like that don’t happen that suddenly.

“Boom!” a loud explosion exploded behind me. I jump forward and placed my arms over my head. I look around and I realize that someone or something had blown up the military base.

Chapter 15

They had a mere fifteen minutes to get to the water supply and everything was going as planned. It was simply a matter of putting the antidote into the water and all would be over. This nightmare will suddenly come to an end.

Yu Ping suddenly felt light-headed. For a split second, she had no idea where she was. She stopped in her tracks and shook her head to get rid of the uncomfortable feeling that clouded her mind. Something was not right.

She cleared her head when she heard someone shout, “Yu Ping!”

At first, she did not even realize that the call was directed at her and she almost asked, “Who?” Then she realized that she was Yu Ping. She shrugged slightly and dashed after the rest of them.

They were just a short distance away from the reservoir and Yu Ping felt that there was hope for them. They ran even faster, their goal nearing them by the second. All else ceased to matter and there was only one aim in mind and this aim was to solve all the problems that they had at that moment. Mrs. Singleton stopped suddenly and started to walk.

“Mum? What are you doing?” asked George breathlessly, jogging to a halt.

Mrs. Singleton declared, “The patch would lose its effect faster if you ran.”

“But we ran so much everyday already,” said Yu Ping, unhappy about where this conversation was taking them.

“No... Your patch will wear off soon! Get to the reservoir, um...” said Mrs. Singleton and suddenly stared at Yu Ping like she was examining her.

“I’m Yu Ping,” said Yu Ping.

“Right! Like I wouldn’t know the friend of my...um,” said Mrs. Singleton nervously and look around at all off them.

“Mum! I’m George! G-E-O-R-G-E, George!” shouted George.

There was so not much time for this. Apple grabbed the antidote and ran. The surroundings seemed to be coming down on her fast. There was no way her legs could carry her that short amount of distance that quickly. Yu Ping could feel Peter at her side and somehow, his footsteps made her run a bit faster.

She threw open the underground hatchet in the emergency room, a place that she had been all so familiar with, the escape hatch. She knew that this was her best childhood memory, which was hiding from the other fuvias when they were out to get her for failing her subjects. She knew that that was not long ago but her subconscious mind believed that it had happened so many years ago like an old fairytale. John and Apple had not followed them. They ran faster before and perhaps, the disease had already gotten to them.

A blank flashed through Yu Ping's mind as she suddenly felt lost and purposeless. She had no idea where she was or what she was doing at the moment. A big and strong boy shook her by the shoulders and she snapped back momentarily. Peter, it was Peter, Yu Ping thought continuously. She was beginning to forget her friends.

Quickly, she jumped into the escape hatch and to the left; she found the handle that she knew would lead to the reservoir. Not many knew of its existence and would have to take a long trip down to it. She tugged at it and twisted it to the right. She placed it into the passage way as she felt her eyes drooping. Peter sent his fist crashing into the bottle and it opened. Before she closed her eyes, Yu Ping saw in a vision, the mist in that meeting room full of important authorities had started to slow and dissipated. It was as though it was pulling a retreat. A voice appeared in her head, "I guess this is how it was supposed to end, sis."

Yu Ping felt herself talk right back but not literally, "You failed."

"Yes, but only for the moment. I'll come back for you. I'll find a way to get us home next time."

"What..." Yu Ping lost consciousness and she drifted off into a nice deep sleep as she saw Peter pressed the big red button that said "Emergency whole city sprinkler" and she smiled. Uncle H was weird but in some ways, it was not such a bad thing to go labeling everything.

Peter fell beside her and they had a good afternoon nap...

Everything in the base was gone and every facility was destroyed. I can feel this lump in my throat that made my mouth so dry that I am desperate to drink the air. Quickly, I move away from the base and stare at the flames with wide eyes.

This war has only just begun.

Chapter 16

Yu Ping awoke from a seemingly long dream. She stared up at her ceiling filled with glow-in-the-dark stars. She sat up immediately. Everything around her was so familiar that it made her cry. She had never felt this way since that little box returned with all her belongings. She sobbed as she looked around. She was back in her own room. That was not all that made her so relieved and happy. The sounds outside her door, where everyone moved in and out of the fuvia-heq carrying their own business made her unable to believe what was going on.

She could not care less as she dashed out of her room. Uncle H was sipping on his morning coffee and walking towards the dining hall for breakfast supposed Yu Ping as she looked at the clock on the bottom of the control panel screen which said it was seven in the morning.

She ran towards Uncle H and hugged him. Uncle H was very surprised. He put down his mug of coffee and, after a long pause, decided to hug Yu Ping back.

Holidays have started already and all they had missed was simply one week of school after the examinations and there would be a two week break before school reopens. Since it was their last year in elementary school, the last two weeks would be set aside for organizing fun events for the students by the students.

All Yu Ping knew for sure was that everything was back to normal, the way it should be.

She pushed Uncle H aside and grinned at him. She gazed at the face of this seemingly long-lost friend and laughed happily. Uncle H asked, "Are you alright?"

"Better than ever," said Yu Ping as she dashed off to the surface of Seron.

It was as though everything was back where they belonged. She ran around the whole city, not really sure where she was running to or what she was running for. "Hey!"

shouted Apple from a building nearby and Yu Ping stopped. They looked at each other and smiled. Apple ran out of her house and joined her. Together, they raced around Seron, feeling more than happy to be home. Yu Ping thought, if this was like home, what would it feel like to be back on her home planet?

She was not looking where she was going when she crashed into Esther who was headed their way with the rest of the gang. They looked at each other for a short while and grinned. Feeling as though back to the days when they were small little kids, they joined hands and ran towards the town square, found a tree and sat down around it.

John, however, did not look as happy.

“What’s wrong, John?” asked Yu Ping.

“My sister is gone. It was like she had never existed, even my parents sworn they’ve never heard of the baby. I’ve always wanted a sister”

“Mine is gone too. You don’t think this had any effect on time has it? It would mean that the parent-teacher meeting session is tomorrow,” said Esther.

“You remembered that?” exclaimed Yu Ping.

“What’s the date today?” asked Apple.

Yu Ping stood up and ran towards the first fuvia she found was wearing a watch. “Sir, do you know what date it is?” Parent-teacher meeting day was on Wednesday, sixth of August.

“It’s Tuesday, kid,” said the man.

“Tuesday which is which date,” said Yu Ping excitedly.

“Fifth of august.”

Yu Ping was very alarmed. It was as though everything had happened and then returned to the same time. That was impossible as they did not turn back the time.

A voice appeared in her head, “Don’t worry, bud, I fixed everything. You’re right; I shouldn’t mess with your life. Get on with it.”

Parent-teacher meeting day could not have gone better. Everything was as normal as they could get. Uncle H ate up all the cookies that were provided for all of them, Mr. Yong got to know Mr. Waser very well and they talked about soccer.

The mothers grouped together and had a nice chat while they decided which of their teachers to look up. More than not, the parent-teacher meeting day meant that

parents meet parents and not with the teachers. It did not matter here as they knew and had absolute confidence in the teachers.

“Do you think I should have another kid?”

“No! Why would you want to raise another one?”

“Well, it’s like this; my daughter came back the other day and talked as though I had another child.”

“To much trouble, darling.”

Yu Ping could have laughed at the mothers’ conversations as she knew that she knew things that they did not know.

The sun shone brightly in the sky like any other day, only, unlike any other day, its sunshine got to Yu Ping even more.

That night, Ray appeared outside Yu Ping’s room looking disoriented. Yu Ping immediately got him to sit down beside her on her bed and she told him everything he had missed. Ray looked slightly disappointed but he too had memories of what had happened and he knew that it was great that everything was back where they belong.

“Wow. I can’t believe it’s all over,” he chuckled.

They looked at each other in a comfortable silence and they laughed. The situation was no longer urgent, there was nothing that was going to tense them up for action, everything was as relaxed as it should be.

“You know, I’ve always taken this life for granted,” said Yu Ping.

“So did I,” said Ray with a smile.

The Sneaks, the Brains and the Strong are fighting it out here, outside, in the open. No one could have gotten in to sabotage the base even if they aren’t fighting. No one could have broken through the security, no one! Yet, someone did.

Common sense then told me that whoever turned them against each other did this. If the society was a fabric in big separated pieces, it had become shredded.

Esther has to come here quick.

Epilogue

“Presenting! The ever amazing John the Horrendous!” shouted Esther over the microphone.

They had set up a stage at the annual end of term fair at Goldfields High elementary school. After researching for a month, they were ready to present their magic skills to the world, or at least to fellow classmates.

Card tricks appeared the most as Apple found in her possession a book on it and research simply came up with magicians who refuse to tell anyone their tricks.

The fair was extraordinary and it took place in the great hall. There were stalls selling books and stalls selling food. Yu Ping was however most interested in the stall that sold very interesting toys. A ball that would change its colour every time you touch it and giggle every time you throw it into the air caught her attention the most and she bought it. She browsed around the section and opened a nicely patterned box with red petals stuck all around it. She opened it and music filled the air. Suddenly, the music became a hard rock and she shut it immediately. She looked around in alarm but no one else had heard it.

The kid that was manning the stall looked at her and said, “Don’t worry, only you can hear it since you were the one who opened it.”

Yu Ping laughed and the little boy who manned the stall smiled at her...

It would be one more week before school was reopening and they were going to attend their first lesson out of Goldfields High. They were going to Seron grade school. Nothing was more saddening than to say goodbye to the school which they had known so well.

Yu Ping was feeling a little sad as well but part of her looked forward to having classes at grade school...