

NAMUH

Book One: The Awakening

Desmond Knipe

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Preface

Let me begin by commending you on your purchase and welcoming you to the world of the NAMUH.

In a world so full of wonder and beauty, I am astounded by the continued presence of hate, war, hunger, and harm. This is a statement, not a call to action.

The NAMUH trilogy is fiction?

When most authors construct a story, they choose a genre to write their story in. Namuh chose me; the story will not be contained, or limited to one genre.

It is a project that has taken me six years to get to the stage that it is ready to be released into the world of literature.

Within these pages are stirrings, remembering, and awakenings. To expose the light, I first need to show you the dark. There are scenes, some gruesome scenes, some beautiful scenes, and some scenes that explain how things can be.

I hope you gain enjoyment from reading not only this first book, but the next two as well. More importantly, I hope that you recognise the truth behind the story.

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Chapter One

The Awakening.

August 8th, in the not-so-distant future, just before dawn.

In a remote rain forest on the North Island of New Zealand, overlooking the constantly moving ocean, stands a very large, very old Kauri tree. The air is cool and wet, the drizzling rain briefly interrupted by the thick green canopy high above the forest floor. There, it gathers into larger droplets, preparing for the forty-metre plunge to the earth below.

Covered in an immensely dense layer of wet moss, this tree trunk is fifteen metres in diameter. The trunk towers steeply upward, void of any branches for the full forty metres, before strong, thick branches, holding dark green foliage, erupt haphazardly from the trunk to form the tree's canopy. Towering above the rest of the forest are the uppermost branches of this tree.

Many trees similar to this magnificent specimen, in forests worldwide, have died off in recent years. Humanity's lack of understanding, no, humanity's inaction to rectify the damage they have inflicted on the planet is the cause. Climate change, land clearing and ecosystem poisoning are but a few of the prime culprits.

This area of the forest remains mainly unaffected by the drastic climate changes affecting the planet. Aside from experiencing slightly hotter days and cooler nights, the forest ecosystem continues as it has for eons.

Long before humanity crawled out from the primordial ooze, the life-giving growing medium dirt beneath the forest floor was already preparing itself to be the major supporting instrument for this forest now towering above it.

Five people approach from different paths within the forest, the wet deadfall and moss beneath their feet muffling any sound their steps might make.

The steady bombardment of the forest floor by large droplets falling from the canopy above is deafening—especially in the absence of the usual forest sounds: no frog song, no foraging kiwis scratching, no hooting owls.

Both pant legs on Michael's jeans are completely saturated from the almost consistent contact with the widely spaced ferns on the forest floor. He grimaces as he feels the moisture from the bottom half of his pants make its way down to the top of the thick woollen socks inside his newly acquired hiking boots.

Just one week earlier, he had been fastening metal G-clamps to three men's ball sacks, duct-taping their naked bodies to three metal swivel stools and connecting the lot, to a power supply capable of delivering life-ending amounts of electricity. At least he had been dry.

Michael hated being in wet clothing; it made him feel claustrophobic. He would often change out of sweat-infested clothing whilst working. It upset him deeply; he utterly hated the way any type of wet clothing would just cling to his skin.

Michael keeps the forward momentum of his stride going, soon forgetting again the wetness of his clothing, the fatigue in his leg

muscles, and the pain from his sprained ankle, which had occurred just as he left the designated walking trail about thirty minutes prior.

He still cannot understand why he is forcing himself to take this early morning bush walk on his birthday. Michael also hates his birthday, and he thinks that maybe it is to take his mind off their deaths.

A grotesque scene manifests inside his mind: six bloodied bodies lying on the ground, their faces no longer recognisable, next to pools of their congealed blood.

Michael feels the tears welling up in his eyes. He quickly wipes them away and again focuses on his next step.

The five people in the forest reach the magnificent Kauri tree at the same moment, oblivious to one another, each lost in their single-minded focus and deafened by the constant percussion of large water droplets striking the forest floor.

Each hand touches the trunk; the message is identical for all.

“IT IS TIME NAMUH, YOU ARE NOW THIS WORLDS ONLY HOPE.”

On their approach to the tree, the five individuals had remained unaware of one another. But upon realising they are not alone, they move around the massive trunk to see who else has arrived.

Everyone in the group looks at Apollo, who appears to be having a conversation with the air next to the Kauri tree.

Apollo has the physique of a career bodybuilder and stands at an impressive 191 centimetres tall. As he speaks into the cool, moisture-filled air, his youthful, light brown face is pointed almost straight up.

Each person edges closer, except for Sophia, who is now leaning against the tree. Unlike the others, she can hear both parties in the conversation, not just Apollo.

“But I don’t know these people!” Apollo cries in a deep voice, his strong New Zealand accent informing the rest of the group that he is a local.

Apollo converses with a Sprite, a forest spirit who oversees the energies within a section of the forest.

A Sprite is the energy being, the soul of a garden, a group of trees, a forest, tidal current in an ocean, or a section of a river. Normally, the bigger the Sprite, the more area it looks after, and this one is monstrously huge.

Apollo views this Sprite as an extremely large tree formation with an overall humanoid look. The tree trunk splits into two parts, functioning as legs. Many branches are protruding from the trunk, but the largest two represent arms; beneath the top leaf-covered branches are the vague makings of eyes and a mouth.

Apollo has grown up with the ability to see these entities, and many others, inside his mind. This ability has brought him tremendous information, and ridicule from his family and friends.

Sophia, a very attractive, porcelain-skinned, blonde-haired beauty, can hear the voice of the Sprite as clearly as crystal, without seeing who or what is talking, says to Apollo, in a heavy European accent. “Just tell them what the fuck you are talking to already. And you had better explain what it is asking of us.”

The rising sun has illuminated the entire area, casting distinct beams of light that pierce through the mist hanging between the trees. The persistent drizzle, responsible for the heavy droplets falling from the canopy, has stopped, easing the downpour and bringing an end to the constant drumming on the forest floor.

Apollo looks at Sophia, shocked that she can hear the conversation. He has never met anyone who can confirm that what he is seeing is not

just his imagination. Another person has now validated these entities he sees.

He soon recovers, turns to the others in the forest, and mutters, "Well, you might think I'm crazy, but there is a very large entity in front of us, wanting us to work together, to direct humanity in a different direction somehow, and it keeps referring to us as the Namuh."

Brahma, Bollywood movie-star handsome, excitedly replies in a Southern Indian accent, "I do not think that you are fucking crazy at all. The energy signature that thing is giving off is fucking insane. Hi everyone, my name is Brahma."

Brahma's 172-centimetre frame, slender build, and young, handsome face don't bother Michael. It is the permanent smile upon his face, his whole mannerism giving off the 'I want to get to know you' vibe, in a friendly, excited way, that annoys the crap out of him. Michael has no time for adults who act like children.

"Hey, we've got Brahmas back home in Texas, only they're bulls. Where are you from?" Michael says to Brahma.

"I'm from India, the same place as the bulls." Brahma snaps back at Michael, with an even bigger smile on his face.

"Hi, I'm Tara." An extremely attractive young lady says, stepping forward between both Michael and Brahma, then looking directly at Apollo. "I can't see or hear anything, but I can feel its presence," she adds, her voice carrying a muddled British accent.

Tara's very slight build, at just 164 centimetres tall, combined with her olive complexion, adds to the beauty of her mild Asian facial features. Instantly shutting down any chance of an altercation between Michael and Brahma, they are both feeling at ease.

"I also sensed the message that we received when we placed our hands on the tree earlier. Are we all somehow meant to... rectify the world?" She asks, looking to the others for confirmation.

Michael clears his throat, directs his gaze to Apollo, and states in a heavy Texan accent, "We all must have similar abilities. It seems we each know you're telling the truth." Michael continues, looking directly into Apollo's eyes, "Buddy, we don't think you're crazy. My name is Michael. What's yours?"

"It's Apollo," he replies.

Michael looks at Sophia, and after a few seconds of admiring the extremely attractive young lady, he asks, "And you? What's your name?"

"Sophia!" she snaps. She is pissed at what she has just overheard Michael thinking about her. "I hear things that are not there, or so my fucking psychiatrist and family used to tell me."

"Nice to meet y'all," says Michael.

Michael's 180 centimetres of height does not make him the tallest in the group, but he is the embodiment of a 'natural born leader' wherever he finds himself. Fast-thinking and talking, he has no problems taking control of any situation.

Michael's sharp facial features and his slender athletic build all contort as he struggles with the wetness of every piece of clothing that he is wearing. He is moving his whole body to dislodge the wet materials that are sticking to his skin.

Michael continues, "I ended up at this spot this morning 'cause of some over-whelming feeling pushing me to be here right now. Best I can explain it—I just had to be here, even though I didn't know where 'here' was."

He looks at Apollo again and says, "What about you?"

Apollo is standing dumbfounded, mouth slightly ajar, just staring at the group as if they were an alien invasion force. 'All five of us have psychic abilities,' he thinks.

“Someone told me to follow this forest Sprite,” he manages to get out, gesturing toward the Sprite. “My dead uncle Davis introduced it to me, in the town just south of here,” Apollo concludes.

Apollo had never heard of his uncle Davis until the previous night. He had finished a job in Auckland the day before and hired a vehicle to drive him to his grandmother’s house in Dargaville. He was in search of his mother, whom he had not seen since he was a child, and was hoping to get information from his grandmother about her possible whereabouts.

“I’m like you, Michael,” Tara interjects. “I just knew I had to be here, but had no idea where ‘here’ was. It felt like a pressure on my back, as if something were pushing me forward.

Tara’s face saddens, and tears begin to build in her eyes. “It’s similar to the feeling that made me leave home, but that was more of a pull, not a push,” she adds, as she rubs the water and tears from her eyes with both hands, trying to compose herself.

Brahma jumps back into the conversation, the same excitement and energy as before. “I track energy loss signatures from power grids as a job. I can see energy in my mind.”

Brahma pauses, takes a second to assess each of them, then continues. “I saw the energy emanating from this tree on a flyover yesterday. I just knew I needed to see it up close. Then, early this morning, an urgency to return awoke me, and I started walking.”

Sophia, projecting both strength and callousness via her facial expressions and body language, although this is more a defence against new people she has developed from childhood, says, “I was urged by one of the voices in my head to be here.”

She had been leaning against the Kauri tree for most of the conversation. Now she shifts her weight forward, stepping away from the trunk to get a clearer view of Apollo.

Apollo seems captivated by Tara, his dark brown eyes fixed on her with a look of quiet wonder.

Tara, sensing others' feelings, understands that Apollo isn't trying to be creepy, although it certainly looks that way.

He is unknowingly radiating desire—not the lustful kind that most men, and some women, project upon meeting Tara for the first time, but something gentler, deeper. It's the quiet, awestruck yearning of someone who believes they understand what love at first sight truly means.

Tara, too, feels an attraction toward Apollo but understands that now is not the time to act upon it, so she flashes Apollo a radiant smile that almost stops his heart and says, "Do I have something on my face?" Raising her impeccable eyebrows in a questioning motion.

"Ugh, no, I was, I was..." Apollo splutters.

"Don't worry, that happens to me more often than I care for, but at least you are a gentleman about it." Tara laughs as she reaches up and brushes Apollo's left pectoral muscle with her petite left hand.

Michael, still assessing the conversation in his head, asks, "Brahma, what did you mean by a flyover?"

"As part of my job, I cover vast areas every day. So, wherever I go for work, there is normally a P.A.V. at my disposal, and I was flying over this area in it," Brahma replies.

P.A.V. is the acronym for a Personal Aviation Vehicle. Companies and people with large amounts of assets use them as personal vehicles instead of road-based vehicles, or in cases such as Brahma's line of work, where great distances are required to be travelled daily.

The group of five continue the discussion for another thirty minutes on the forest floor before hunger gets the best of them. They follow Apollo, who follows the Sprite, back onto a track that will

lead them to the small town of Dargaville, just over six Kilometres southeast of their location.

Chapter Two

Breakfast and a Drive for the Five

Entering the outskirts of Dargaville, they find a small café. There is little movement on the quiet street, only a passerby now and then, and no vehicle traffic. The road still bears the dampness from the persistent drizzle that had just stopped not long before.

Staff are still setting up the outside tables. Each small square table lowers to seating height via a straight telescopic arm, on the underside of the extendable awning, that now covers the entire footpath directly in front of the café.

After adjusting each table to the correct height, the arm locks into place with a click, and a staff member sets the four padded cushions atop each table onto the magnetic seating field. The field, which is being generated via a flooring mat that is a permanent fixture on the footpath, grabs each cushion and holds it in place. The cushions will now only move up or down, depending on the weight of the occupant.

One of the staff acknowledges she sees them and returns to the seating control panel on the touchscreen at the front face of the building, just to the side of the café's main entrance, which is central to the building's face.

After touching a few icons, cursing, and then touching a few more, Brahma walks over to her, smiles, and asks to have a look.

The attractive, slightly untidy-haired young lady watches as Brahma activates the settings icon on the pad, touches an icon marked 'Table Setting,' and then slides one table on the screen display next to another.

The two tables closest to the building, at the far end of the awning, magnetically attach their cushions back to the topside of each table, with an increase in height from the magnetic field that has been holding each cushion. It looks like they just flip back onto the tabletop by some sort of magic.

From the table closest to Brahma, the telescopic arm then performs a rising arc movement towards the farthest. The seating system has activated a four-way knuckle near the top of the arm that allows for exactly one table-space movement in four different directions. Then, lowering to seating height, it joins the other, a hearty 'click' signifying its secure position.

Smiling exclusively at Brahma, bubbly Zoe, as her name badge says, waves the others in under the awning. She then steps quickly towards the now joined tables and throws the plush cushions onto their magnetic seating fields.

Zoe activates the built-in computer within each table by swiping a pass card over the control panel near its centre, causing the café's menu to flash onto the surface in front of each person.

“Let me know if you have any problems,” smiles Zoe. Then, she places her hand on Brahma’s shoulder and delicately whispers, “Thank you,” into his ear, her lips briefly brushing his ear lobe.

Now blushing, Brahma selects tea, pancakes, and a cupcake. Everyone else, whilst attempting not to smirk or laugh at Zoe’s blatant show of affection toward him, selects coffee and the ham, cheese, and tomato toasted sandwich.

Tara cannot help herself and says, “Well, Brahma, she obviously likes a man who is good with his fingers.”

They all laugh, including Brahma.

New Zealand is renowned for having the best food on the planet in these drastic climate-changing times because of the early stance taken towards mitigating the effects of climate change. The new strategies implemented within the farming industry have improved not only the quantity of food produced, but also the quality. They are all looking forward to another quality meal, as Zoe and two other staff members return with their orders.

Before Zoe leaves the tables, Michael asks, “Zoe, what time will the clothing store across the road open?” pointing to the Real Kiwi Rural Wear clothing store on the opposite side of the street from the café. He desperately desires to change out of his soaking clothing that is clinging to every part of his body, causing that claustrophobic sensation that he hates so much.

“Around 9 o’clock,” she replies, after following the direction of Michael’s pointed arm. Zoe then turns, smiles again at Brahma, and walks back inside the café.

The entire group is buzzing with excitement regarding the experience they have all just been involved with this morning, and the discovery of others with similarities to themselves. None of them except

for Brahma had ever met anyone else with abilities similar to their own. Until now.

Sophia takes a slow, deep sip of her coffee, looks at the cupcake in front of Brahma, then looks at Brahma himself and says, “So I don’t mean to come across as rude, okay, maybe I do, but just how many of us have birthdays today?”

Everyone looks at her, then at each other. Sophia raises her hand to show that she has a birthday, and then each one of them also raises their hand.

Sophia had heard the internal thought from Brahma regarding the cupcake being the smallest birthday cake he had ever had, as well as Tara’s constant internal chatter about remembering to call her parents for them to pass on birthday wishes. She was also hoping that her father would send her some money as a gift. All of which is why Sophia had asked the question.

The thoughts had come to Sophia as if she were hearing them being spoken to her, but of course, both Brahma and Tara were involved in other conversations and only thinking about what Sophia had heard.

As a child, she would often hear what people were thinking and react to it as if the person were speaking normally. This, of course, scared the hell out of a lot of people, as this type of thing was not possible. This early childhood education taught her to be guarded around most people.

“What do you think the significance is of us all having the same birthday?” Tara asks everyone.

Michael automatically starts a recap of everything that has happened this day in his head: during breakfast, their prior discussions in the forest, and the hike back to Dargaville. With his near-perfect photographic memory and lightning-fast thought process, it all unfolds clearly in his mind.

Before they discovered they all shared the same birthday, they had only asked each other for their ages. They ranged in age from 23 to 27 years old, consecutively. Now they realised there was exactly a one-year age difference between the youngest and the next, and so on. They also figured out that none of them fully understood their abilities or how to use them. Aside from Tara, who was backpacking (budget travelling), they were all financially stable.

Apollo and Brahma both ran successful businesses, Sophia had her family trust fund, and Michael made his money by trading in stocks, currency, cryptocurrency, and NFTs. He always left with more money from games of chance than he started with and did the same on financial trades.

Michael looks at everyone seated at the tables and says, "I got nothing, no clue why we all share the same birthday." He raises his hands, palms up, to emphasise his shoulder shrug.

Sophia slaps her hand onto the table three times to attract everyone's attention and says, "Guys, we need to get in a vehicle and go north now. Someone is waiting for us." No one questions her, as they all feel the familiar push on their lower backs, indicating they must move forward to somewhere they need to be.

Brahma states, "My car isn't that far from here. We can all fit in. Give me a minute, and I will get it to pick us up." He activates the communicator on his wrist, touches the vehicle icon on the screen, and says, "Come pick me up."

"I've got the bill," Sophia demands. She touches the wallet icon on her communicator, selects a cryptocurrency account, then activates the automatic currency exchange function, waves her wrist over the table control panel, and settles the whole bill.

They stand at the roadside curb waiting for Brahma's vehicle, which is in self-driving mode, to arrive. Because it is only parked two and a half kilometres away, the vehicle's arrival doesn't take long.

Their conversation turns to how they all understood they needed to go as soon as Sophia told them. They do not feel strange or anxious at all. It just seems natural, as if they are all being guided in the same direction by the same force.

Brahma's car pulls up beside them, and they all climb in. His car is a Toto electric vehicle, the latest four-wheel-drive model with a fold-out camping system built into the roof. This is extremely useful, since Brahma sometimes finds himself in places where accommodation is not available. There is also a P.A.V., a personal aviation vehicle, in tow behind the car.

Ever since Toto had set up automated battery exchange stations instead of vehicle recharging stations fifteen years earlier, there had been very little competition from other electric vehicle companies anywhere in the world. Even the behemoth Tesla, which had been around for decades, could not compete.

Toto had simply started selling electric vehicles without adding the cost of the battery to the price of the vehicle. This made the sales price, less than half that of the closest competitor.

They surprised everyone six years ago by introducing their new lightweight gel battery technology. The aviation markets for personal, military, and general aviation quickly expanded, as did the battery network.

Brahma had been the head advisor for the development of the gel battery project for Toto while still at university. He continued to receive perks and benefits wherever he travelled around the world. Toto in New Zealand provided him with this car and the P.A.V.

“I see you are in manual driving mode. Why not just tell the car you want to head north?” questions Michael, who has taken the front passenger seat next to Brahma.

“I actually enjoy driving here in New Zealand. There is very little traffic compared to back home.” Brahma replies. “The power cell is low as well, and I think I will top up before leaving town.”

Although Toto's competitors had reduced fast charging times for their vehicles to just under an hour to a full charge, people preferred the less than five-minute rapid battery exchange system that Toto offered. Not to mention the fact that Toto electric car owners no longer faced the expense of battery replacement every five to seven years, unlike owners of competitor vehicles.

Toto looked after the batteries and charged car owners per kilometre of travel, plus a small annual fee to join the battery network. Depending on the country of operation, the average travel cost worked out to less than ten cents per kilometre. When the average fuel price per kilometre had risen to over fifty cents, there was no competition.

After swapping the vehicle's battery out for a fully charged one, the group travels north on the Twin Coast Discovery Highway for some distance until Tara feels they need to turn.

“Brahma, you need to turn right onto the next road.” Tara informs.

Brahma turns right onto Waihue Road and travels only a short distance before Apollo instructs him to turn left.

Apollo is looking at the spirit of his uncle Davis, standing on the side of the road, and indicating for them to turn. The top right side of his skull still hangs by the skin, exposing his brain tissue. He is still wearing the Mongrel Mob patch on his jacket, which is severely torn.

When Apollo sees a human spirit or an entity, it appears within a window in his mind. The image generated inside this window overlays

reality for him, similar to a holographic image projected directly into his field of view. He has seen wonderful sights and some horrific ones.

As Brahma turns onto Maropiu Settlement Road, he notices a very large driveway and instinctively understands that they are meant to go there.

Brahma stops the vehicle outside the front of a sizeable house. The massive front yard is full of blossoming trees and flowers. There are many Maori Pouwhenua carvings, or totem poles, placed in various spots around the garden-scape.

A very tall Caucasian woman with long dark hair opens the front door of the house and gestures for them all to enter. She then turns around and re-enters the house, leaving the door open.

Michael knows that there are answers inside. Brahma can see and feel extreme energy emanating from the entire property. Sophia has covered her ears. Tara is crying, smiling, and laughing at the same time. And Apollo is utterly astounded by what he can see.

Apollo observes entities everywhere he looks: spirits of people, sprites, beings of light, darkness, small-winged beings, massive troll-looking entities, and many other beings that he has never seen or even imagined before. Two immense dragons are circling the property overhead, one pitch black and the other a shimmering silvery-white. Apollo is reminded of the way the Chinese culture depicts dragons in their children's stories, almost snake-like, with lightning arcs constantly between them.

Apollo feels his mind going into overload; there is immense pressure building within his head. He turns his focus back to the front door of the house and runs for it.

As they all enter the house, they relax. Sophia stops covering her ears, Tara settles down emotionally, Apollo can now only see the

others, Brahma senses energy but can no longer see it, and Michael is making a beeline for the room at the end of the hallway.

Upon entering the room, they notice the same Caucasian lady who had come to the front door to gesture them in. She is now gesturing for them to each take a seat on one of the six large round cushions on the floor around the small but sturdy wooden rectangular table in the centre of the room.

As they take their seats on the luxuriously comfortable cushions, everyone notes the many crystals scattered around the room, different in colours, size, and varieties. Several abstract paintings line the walls, and in the far back corner stands an old-style wooden bookcase stuffed full of various books. It is so packed that the bookcase seems to be bulging.

They all settle into the extreme comfort afforded by the cushions, as an elderly man, who looks to be in his late 70s or early 80s, enters the room. Walking purposefully, he sits down on the last remaining cushion.

“My name is Douglas,” he says. “Do you understand why you have been drawn here?” he asks. He is Caucasian, of medium build, with a shaved head and face.

Michael is the first to respond, reaching forward and grabbing the edge of the table in front of him with both hands. He says, “We all have only just met this morning in the forest. We know we have something to do together that involves rectifying the world, and that we are being guided by a kind of unseen force. Can you tell us what the hell is going on?”

Douglas sits comfortably on his cushion as he has done many times before this day, anticipating this very moment. He has his legs comfortably crossed, and his breathing is slow and purposeful. He wears a pair of black shorts, a plain, old, grey T-shirt, and no shoes.

His wrinkled, kind, smiling face emits trust, wisdom, understanding and friendship. Every member of the group comprehends that they are about to receive information as to why they have been drawn together to this place, and possibly a lot more.

Leaning forward on his cushion, Douglas places his hands on the edge of the table, just as Michael has done. "You are here to learn how to access and utilise the gifts that you have brought with you to this plane of existence," Douglas states clearly and calmly to them.

Douglas eyes each of them for a second, then continues. "You are all at various stages of development, but it is now time to fulfil your contracts, the contracts that your spiritual selves committed to before your birth on the Earth plane. Today on your earthly birthday. You are reborn, Namuh."

The group sits in astonishment, staring at Douglas, listening to him intently. His voice is calming and invigorating at the same time.

Their bodies are calm, but their minds need more; each of them had felt a wave pass through their being as Douglas had stated the word 'Namuh.' It was the same feeling that they had each experienced that very morning when placing their hand upon the Kauri tree in the forest.

Douglas conveys a look of understanding and pride to each as he continues. "For many years, you have all been looking for answers to the reason you are so different from everyone else in your lives."

"Battling the self-doubt created within your earth being's programming due to having access to a small portion of the abilities that are yours for the taking. The universe has decided you are now ready for those answers and full access to your abilities. It is my task to guide you to them," Douglas states.

"How do you know this?" questions Sophia, her scepticism of new people clear on her face.

Douglas, looking at Sophia and smiling, says. "Unlike you all, my communication comes from spirit guides. They guided me to understand this, but each of you knows it to be true."

Douglas looks over at the tall lady standing at the door, who seems to have reappeared from nowhere, and says, "Just chilled water. Thank you, Mary."

Mary turns without saying a word and heads off down the hall.

Chapter Three

Michael, A.K.A. Mystic Warrior

Born August 8th, twenty-four years earlier.

Well, y'all, I'm Michael Angelus. I was born to Sarah Walker and Samuel Angelus in Pecos, Texas. My birth was straight-forward with no complications, or so I'm told. The only thing out of the ordinary was an intense lightning storm that occurred directly above the hospital as I was being delivered. It played havoc with the hospital's power, lights flickering and all.

My mom, Sarah, was in love with Samuel, her boyfriend of three years. The same Samuel, who skipped town just one week after I was born, with another girl that he had deceptively been seeing on the side during the previous eight-month lead-up to my birth. It seems he didn't love Sarah as much as she loved him.

At the time of my conception and during the pregnancy, Sarah and Samuel had been living together, attempting to etch out an existence

in a semi-self-contained tiny home community located within a trailer park close to downtown.

My mom's income, derived from selling the excess produce of my grandparents' extended C.C.A.G. (Pronounced C-cag, it stood for a Climate-Controlled Aboveground Garden), was far more than Samuel's as a transport attendant onboard an interstate freight transporter.

A freight transporter is an electric self-driving truck-like vehicle that looks more like the sleekly designed engines of the old bullet trains. Each transporter usually connects with three to five freight pods at any given time.

With my mom, Sarah, being unable to work, because of having me, a newborn baby to care for, and that dickhead Samuel walking out on us, she understood that there would not be any money coming in to pay bills. She had no choice but to move us in with her parents, my grandparents, on the outer northern boundary of the town.

Each year, people felt the increasingly devastating effects of climate change closer to home, so Mom's parents, like many others from town, moved to the outskirts to escape the rising cost of living.

My grandfather, Jeffery Walker, had built the new house underground to reduce the power consumption used for heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. We still had a front door above the ground. It was built into the flat face of a dirt hill that had been excavated, with a staircase leading down to the underground shelter. I was told many times growing up that the quality soil from the excavation was placed into the growing beds for the C.C.A.G. (climate-controlled aboveground garden)

Garden was an understatement for what Grandpa Jeffery had created; his operation was so efficient that it not only supplied our family's needs but also the needs of the livestock, and provided an income

for our family from the sale of the excess product back into the local market.

I grew up in this household surrounded by the love of my mother, grandma, and grandpa. They told me I was one of those kids who picked up everything early: feeding myself, crawling, walking, and talking. I'm pretty sure my grandpa Jeffery told me I could wipe my own ass by two and a half.

My rapid development carried on through to school. I just seemed to excel at everything, but I reckon I still stayed humble, considering my excellence. Some dedicated teachers introduced me to extracurricular activities to occupy my time outside of the classroom. Everyone was worried that we young'ins would fall in with some dangerous crowds.

I was a whizz at chess, and once I understood the basics, I became unbeatable. By the age of seven, I had claimed the state's chess championship, much to the displeasure of some of the adults whom I humiliated. I understood the potential outcomes of every move and consistently implemented unbeatable strategies.

I enjoyed the sport of fencing for a while, but after attaining the state's junior fencing championship at eight, I gave the sport away because of the clinging protective outfits they made us wear during practice and competition. The claustrophobic feeling that the outfits used to trigger in me is still an occasional annoyance, even now.

Between the ages of nine to fifteen, I pushed myself to master Jiu-Jitsu, a fighting style from Brazil; Krav Maga, a style from Israel; and Jeet Kune Do, the style created by the long-dead, but not-forgotten Bruce Lee. After attaining black belts and the masters being unable to provide any further knowledge, I simply took a leaf from Bruce Lee's own life, by combining all the fighting styles I had studied,

and others that I had researched, into a style that I understood as being formidable. In a fight, I kick ass.

My leadership qualities developed throughout this time as well. I became the school captain and captained the school's football team from juniors through to seniors. Acted in the school plays, always attaining the lead role, and played every instrument that the school offered. Teachers often asked me to lead and tutor the school band.

Being exposed to so many cliques within the school assisted me in becoming a very likeable person and a well-known student. My popularity with most of the girls quickly made me the most sought-after boy at school. I was told by many that my sharp facial features matched my slender, athletic build.

Although I engaged in my fair share of dating, I found I was always looking for something different. I wanted to be with someone who would challenge me and wanted to get to know me for who I was. I found this in Esmerelda Carranza, a young Spanish girl who transferred to my school mid-year, during our second-to last year of school.

When her tightly curled ringlets of jet-black, shoulder-length hair framed her joyous face like a picture, it instantly stole my attention. Her wide, open-mouthed smile was utterly infectious, and I found myself unable to resist smiling in return. But it was her eyes, the colour of blue sapphire, that truly stood out. I felt as though they could peer directly into my soul.

It took me three months to convince Esmeralda to agree to a first date, after which we became inseparable. Esmeralda, an exceptionally intelligent individual devoted to reversing the damage done to our planet, challenged me daily. She knew as much about her father's work as he did himself. He was the new head of the town's climate adaptation department.

She had made it her mission to ensure everyone she encountered understood the urgent changes needed to prevent humanity from continuing down the path towards extinction.

Like so many other activists throughout history, her words often fell on deaf ears, but not mine. I could have listened to her talk about anything, as long as she was the one speaking. I understood that Esmeralda's passion was to help humanity survive the fast-approaching catastrophe, so I committed wholeheartedly to supporting her efforts.

The end of senior school meant university for Esmeralda. I had received academic scholarships from three different universities, but as Grandpa Jeffery's health began to decline, I chose instead to run the farm.

On my twenty-first birthday, Esmeralda had quietly come home to organise a surprise party for me. She had coordinated everything with her parents and my family. To keep the celebration a secret, Grandpa Jeffery sent me off to the nearest large city to pick up supplies, the only place that carried them in stock. It was a four-hour round trip, not including loading time.

Well, my return that evening surprised me. I walked into a massacre.

My entire family, my girlfriend, and her family lay in pools of blood at the front entrance to our underground home, which had also been set ablaze, black smoke wafting out through the open doorway.

Fortunately, my analytical mind snapped into action before any emotion was allowed to break through. I could see they had all been lined up and shot, execution style, through the back of the head. Blood, bone, teeth, and brain tissue had sprayed onto the ground in front of each corpse. Their bodies had slumped forward and now lay across the blood-spattered earth left by each devastating shot.

Most of the blood from each body had pooled around the respective person's head. It had flowed from the gaping hole where their

faces used to be, the blood-soaked dirt beneath each head acting as a receptacle for the lumps of dark red, jelly-like congealed blood that now sat glistening under the front yard security lighting. I knew it was too late to provide any help.

As the scene etched itself permanently into my mind, I could feel my devastation beginning to search for an outlet.

I began crying uncontrollably on the ground beside my loved ones, shuddering, screaming, and bawling my eyes out, until I could no longer cry. Then I bellowed, like the sound you hear from a goddamn cow when it is in distress. It came from deep within my gut, and it was the only way I had left to release my grief. This grieving continued for an unknowable amount of time, and when I could finally pull myself together, I called the town sheriff.

By the time the sheriff's department officers arrived with the town coroner and a fire engine in tow, I had no more tears left. There was only calculated rage building within. Not showing the rage outwardly; it was all internal. My understanding of control allowed me to keep it just under the surface, ready for a call to action at any moment. Still waiting to understand my next step.

I witnessed the firefighters activate the internal fire suppressants inside the house and closed the door to wait for the fire to extinguish itself.

Watched as the town coroner and his assistant bundled each body into black body bags, then hermetically sealed each one using an apparatus similar to a vacuum cleaner.

Saw the investigative team take photos, pick up handgun, shotgun, and rifle casings, and scan all the footprints and tyre tracks on the ground.

Then I looked at the three visible cameras connected to the farm surveillance system via satellite. They were well hidden and would only be visible if you knew where to look, and I knew exactly where.

I casually walked over to my truck and retrieved my communicator. I pulled the recordings from the cloud and watched my family, my girlfriend, and her family being murdered by a gang of seven well-organised men. There was no attempt to cover their faces, and I could make out the type of vehicle they had arrived in. The calculating, silent rage inside me continued to build.

I do not know why, but I made a copy of the footage onto my communicator and then informed the sheriff about the surveillance video. I reminded him he could access the footage via the department's crime portal, and to make his job easier, I sent him the footage address along with the access passcode.

A whole two bloody days after the incident, the sheriff's office informed me that, apparently, the video footage had become corrupted and was now useless. The prints gathered from the site produced no viable leads, and the same was true for the shell casings. They were at a loss as to whom had committed this dreadful crime.

Well, fuck. Accepting that I would not be receiving any help from the damned law enforcement, I began working on a plan to find those bastards myself.

After organising the funerals, cremations, and last wishes of everyone I had ever loved, I set off across Texas, searching for the men who had brutally murdered them.

For two years, I chased every lead I could find, most turning into dead ends, but some leading on to other clues. I knew I would find them; it was only a matter of time. I studied the art of inflicting pain. These beasts were not about to go out quietly if I had anything to do with it.

Chasing these individuals across the state of Texas every day came at a cost, money, and not having much of it, I started cashing in at the casinos. I was a natural card counter and had an amazing ability to beat the odds on the roulette tables.

After a short time of being welcomed as a high roller, they soon placed me on a 'no entry' order, issued by every casino in the state, because of my consistent winning streaks. Which then forced me to move into the realm of investments to derive an income for my continuing manhunt.

Approaching the anniversary of the massacre in the third year, I finally caught up with the animals responsible for the murders, almost right under my fucking nose.

During one of my investigations, I happened upon an ex-military computer. I knew I shouldn't have had it in my possession, but what the fuck. Hacking into the system gave me access to secured military records and local law enforcement surveillance networks.

Through a tremendous amount of effort that many would class as luck, I discovered the perpetrators had been a military unit of Rangers, listed as K.I.A. killed in action, whilst carrying out a secretive mission within an undisclosed nation.

That smelled like a cover-up to me.

The group had set itself up in an old abandoned Air Force hangar on the edge of the Chihuahua Desert, not really that far from the city of Pecos. I kicked myself when I found this out. Anyway, now that I knew where to find them, I needed to go shopping.

SHOPPINGLIST

12x Muso bamboo seedlings

1x jar of pure honey

1x bag cutting starter medium

200x rolls of duct tape

- 3x metal swivel chairs
- 3x metal G-clamps
- 3x 20-metre rolls of electrical wire
- 3x Voltage regulator controllers
- 4x medical traction gurneys
- 2x heated half cages
- 2x heavy-duty drums
- 20x Rodentia (rats)

I used the law enforcement surveillance networks to track where they travelled to and from their base of operations. I watched the group for a week, planning the incursion, and then I inflicted my revenge upon them.

It took me less than one hour to incapacitate all seven members of the group, then set up my torture suites inside three separate rooms of the old Air Force hangar. I had mastered the art of inflicting pain to a degree most could only dream of. My targets were not in for a pleasant time, but if they gave me the information I thought they might have, I would end them quickly. That was my thinking as I cut a small nick under the thumbnail of the first man in line, then inserted the leading edge of a new one-and-a-half metre Muso bamboo plant into the wound. I did the same for a toe on each of the man's feet.

It took a full week before I gained any useful information from any of the group members, and that information was only a confirmation of what I had already assumed three years earlier. This group received orders to eradicate everyone at my house that night.

I had tortured and killed two with bamboo. Muso bamboo grows at over 900 millimetres a day, so placing it under fingernails and toenails cause's excruciating pain. Having a bamboo plant grow through an eye and continue into the brain is not the best way to leave this world.

The three men that I taped naked to a steel swivel bar stool each got extremely upset when I affixed a steel G-clamp to their scrotum and penises and then applied ever growing-currents of electricity until it had become lethal. Pubic hair and burning human flesh do not make a barbecue.

As for the two that appeared to be the leaders of the group, I introduced them first to torture by rat. I placed an appendage into a drum and then heated the opposite side, encouraging the rats inside the drum to eat through the soft human tissue and bone to escape the heat. I then introduced death by rat to one of them with a wire mesh half cage containing just one rat affixed to his stomach. Again, using heat as the motivator, the rat burrowed through to the intestine and crawled around for some time before chewing its way out through the side of the man. His buddy, watching this all take place from the up-righted medical gurney next to him, told me all the information he had; he died quickly.

I understood that when the bodies of these men were discovered, there would be a manhunt for the psycho who had committed these heinous murders. Not only by the police, but possibly the military and/or whoever had hired the team for the executions. I had accepted that I would need to skip town.

I had killed, and not just once, every person who was with the gang that day they murdered my family, girlfriend, and her family. They were all now dead.

The farthest place I could think of to run to was New Zealand.

Chapter Four

Education

Mary soon re-enters the room carrying a large pitcher of iced water and six ice-filled glasses. She is wearing a long, full-length silk sarong, patterned in bright colours on a white base. It seems to float in the air at times, moving gracefully with every step she takes. Her face commands everyone's attention; Helen of Troy's smile, said to have launched a thousand ships, would pale in comparison. She is simply mesmerising. Beyond the beauty radiating from her almost angelic face, there is a continuous flow to every movement she makes.

She captivates everyone as she places a coaster in front of each person around the table. The coasters flow from her hand, gliding perfectly into position. She then sets a glass onto each coaster, seemingly releasing them too early, yet somehow, they float effortlessly into place. She proceeds to pour water into each glass. All the while, everyone can feel her radiating beauty, joy, and love from every fibre of her being.

The water looks and sounds happy; it glistens like clear liquid crystal, and you can almost hear a faint musical ringing, like crystal glasses stroked by a master musician, as the ice cubes clink against the glass sides. Everyone sits in complete silence, captivated by Mary's every

movement. When Mary leaves the room this time, she quietly closes the door behind her.

Douglas reaches for his glass and takes a large gulp. His eyes close as he lowers it from his lips. As he opens them, a smile forms on his face. He states with a slight drawl on the first syllable, "Wonderful." He returns the glass to the coaster, looks around at the five people seated, then says, "It looks like we have some cleaning to do."

Launching himself from the cushion with the ease and speed of a child, not a man in his later years, Douglas walks to the bookcase, selects a handful of books and some neatly folded posters, and returns to the table.

Whilst Douglas is away from the table, they all reach for their glasses of water and take a sip of the chilled liquid that Douglas had just made look so irresistible.

As Tara tips the water into her mouth, she feels the cold, wet liquid slip lightly past her lips, leaving the sensation of a passionate kiss. She becomes aware of a delicate tickle on her tongue as the water graciously slides over it. She savours every elegant moment of the water gliding down her oesophagus before gently settling in her stomach. A pleasant tingle slowly grows and then dissipates. Never before has she experienced iced water affecting her senses so delightfully.

As she opens her eyes, which she had not realised were closed, Tara makes eye contact with the others and senses they have just shared the same experience. There is a new alertness about each of them; they feel refreshed, ready for anything, and exceedingly happy.

Douglas stands over the table and unfolds the first poster, spreading the paper out before them. It depicts a man surrounded by outwardly emanating ovals of colour.

"Who can tell me what this is?" Douglas asks, pointing to the coloured ovals as he settles back down on the cushion.

Apollo smiles, then looks at Douglas and says, "It's an aura. It surrounds every living being. I see them all the time."

"I see them as well," Brahma says matter-of-factly, adjusting his position on the cushion.

"Very good," declares Douglas, turning his head slightly to glance at Brahma. "This proves you aren't limited to a single psychic ability; you have access to others, each at a different level," Douglas explains.

The group looks at Douglas with slight surprise.

"But I'm getting ahead of myself," he says, waving a hand as if to brush the last statement away. "I need you all to ground yourselves and cleanse your aura. Do you know how to do that?"

"I usually cleanse my aura during meditation, before treating my massage clients," Apollo states slowly, careful not to sound like a know-it-all.

Michael speaks first, then looks quizzically at Douglas. "I was taught to meditate in some martial arts classes, but nothing about aura cleansing. And what was that you said, grounding?"

Brahma, Sophia, and Tara all shake their heads, gesturing no. Tara raises both hands, palms up, as her shoulders shrug.

"Very well. Let's start from the beginning," Douglas says.

He repositions himself on the cushion, crosses his legs again, and sits up straight.

As Douglas shares his knowledge, Apollo remembers some old footage he once watched with his girlfriend about the planet and its wildlife, narrated by David Attenborough.

"An energy light force we call the aura surrounds the human body. Like our body, it is important to look after it, keep it clean and healthy. You can consider your aura as the antenna to your higher self or soul, whichever you relate to better."

“The better you treat your aura, the stronger your connection will be,” he continues. “If you don’t ground your aura to this plane, you’ll find your auric connection tends to drift away from time to time.”

Over the next two hours, Douglas guides the group through three meditation processes, four grounding techniques, and several methods of cleansing their auras.

They question nothing of Douglas’s teachings; everything resonates perfectly with them. It is like the feeling of riding a bike. After not having ridden for five or six years, you’re a little wobbly at first, but then it all comes back.

During the session, Douglas explains that the main reason they need to connect with their higher selves is to allow their psychic abilities to manifest fully on Earth.

He informs them that although they have each accessed some of these abilities throughout their lives; it is only a fraction of what they are truly capable of.

Just as Douglas finishes speaking, Mary opens the door and nods to him. “Lunchtime,” he says, rising swiftly from his cushion.

They all follow Mary down the hallway into the dining room, where a large wooden table sits, set for six. An abundance of food stretches down the centre of the table, and the banquet looks and smells incredible.

A whole roasted suckling pig takes pride in place, its crispy golden skin glistening in the sunlight streaming through the many large windows, a set of screen doors, and a skylight directly above the table. The sunlight bathes the feast in a heavenly glow.

Douglas takes his seat at the head of the table, Michael at the foot, Tara and Sophia opposite Apollo and Brahma. Then Douglas smiles and says, “Don’t be shy, dig in.”

The food is glorious, the only word that can do it justice, not only the suckling pig, but the side dishes as well. The aromas form an orchestra in their noses; the textures on their tongues are perfect, and the flavours are mouth-watering.

After eating far more than they should have, Douglas answers some questions from the group, though there are few.

“Why us? Why here? Why now?” They all ask, and Apollo is also curious about the many beings and entities lurking outside the house.

“Why you?” Douglas explains. “Before you each took physical form, your spiritual selves committed to completing certain tasks on Earth. You are the first of the Namuh, a new type of being on this plane. Your design surpasses the human; you have been designed to endure Earth’s encroaching desolation and cultivate profoundly deeper spiritual connections with your true selves.”

“Once you, the Namuh, rejoin with your higher selves, you will experience a direct link to the Divine Cosmos and comprehend the information received. Other humans require spiritual guides to make sense of such knowledge; in fact, most will never realise that the meat sack they believe themselves to be is merely the manifestation of their spiritual self on this plane, a biological robot, if you will. That may change once they grasp the importance of establishing their own connection.”

“Why here?” Douglas continues. “This region of New Zealand is one of the few remaining ethereal power conduits left on the planet. Its unspoiled terrain, temperate climate, and the ethereal care of the local population have kept this place as it was meant to be.”

“And why now?” He sighs, his voice heavy with sadness. “There are forces at work on Earth driving humanity in the wrong direction. If we do not change that path soon, there will be nothing but the end of humanity itself.”

Douglas fixes his gaze on Apollo. "Beings and entities feel drawn to ethereal light or power. Most mean no harm. As for what you see, my boy, I would love to understand it one day, but your comprehension will become clearer after our next step."

Having heard Douglas's explanations, the group feels satisfied and eager to continue.

He informs them that once they each connect with their higher selves, they will gain an understanding of life and beyond that only a select few throughout history have attained. They will discover a clear path forward, initially as this group. Their psychic abilities will begin to grow to their full potential.

"Please understand," Douglas cautions, "you cannot return once this connection is made."

He explains that others on Earth will seek to stop them at all costs, even killing, to prevent the essential work from being completed, as it threatens their priorities.

Douglas concludes by saying that the experience they are about to undergo will not only change their lives but also grant them a vastly different perspective.

He promises to train them not only to use their gifts to their fullest potential but also to become an elite fighting force with the power and capability to stand up for the planet and humanity.

The group is now in unanimous agreement about the continuation of their education into the spiritual unknown.

As they all re-enter the room with the luxurious cushions, the conversation turns from themselves to Mary.

They have all observed her during lunch; she had not partaken in the food; she only served. Her body movements still had a flow to them that was most unlike other people. She still had not muttered a single word.

Brahma states, "Mary has an immense energy field about her."

"She appears to me to have wings emanating from her back," announces Apollo.

"I sense warmth and love from her," says Tara.

Douglas chimes in with, "She is an Angel of service, sent here to assist with your transition."

"What do you mean, a fucking Angel?" Sophia enquires with a quizzical look directed at Douglas.

"An Angel of service, on this plane, is an Angel that takes on menial tasks of servitude to assist with the betterment of humanity." Douglas articulates, smiling at the group. "She arrived here yesterday, to my complete surprise. My previous lack of angelic encounters left me extremely flabbergasted."

"She is the one who has placed the protection barriers within my house," Douglas continues. "That is why all the outside interference would have stopped once you entered my door. Once your connections with your spiritual selves take place, the protection barriers will no longer be required."

"How do you understand her?" asks Michael. "She never talks, yet you seem to answer her without her saying a thing."

"You will all understand that soon enough," replies Douglas. "It is now time to get connected."

Chapter Five

Apollo A.K.A Minds-Eye

Born August 8th, twenty-seven years earlier.

Kia-ora, my name is Apollo Davidson. I was born to Aroha and Daniel Davidson in the small city of Invercargill, New Zealand. My birth was straightforward with no complications; the only thing out of the ordinary was an intense lightning storm that occurred above the hospital as I was being delivered.

My family used to comprise of my mother, father, two older sisters, and one younger brother.

The main things that I remember from my early childhood are the many beatings that I suffered at the hands of my father. I recall the beatings were extremely severe whenever I stepped in to stop my father from beating my mother. It was after one of these beatings that Mum ran away and never came back.

My father, Daniel, is now a recovering alcoholic and drug addict. He has not touched drugs or alcohol since I was seventeen years old.

Other early recollections from my childhood are a little less dramatic, well maybe. I recall seeing these small, fairy-like creatures; they would enter my room whenever it was time for my nap, and they liked to fly around in front of my face. Viewing them as funny little toys and would smile, laugh, and giggle until I fell asleep. Don't know about you, but I have met no one else who has memories from when they were babies.

As I grew and explored my world as a toddler, I noticed many other creatures and entities wherever I ventured. I could never hear them; instead, the communication came as visions—pictures or words appearing clearly in my mind, conveying what they wanted to share.

Growing up with an abusive father was a part of the reason my siblings thought I had developed what they referred to as invisible friends. They would see me walking around, talking with the so-called invisible friends all day, every day. What they didn't understand was that my so-called invisible friends were, in fact, spirits, sprites, and many other entities. But as I was the only one with the ability to see them, everyone else thought I was mad and talked to myself.

After starting school, I understood it was probably not a good idea to have conversations with these entities in front of others. Once I had that under control, I became more accepted by both my siblings and peers.

Throughout most of my school years, I kept mostly to myself. I had a few close friends I would visit from time to time at their houses, but would never invite them to mine, just in case my old man was home. He made me ashamed, as he would not only physically abuse me, but mentally abuse me as well. Telling me I was a useless little shit, a little fucking freak, and worthless.

I had only just turned seventeen when I finally stood up to the prick. Daniel had not laid a beating on me during the previous two

years. I think it was because I now towered over the man. On the day I stood up to my father, things changed for that abusive wanker. I think that being picked up by your son and tossed through a wall, breaking a couple of ribs in the process, would make most people come to their senses.

I had arrived home from school one afternoon to find my younger brother bleeding, curled up, and crying in pain on the kitchen floor. Our intoxicated father was staggering over him, recoiling his leg for another kick.

I dropped my school bag at the door as I entered the house, ran straight to Daniel, grabbed him by the thick wool jacket that he was wearing, lifted the fucker off the ground, and hurled him through the kitchen wall into the living room. He screamed like a little bitch, and I knew he had broken bones. Good.

I then bent down to check on my little brother, discovering that he most likely had a cracked rib from one of Daniel's kicks landing just in the right spot. I had endured my share of broken bones from that arsehole's beatings, so I was familiar with the symptoms.

After checking that Daniel was still alive, I placed a call to the emergency services to report what had happened. The police and paramedics arrived and treated both my younger brother and Daniel for broken ribs.

They used an interesting technique, similar to microsurgery, which involved inserting a thin rod made of a gel-metal combination through a small incision in the patient. They then manipulated the rod into the correct position with the help of a portable ultrasound monitor. Afterwards, an industrial-strength manipulation magnet was applied to the outside of the rib cage, or whichever area the broken bone was in, to set it back in place.

The magnet shaped the thin gel-metal rod to form a brace around the fractured bone. Then, a slight electrical charge, applied via a wire attached to the tool used to position the gel metal, caused it to harden. The gel-metal began to dissolve and break down inside the body after six weeks.

This method allowed minor breaks and fractures to be treated in the field with no need for hospitalisation.

That was the last time I or my siblings saw our father for two years. Police took Daniel Davidson into custody that day, charging him with drug possession and inflicting bodily harm on his son. I said, “Good fucking riddance,” as the police walked him out of our door.

I had only one girlfriend throughout my education. After I had sorted my father out, I was so full of confidence that I just asked the hottest girl in school out on a date, and she said, ‘Fucking yes.’ The relationship took off from there.

Annalise Templeton was a stunner, with dark hair, dark brown eyes that were almost black, and eyelashes for days. Her Arabic father gave her a slight Middle Eastern look, while her mother, who came from good Kiwi stock, provided the rest—and yes, there was a lot of the rest.

Annalise had far more sexual experience than I, as I found out on our first date. She had been dating since she was thirteen, thought she had found the ‘One’ at fifteen, then again at fifteen and a half, and a few more times during the age of sixteen. When I asked her out, she was in a very lost space when it came to relationships. Everyone she had ever been with had left her, or the relationships had turned sour. There were anger issues, infidelity, and some boredom. Annalise was looking for something different.

She told me that everyone at school knew me—not as a freak who spoke to invisible friends, but as the tall kid who was built like a brick shit-house. I did work-out, hard. When I turned fourteen, I started

using the school gym for weight training after school, thinking that if I got a little bigger, the beatings might not hurt as much. It never occurred to me to stop working out. Now I was strong, really strong.

Annalise had noticed me around school, as had most of the other girls, apparently, but as I never showed any interest in any girls, she assumed I was gay.

Our first date put an end to the idea that I was gay, and Annalise had the most fun she could remember having on a date. I took her to a nice café in the old transport museum on Tay Street. We spent some time looking at the old vehicles, with me giving her an unofficial rundown on some of them. It was a case of who had done what, or who had done whom, in each vehicle, before we took a slow walk through the park together, holding hands, sharing stories about ourselves, our lives, regrets, and dreams. I walked Annalise home, kissed her goodnight, and told her I would call her the next day.

Unfortunately for Annalise, but fortunately for me, her previous understanding of going on a date had been a quick bite from some fast-food outlet before her date would attempt to get her undressed. Even before I made it home that night, she had called my communicator to thank me again for a fantastic evening, tell me she thought I was great, and ask if I would be her boyfriend, to which of course, I said yes.

After leaving school at seventeen, I went straight into the workforce to help support the family. My size and strength were a significant advantage in the landscaping industry, where I was accepted into a three-year apprenticeship programme.

Landscaping has grown from the old days, which had been about mowing grass, pruning trees and hedges, a bit of weed control, turf laying, popping in a plant here and there, maybe clearing away the waste, and then letting nature do its magic.

Nowadays, wealthy individuals and corporations enlist landscapers to establish, monitor, and maintain a piece of Eden in an inhospitable climate.

A landscaper is responsible for the design, growing medium, and plant choice, as well as water supply, treatment, and irrigation. The less water used, the better, because of scarcity in many places.

I was a natural in the eyes of my employer. He thought I knew which plants suited what type of growing medium, that I was precise with the irrigation requirements for each development, and that I kept surprising everyone with outside-the-box ideas that all had merit. I honestly could not tell my boss that invisible entities were giving me the information needed to establish a viable garden, tree, or landscape within their area of influence.

My girlfriend, Annalise, had gone straight to university when we finished high school. She studied environmental management, hoping she might one day provide solutions to help rectify the climate catastrophe the Earth was now facing.

She knew of my gift, and we often spoke about it. Her belief in my abilities came when I told her things I should not have known. Spirits connected to Annalise's family provided this information.

As the entities I interacted with through my job often gave me insights about various ecosystems, I liked to pass this information on to Annalise for her studies. This helped her become the top student in her class.

We were together for four years until a vehicle accident killed Annalise and my eldest sister, along with some of my sister's friends, one night during her hen's night.

They had been conducting a pub cruise, being driven from country pub to country pub, celebrating at each stop in a self-driving electric

limousine, when a freight transporter collided head-on with the limousine they were in, on a backcountry road.

Electric self-driving truck-like vehicles, which reminded me of the sleekly designed train engines of the old bullet trains, transported cross-country freight. They were normally connected to three to five freight pods, each possessing its own drive and battery systems. Although these vehicles were self-driving, there was always a transport attendant in the vehicle, just in case any unforeseen circumstances occurred. It seemed the transport attendant had died as well.

I was supposed to have gone along as the chaperone in the limo but had been held up at a job site, so I arranged to meet the girls that night at the last stop, which was to be the old Ascot Park Hotel.

The Ascot Park Hotel was the oldest remaining hotel in Invercargill, being over two hundred years old. It was also where the wedding ceremony was to be held.

Instead of meeting the girls, my eldest sister's spirit met me. She informed me of the incident and how it had occurred.

Police investigation of the crash revealed that both vehicles, the freight transporter and the limousine, had been manually operated for less than a minute before impact. The collision resulted in the deaths of all vehicle occupants and the destruction of the vehicles' hard drives, which would have automatically uploaded data to a cloud server every 15 minutes.

The police, unable to determine a cause, classified the incident as a tragic road accident with all involved killed.

My sister's spirit had informed me of what had happened just before the accident occurred, but when you tell the police that your dead sister's spirit has told you how an accident happened and that it was no accident, they have a tendency not to believe you.

Unfortunately, I have had no luck in discovering why the freight transporter was travelling on the wrong side of the road, with its lights off, at the time of the accident. The entities from around the area of the accident informed me of a flying craft in the area at the time, an unusual presence of a foreign energy being projected from the craft, before the lights of the transporter turned off.

That night was the last time I got to see my eldest sister; her spirit told me that Annalise had said for me to move on with life, it was imperative that I change my profession to massage therapy, and then she left the Earth plane.

I expected prolonged incapacitation from grief over Annalise and my sister, but after the funerals, I eagerly enrolled in a three-year Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage program at the Southern Institute of Technology.

Once I had attained my degree, I established a business, and over the following three years, I became the most sought-after massage therapist in New Zealand because of the incredible results that my customers received from the treatments I supplied.

The New Zealand All Blacks rugby team flew me to Auckland a week ago to help with the remedial training of three team members.

After that, I took some time to visit some of my relatives on the North Island of New Zealand, which is what brought me to Dargaville on the eve of the meeting in the forest.

Chapter Six

Connections.

Douglas declares, “I’m going to guide you all in a group meditation,” as the five of them reposition themselves on the cushions, preparing to begin.

“Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Breathe in through your nose, one, two, hold that breath, a few seconds, breathe out through your mouth, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.”

Douglas leads the group through this cycle ten times.

Once they are all peacefully settled, he guides them through a grounding process, asking each of them to visualise growing an energy umbilical cord from their root chakra, the lowest ethereal energy centre within the human body, and connecting it to a large rock in the centre of the Earth, which he refers to as the Earth Star Crystal. He adds that if they ever find themselves on Mars, it will be the Mars Star Crystal.

Afterwards, Douglas moves on to an aura-cleansing process, instructing them to visualise their auras being cleansed by the light of purification, which he calls upon from the City of Light on the ethereal plane. He then tells them to emit a purple flame from within

their being, allowing it to flow into the aura surrounding them. This, he explains, will eliminate any unseen entities or psychic hooks that may have attached themselves.

Douglas then calls upon the light of knowledge and communication, followed by the light of protection.

Finally, he instructs the group to request a complete connection to their higher selves, after which he sits silently.

Opening his eyes, Douglas looks at the five individuals seated around his table. From their deeply relaxed states, he can tell that the connections have been made. Each of them is now communicating, unimpeded, with their higher self.

Douglas pauses briefly, wondering where the sixth person, who was supposed to be part of the group, has ended up. Then, with a quiet nod to himself, he trusts the universe will sort it out.

He remembers back to the time when he first connected to his higher self; he likened it to a program download for a computer system. A great amount of information about the Divine Cosmos, one's past lives, the experience and knowledge attained during them, understandings of the planet and beings that inhabit it, as well as an understanding of the ultimate tasks that one has committed to attaining before the birth of their being in this life.

He understood that the connections the Namuh were now making far outshone his pitiful connection. Even now, most of the information he gained still came via spiritual guides, as the mind of his human being, like most other humans, simply could not comprehend, let alone interpret, the material being passed to it. The Namuh being was created to sustain a direct connection with its higher self without the need for assistance from a spirit guide; the Namuh were to be their own spirit guides.

Douglas had been born into a large family in New Zealand, and from a very young age had glimpsed into this ethereal world, this spirit realm.

His mother would regularly take him and his younger sisters to see their grandmother, who was getting on in years. While his mother would help around his grandmother's home, Douglas and his sisters would play.

Douglas loved going there as his grandmother would give him a large white peppermint candy from a glass bowl she kept in the sitting room. Later in life, Douglas found out that the name of the candy was 'Odd Fellows.' By then, his grandmother had already passed away.

He found them delightful and amusing.; Their sweetness was a balm to his soul., they also gave him the sensation of his mouth being on fire before turning the burning feeling into a freezing feeling in his mouth and nose. Douglas would work the oversized peppermint inside his mouth, his saliva and tongue working together in order to create a hole in the centre of the candy. Creating the hole gave him access to the powdery white centre; it flowed like cream over his tongue and down his throat. He especially loved that part.

On one of these days at his grandmother's house, Douglas decided one candy was not enough, so he slipped back inside after being told to play outside. His mother, grandmother, and five other ladies were seated in the sitting room, drinking tea and chatting up a storm.

Douglas dropped on all fours and stealthily crawled along the wall, behind the chairs, towards the glass bowl containing the 'Odd Fellows.'

On his way to the bowl, making sure he remained undiscovered, he noticed most of the ladies weren't drinking from their teacups, but held them upside down on their saucers, in their laps, and took turns handing them to his grandmother.

He soon understood that his grandmother was reading their tea leaves at the bottom of their empty cups; his mother would sometimes do this at home with her tea. When she had finished drinking her tea, she would turn the cup upside down on top of her saucer, and then attempt to read the images that the tea leaves would make inside the cup. It was a practice of divining answers from the spirit realm. People normally did this behind closed doors, as many people of the time looked at the practice as the ‘devil’s work.’

Douglas managed to get to the glass bowl, take three ‘Odd Fellows’ in hand, and slip back outside without being noticed, or so he thought.

After his grandmother’s guests had left the house, Douglas’s mother called him and his sisters inside and asked if they wanted a drink and some cake before going home. Douglas asked his mother for a cup of tea, then sat down beside his grandmother, finished his tea, turned the cup upside down on top of his saucer, and asked if she would read his cup.

She obliged him with the reading, and aside from being told that he should always ask before taking anything, especially candies, she informed Douglas that he had a strong spiritual connection that would allow him access to the spirit world later in life.

Over the following years, Douglas began to see and hear things he knew were not from this plane of existence. He also noticed a passive healing ability he had attained. His mother favoured his shoulder rubs over those of the other children, as he seemed to ease much of the pain and stiffness from her entire body after a hard day cleaning her own house, and those of others.

When Douglas turned twelve, he became afraid of the things he was seeing. When a twelve-year-old sees transparent entities sitting at the end of their bed attempting to communicate, it is not a pleasant

experience. So, he simply began ignoring them consciously, which in turn shut down his ability to see and hear them.

It wasn't until he spent time away from New Zealand and returned some years later that the voices, sights, and visions returned. He healed a few relatives of basic ailments—he did this all intuitively. After which, Douglas was guided by some of his spirit guides to some spiritual reading material that helped him understand how to connect with his spiritual essence.

Douglas remembers the feeling he had once he requested a complete connection with his higher self. He focused on the area inside his mind where he normally received spiritual communication, but instead of simply sensing or viewing this area, he felt his sense of self falling into it, and then he became something else.

The new feeling Douglas was experiencing he found was not new at all. He remembered that this was his true self. A download was taking place to his being on the Earth plane. As his true self, he already understood all the information; he understood everything at that very moment. He was in the endless Divine Cosmos, where everything just is.

Once the download to his human being was complete, Douglas felt himself return to his being. The understanding of everything he had just a moment before evaporated, leaving him with an understanding of what he needed for when this day came. From that day on, he spent his time helping others, developing equipment and systems to aid the planet, and preparing for what was to come, starting today.

Michael was the first to open his eyes. He just sat on the pillow, smiling and looking at the others. One by one, the others opened their eyes, smiled, and looked at each other.

They had all completed their connections without difficulty, were now full of information they did not know before their connection, and they were all filled with tremendous energy.

Joyous excitement from the entire group replaced the calm, relaxed atmosphere, who were now talking amongst themselves about the experience they had just shared. They spoke of past life experiences, skills they possessed or would soon possess, astral travel, other beings, planets, and dimensions.

Michael's face took on a serious expression as he asked, "Where is Patricia?"

They all stared at one another as Sophia said, "She is the pathfinder; she is needed."

A split second after Sophia finished speaking, Tara grasped the edge of the table in front of her, closed her eyes tightly, forcing tears to form at the outer corners, and grimaced. "I can feel her pain, but she is calm."

Apollo said, almost as a question, "She's in space."

Douglas leaned forward, staring directly at Apollo and demanding, "Tell me exactly what you can see."

Apollo closed his eyes and, before he could fully comprehend what was happening, he saw a female face reflected on a glass-like surface. She had shoulder-length brown hair—possibly; it was difficult to make out in the reflection—her face was pale, her jaw appeared clenched shut as if she was experiencing tremendous pain, and her bright emerald green eyes sparkled in the reflection. Apollo glimpsed what seemed to be stars moving relatively fast in an arc beyond her reflection.

As her head turned to look forward, Apollo could see her blanket-covered legs and torso lying on what appeared to be a medical bed. As the image rotated upwards, he realised the floor at the foot of the

bed also curved upwards, and a man in a white lab coat was walking down the arc towards the bed.

Apollo now caught sight of a central hub in the middle of what he understood to be an E.G.R.S., Earth Gravity Rehabilitation Station. Although he had never been aboard one, he had seen the documentaries.

Everyone who leaves the planet's gravity for more than a week is required to undergo 'Grav Rehab'. If not, the muscle and bone decay process caused by the interruption of red blood cell production, which affects the human body at the one-week mark in space, is difficult to reverse planet side and can cause various side effects, including death in some cases.

There are approximately one hundred and twenty E.G.R.S. in various orbits close to the Earth. They service the shipbuilders who work on the orbital construction platforms. These builders only require a two-day stint of Grav Rehab, as they spend a maximum of two weeks in zero gravity.

The miners based at the Moon base, as well as the more adventurous asteroid miners, normally require a longer stay. Some of these people have been known to remain off-planet for two to three months. As long as they continually take supplements and follow a regimented physical training programme, they can manage a two to three-week stay aboard an E.G.R.S., though it is painful, especially during the first few days.

The crews that man the transporter ships to and from Mars have it the worst of all. They will normally conduct two round-trip runs, that's just under three months each way, and with the loading and unloading at either end, the crews are normally at the twelve-month mark, mostly at 'zero G'. During their first month in 'Grav Rehab' these people are placed into an induced coma, as the pain for them is

unbearable. They are kept onboard the spinning tube that is gradually spun up to create the replicated earth-like gravity, whilst their bodies are flooded with an excess of iron supplementation and an Orgone energy treatment that brings the production and dying off of the red blood cells back into their proper earthly balance.

Apollo informs Douglas that Patricia is on an E.G.R.S.

“Do you know which one she is on?” Douglas asks.

Apollo simply shakes his head.

As Douglas stands to walk to the door, he says to everyone, “Please excuse me for a moment.” He opens the door and is out of sight for just a moment before re-entering with a communicator in hand. Closing the door, he returns to his cushion.

Holding the communicator approximately 300mm from his face, Douglas talks into it as soon as the face appears. “Steve, they have located the pathfinder. Her name is Patricia, and she is on board an E.G.R.S. Can you please locate which one she is on and then find out how soon we can send a ship to retrieve her?” Not waiting for a reply, Douglas ends the call.

“You must have some very influential friends or access to hefty corporate assets that will allow you to send a spaceship to retrieve her,” Michael states, looking at Douglas with that quizzical look on his face again.

Douglas smiles and says, “That will be a topic of discussion for another time. Right now, I’m starving.”

The door to the room opens, and in the doorway stands Mary in all her splendour. Her body emanates a heavenly light, making her skin shine with a golden glow. Her smile indicates its ability to melt the coldest of hearts, and her hair defies gravity slightly. Yet the true attention-grabbers are the golden wings of light extending out from her sides.

“Dinner is served,” Mary communicates to them all, without moving her mouth. Everyone hears the beautiful, soft, melodic voice, which leaves each of them with a sense of joy and well-being.

Chapter Seven

Tara, A.K.A. Sensation

Born August 8th, twenty-five years earlier.

Apa kabar, saya Tara Wrathborne. I was born to an English father, Gerald Reginald Wrathborne, and an Indonesian mother, Kartika Putri Utari, in Jakarta, Indonesia. My parents informed me that my birth was straightforward with no complications; the only thing out of the ordinary was an intense lightning storm that occurred directly above the hospital as I was being delivered. It was so intense that even the doctors and nurses inside the hospital were ‘Takut,’ afraid.

My father, Gerald, held a managerial position with a large accounting firm and, as an expatriate employee, was afforded the usual perks that came with that type of job. We lived in an executive housing estate, in a rather affluent suburb named Pondok Indah. Our house comprised 5 massive bedrooms, 3 of them with en-suites, a ridiculously oversized kitchen, an opulent entertainment area, and 2 oversized lounge rooms, not to mention the pool, gym, and jacuzzi.

Our servant's quarters, built off the side of the main house, comprised 3 rooms for the maids, 1 room for my father's driver, a small cooking area, and a very basic traditional bathroom, comprising a squat toilet, a square concrete-tiled tub, for the maids to wash with, using a plastic scoop to throw the water over themselves.

As I grew up, my maids would tell me stories of when I was a baby. They never spoke much English, and as I spent most of my time with them, my Bahasa Indonesian was formidable, or 'Hebat', as the locals would say. Not to gossip, as they wouldn't do that, but apparently, the reason I spent so much time with them is that my mother was not around in my younger years; she was out enjoying the high life that she had never experienced before marriage to a foreigner.

But I digress. As a baby, they adored me because I was a pleasant, well-behaved baby. As a toddler, I started acting very spoiled. Whenever I was not provided with whatever I desired, my maids would feel such powerful emotions within themselves that they would run and hide. My maids had all become so fearful of my tantrums that they brought in a witch doctor from a village that one of them came from, in the hope that he might have a solution to fix the situation.

My maids tell me he walked into the house as bold as brass, snatched my teddy bear from my hands, and said, "This is mine now." They say I just looked into his eyes, and an instant later he started to cry. He threw my teddy bear back to me and ran out of the house, saying the solution was to give me whatever I wanted.

My father's company enrolled me at CIS, Central International School, which was a rather expensive private school, as soon as I turned five years old. I quickly found that I had no problems fitting in and developed some wonderful friendships. As my new social skills developed with my peers, the spoiled attitude that my maids said I had as a toddler disappeared, much to their relief.

Everything was going swimmingly until I reached the age of ten. That was when I noticed that one of my friends had begun to act very differently; he seemed very closed off and never wanted to play. One day, I sensed a dreadful fear from within him. I tried to talk with him, but he just said I would not understand and walked off.

Two days later, we were sitting next to one another in class when I sensed he was being molested by the teacher at the front of the room. I recall taking all of my friend's shame, fear, disgust, hate, and rage from him, then creating an infinity loop with all his feelings inside me. I sensed the intensity of the feelings grow at least tenfold before projecting them all into the teacher.

Unfortunately, all the children in the class watched as tears streamed down the teacher's face while he sat behind his desk at the front of the room. He then stood up, walked over to the window, picked up an empty desk, and hurled it at the glass, which shattered. The teacher then climbed onto another desk, which he placed directly in front of the broken window. He threw himself through the broken pane and plummeted five stories to his death.

I knew my friends in the class had felt the energy I was emitting as I pushed the teacher with my mind. I think perhaps they also absorbed some of the emotion I had projected. In interviews with school officials and the police, my classmates did not incriminate me, but I think that may have only been because they could not explain what had happened anyway.

Three weeks later, my father moved our family to Milton Keynes, England.

In England, I found it difficult to fit in at the new school. The bullies would target me, and I would fight back with what I had started calling my emotional whip. Everyone soon understood to leave me alone.

Mum and I began to spend a lot more time together. She was a fantastic cook, so I learned how to cook very well from her at home. She was, of course, absolutely brilliant with most Indonesian dishes, not so much with European cuisine, but we soon worked out that adding just a little instinct seemed to do the trick most times. And of course, fusing some dishes was insanely delicious.

I loved the time I spent in the kitchen with my mother, but away from home, I started experiencing a great deal of emotional turmoil within myself. I would go through periods where I would laugh one moment, most times with no idea why I was laughing, and a moment later I would start crying again without understanding the reason. Then next I would feel rage. I was as angry as anything towards whoever was in front of me and voiced it uncontrollably. Then back to laughing.

By the time I was fourteen years old, I was having what my parents called an episode at least once a month, always around crowded areas. Good old Dad started taking me to see a psychiatrist every week, as apparently, when I had one of my episodes, 'I was an embarrassment.' This is where things started to go wrong.

My parents both told me to be honest with the doctor, saying that as long as I was honest, the doctor would be able to help me bring these episodes under control, so I was honest.

Unfortunately, when you explain you can feel what another person is feeling and have the ability to manipulate another's feelings, most doctors tend not to believe you. So, they prescribe medication, and when that doesn't work, you get institutionalised. What a lesson for a teenager!

Because of my honesty, I spent the best part of my later teenage years in a medically induced drug haze, as well as being committed to a psychiatric facility for two years because of my extreme mood swings.

After almost five years of this, just before my nineteenth birthday, I finally decided that being honest with these doctors and my family was not working out the way anyone had hoped. I began to attempt to act 'normal.' Firstly, whenever I felt an episode coming on, I would quickly hide so no one would see me. I soon understood that I had far more control than I had previously thought.

I had locked myself in one of the cleaners' storage rooms, sitting on the floor, ready for an episode to begin. As I sat in the dark away from everyone, my memories went back to what I had done to the teacher in Jakarta when I was ten.

I recalled that day in my mind, ten-year-old me sitting next to ten-year-old David. I had sensed his anger and shame first, which caused me to move what I can only describe as my emotional, sensory net onto him. That is when I got the complete picture of what had been going on. I felt so bad for him that I pictured drawing all my friends' unpleasant emotions from him. Once I felt the emotions within me, I formed them into an infinity loop, the thing that looks like a sideways number eight. That is how I controlled them within myself.

I sat in the darkness, attempting to sense my sensory net. It was not within me, like the day I had moved it onto David; it had spread. I could now sense seventy-three people and their emotions. Using my mind, I shrank the net, bringing it back to me. I now had control. For the first time in a very long while, I was only going to have to deal with my own emotions.

You would think that once a person has fixed themselves, things would go back to normal, right? Not quite. It took me a year of acting normal enough to stop the visits to the psychiatrist and to eliminate all the medication they had been insisting I take for the past six years.

Slowly and steadily, I made my way back into the community, picking up work sporadically in the events industry: toilet cleaning, which is truly shitty work; serving at the bar, which is just mad at festivals; and as a kitchen hand. I loved the kitchen work; I was in total heaven, aside from the heat feeling like hell. Although the work was intermittent, it paid very well, and I was able to save a great deal of money.

The interaction with many people in so many crowded venues allowed me to test my vulnerabilities and abilities. I found that now I controlled my sensory net; I had control of the emotions I took into my body. I could block anything I did not want, and if I was close enough to someone, I was able to alter their perception slightly.

Growing up as a medicated teen and spending two bloody years in a psychiatric hospital, I had never concerned myself with my appearance. But as I was required to be well presented for many of the event jobs, my mum and a few new friends I had made introduced me to conditioner first. OMG, how had I lived without it for so long? Hair salons, nail salons, spas, laser hair removal, oh hell yes, and eyebrow threading. It is so damned addictive.

I was quite attractive. Every passing year, I seemed to attract more suitors, both male and female alike. Many would ooze lust from every fibre of their being. These people I would either ignore or impart a passing gift. They soon forgot the lustful thoughts they were having moments earlier to focus on a pain or an itch that they would feel in an awkward area of their bodies.

I did engage in a few serious relationships. I found that there was always such passion at the start, but this soon faded with all my lovers. A feeling from that partner of being content or simply together for convenience usually replaced it. There was never the feeling of love,

that feeling of ‘we will be together forever’. I would simply move on.

My last big event prior to beginning my travels was the Glastonbury Music Festival in England. I had managed to gain employment as a server for some bars within the venue over the full five-day event. As usual, I arrived one day before the punters (event attendees) for bar staff sign-on, rostering, and to set up my campsite, of course, within the bar staff camping area.

I had only worked for a day and a half before the bombs detonated on the second day of the event. The death toll eventually ended up at 38,752 people dead in one day, from one event. This marked the end of all physical festivals around the world.

That day, I thought myself extremely lucky. I had just received permission for a lunch break and was heading to a toilet pod when an overwhelming urge for Korean fried chicken from a vendor across the venue seized me. I remember the urge being so powerful that my entire focus just went there and my mouth started watering. It was really good chicken.

Using the V.I.P. pass I held, which allowed me access to serve in V.I.P. bars, I instead used it to grant me access to a shortcut to get me there faster. Turning away from the toilet block I was heading towards, I showed my pass to the security person on duty at one of the entry points to backstage. I could then walk the unencumbered 450 metres to the gate on the other side of backstage that would put me at the back door of the vendor selling the chicken, as well as providing me access to one of the luxury backstage toilets on my way.

I was directly behind the main stage when several simultaneous massive explosions occurred. My reaction time was extremely fast, and I felt very instinctive. Upon hearing the loud booming of the explosions, several travel dollies (enclosed equipment cases on wheels) came

to my attention instantly. They were in an area beneath the backstage staircase, the one that leads to the main stage. The dollies had been stacked four high. That was high enough to act as a barrier from any debris, I remember thinking, and I just ran straight for that spot.

I could hear the splintering thuds of projectiles impacting the opposite sides of the travel dollies. I hadn't known until I found my hiding spot that those dollies remained loaded. Being full of equipment acted as fantastic protection against the myriad of shrapnel now pounding on the opposite side of the dollies.

The emotional wave that hit me as I was listening to the pounding shrapnel knocked me down. First, I felt the force of a concussive wave before experiencing, for a very brief split second, searing heat, followed by a brief moment of what I must describe as freedom. Then, extreme pain overcame me. It was then that I once again pulled my emotional, sensory net back within myself.

The pandemonium that followed was nothing short of mind-blowing. The shouts, screams, cries, and moans combined with instantaneous movements from almost every location on the event site were deafening.

It was later determined that an eco-terrorism group had perpetrated the attack by the name of Earth's Last Chance (ELC). Their main agenda appeared to be to eliminate as much of humanity as possible.

The perpetrators were all hunted down over the following five days and were either brought to trial, killed, or had taken their own lives before being captured.

The ELC had managed to get some of its fanatical group members implanted into one of the major suppliers of event toilets for the festival.

Over a period of four months, the members had been attaching trinitrotoluene (TNT) filled containers to the inside of the sewage

waste holding tanks of seven toilet blocks. Each container contained two litres of TNT and a wireless detonator, which they connected to one remote detonation trigger.

A two-litre container of the explosive was enough to blow the holding tank apart, but the group had gone for overkill, literally. At least fifty litres of TNT filled each toilet tank before the group simultaneously detonated the containers.

The explosions taking place at the same time in seven separate locations on the event site had been timed to perfection. One of the headline acts had just finished their performance onstage five minutes earlier, and many of the punters were using the break in the music as a chance to visit the toilet facilities.

The toilet blocks were in full use, with lines of people estimated to be 30 to 50 people deep at each toilet cubicle door, waiting to go next.

When the TNT was detonated, the explosive force shredded each of the seven thick metal holding tanks into thousands of flying, red-hot projectiles. The explosion vaporised the people closest to each toilet block, and the red-hot flying projectiles shredded everyone else within a 150-metre radius of each toilet block.

The projectiles continued on their trajectory after passing through the flesh and bone closest to the toilet blocks and embedded themselves into whatever else got in their path.

Upon emerging from my temporary hiding spot unscathed, the event security escorted me to the backstage assembly area. We were all eventually treated for shock.

It was after this experience that I decided, or rather felt the pull, to get out of England, anywhere but England. I needed to see the world. So, I set to work on a travel plan.

It had taken me slightly over a month before I was ready. I set off with four years of savings, which was a fair swag of money, and a plan

to follow the world time clock. Since New Zealand was the first large country in the world to start each new day, I had started my travels there.

Before leaving England, I signed on with an international working holiday group, which had secured me a four-week placement on a farm halfway between the towns of Whangārei and Dargaville in New Zealand's North Island.

Chapter Eight

Practice makes perfect

Dinner the previous night was yet another glorious feast. None of the group had realised how hungry they were until they sat down at the table to eat, all having consumed far more food than they should have, and they were all ready to fall into food comas at the table. Douglas and Mary showed everyone to their bedrooms, and they all fell straight to sleep.

The next morning, everyone awakened at the same time, just as the sun was rising, with Mary's sweet, pleasant-sounding voice in their heads. "It is time to rise from your slumber and greet the new day," she implants. Each room had its en-suite facilities, prepared with toiletries, towels, and a change of clothes for each of them.

They all located the kitchen, having only a vague recollection of being escorted to their rooms, to find Mary there to greet them with the breakfast of their desires.

Michael and Apollo both had very large plates of mixed grill, steak, bacon, sausage, eggs, tomatoes, hash brown, and beans with a large mug of coffee.

For Brahma, it was Idli. This was not only his favourite but also one of the healthiest breakfast dishes from South India. There were soft, light, fluffy steamed round cakes made with ground, fermented rice and lentil batter, and a fresh pot of tea.

Sophia and Tara ended up sharing their breakfasts: fresh fruit, freshly made Crêpes, yoghurt, perfectly boiled eggs with soldiers; these were toasted bread, buttered of course, then cut into strips thin enough to be dipped into the runny egg yolks, and two large mugs of coffee.

Douglas was sitting at the table, finishing his coffee and the last piece of toast. When he had finished, Mary was already by his side, ready to take his dirty cup and plate.

“Do you have any news regarding Patricia?” Tara questions Douglas.

“Nothing yet, but my team will find some answers soon,” Douglas replies.

Sophia asks Douglas, “What will we be starting with today?”

To which Douglas replies, “The basics of healing.”

As each of them finished off their breakfast, Mary was beside them to clear the dishes from the table. She seemed to appear from nowhere each time.

With breakfast finished, they all walked down the hall to the same room as the day before and sat in the same positions they had been in.

Douglas, dressed in faded jeans, a polo shirt, and comfortable shoes, examines the bookshelf and returns with charts, posters, and books. This time, the topic is healing the human body. He hands out four identical books to everyone except Apollo, each titled “FIND IT: The

Next Step in Your Spiritual Health.” For Apollo, however, he brought a much thicker volume titled “The Elements of Healing.”

Douglas instructs Michael, Sophia, Tara, and Brahma to read chapters five through nine, explaining that the information they gather will allow for a quick understanding of the basics.

Douglas says to Apollo, “You already utilise some of your abilities during the type of work you have been doing. You shall look over this book and read up on the unique elements that are available to you for healing.”

When everyone has finished reading, Douglas unfolds a poster on the table for all to see. The poster is again a picture of the human body: front, back, each side, head, and feet. This poster has many coloured dots in different locations on the body.

“The energies that you will use for healing others will not be your own. You will utilise energies from the Divine Cosmos that are available to us all,” Douglas explains. “You will direct the energy flow through the correct meridians on your patients to allow their own body to heal itself. Consider yourself more like a traffic officer than a healer; you will simply direct the flow.”

With that, Douglas launches to his feet again, just as the door is opened by Mary. “Follow me,” says Douglas. The slightly confused group follows him down the hall, out through the front door of the house, along a paved garden path surrounded by various plants, forming a tall two-and-a-half metre arched tunnel, to the area one would assume to be the back garden of the property. Only there, they find a large, modern-looking building with a very spacious parking area off to the side, lined with at least two hundred vehicles.

“Welcome to the wellness clinic,” states Douglas as he holds the door open for the group to enter.

They step through the side entrance of a very modern-looking hospital. The entrance they have come through brings them into the middle of a long hallway. At the far end, there appears to be the main entrance, with large glass panels at the front, a modern reception, and what looks to be a very full waiting room. In the other direction, and in front of them, are the doors to treatment rooms and nursing wards.

“This is a clinic that I have built, developed, and run for the last five years. It is for people who want alternative treatments that are not available from their doctors or hospitals at this time,” explains Douglas. “We have people coming here from all over the world with ailments that modern medicine has been unsuccessful in curing.”

“Today, you will each be putting to use the healing skills that are now available to you,” Douglas says, smiling at the five dumbfounded people in front of him.

Tara is the first to speak. “Douglas, we only just started learning about using what you refer to as divine energy for healing a few hours ago, and you expect us to just jump in at the deep end on real people?”

“Practice makes perfect,” Douglas responds with a pleasant smile.

He leads the now very hesitant group up the hallway, towards the reception, and steps into one room just before reaching the reception area.

Inside the large medical classroom are twenty people, male and female, of various ethnicities, seated at four long white bench desks, all wearing white medical jackets. Each is viewing, reading, or scrolling on the computer tablets in front of them, and some are talking amongst themselves.

Douglas gestures for Michael, Apollo, Sophia, Tara, and Brahma to take seats at the back of the room while he walks to the front of the classroom to address everyone.

“Let another fantastic day of healing begin,” says Douglas in an extremely authoritative voice. “You all have your assigned rooms and patients. As you will undoubtedly have noticed, the staff administrator has placed you all into groups. Each group of five comprises one of our permanent practitioners, one visiting doctor, two students, and, for something new, one advisor.”

Douglas continues his speech. “These advisors will not only assist you with the treatment of your patients today, but will also help each of you to gain access to the unexplored potential that you each possess.” He concludes, “Once you have gathered your team, come to me and I will introduce you to your advisor.”

He then gestures for the group at the back of the room to come forward to join him at the front.

“I had no idea we were to be learning from such an advanced skill set of people,” says Sophia. “Which ones are the advisors?” She asks Douglas while scanning the room.

“Well, that would be you lot,” he replies, his smile seeming to grow even larger with amusement.

“You can’t be serious,” retorts Tara in an anxious-sounding voice. “I said before, we have only just read some basic information on healing, and now you think we can advise doctors?”

Douglas laughs as he looks at the faces before him. There is panic, confusion, and fear in all of them.

“Trust me, please,” says Douglas, smiling. “You will all understand soon.”

The first group approaches Douglas and the others at the front of the class.

“Ah, Samuel,” says Douglas, as the tall African doctor shakes his hand and gives him a beaming smile. “Today you will be with Brahma,

who has the ethereal energy ability, or ergo kinesis. He can sense and manipulate energy fields.”

Samuel turns to Brahma, his smile still beaming, and shakes his hand. “What a wondrous gift it will be to work with you today, Brahma,” he says.

Samuel, Brahma, and the rest of the team leave the room as the second doctor’s group moves forward to Douglas.

“This is Sophia. She has the ethereal auditory ability, or clairauidience,” Douglas says to Stephan, a stately, older-looking doctor.

“Michael has ethereal knowledge, or claircognisance. He has access to the Divine Cosmos knowledge vault,” says Douglas to David, a young New Zealand doctor of Māori descent.

“Tara has the ethereal sensation ability, or clairsentience,” Douglas tells Christine, a stunning blonde-haired doctor from Australia.

“Aside from being New Zealand’s most sought-after massage therapist, Apollo also has Ethereal vision, or clairvoyance,” Douglas informs Endang, an extremely attractive doctor from Malaysia, of Chinese descent.

Samuel and his group are the first ones ready to receive patients. He has just finished discussing the first patient with his team when she is sitting in a wheelchair and wheeled into the consultation room.

The patient is female, thirty-two years of age. She has suffered from epilepsy since the age of six. Her doctors have prescribed various treatments over the past twenty-six years. Some have worked for a while and then become less effective, some have had no effect, and others have had side effects worse than the fits and blackouts.

“Hello, Sarah, how are you?” says Samuel as she and her partner Philip enter the room.

“I’m fine, but a little nervous,” she replies, looking at everyone in the room.

Samuel smiles and responds confidently, "That's a completely normal feeling to have with this many people in here."

He continues, letting his brilliant smile work its magic to put Sarah at ease. "Just so you know, we have two students, two doctors, and one advisor looking at your case today. Let's see if we can do for you what others have been unable to, all right?"

As Samuel asks Sarah about the types of medication, she's currently taking and helps her onto the examination bed, Brahma notices that on the wall above the bed is the same meridian chart Douglas had shown the group at his house earlier.

As Sarah lies face down on the bed, Brahma begins to see the meridians on her body light up as though each is a small individual lamp, as well as condensed areas of energy that he can only describe as energy dams or blockages. He thinks to himself how similar it is to what he's able to see when looking at an electrical system. In several areas along Sarah's back, these dams or blockages are causing great disruption to her energy flow, something Brahma can now view with extreme clarity.

Noticing the concentrated look on Brahma's face, Samuel asks, "Brahma, what is it you see?"

After Brahma explains what he's observing to Samuel and the group, he notices the aura around Samuel beginning to change shape. The top of his aura expands to allow an immense flow of energy from above to enter it.

"Will you guide my right hand to the lowest point on Sarah's back where you see this blockage?" Samuel asks Brahma.

Brahma can feel the energy in Samuel's hand as it rests upon Sarah's lower back. As he watches, he sees a flow of energy entering Samuel's crown chakra, the highest ethereal energy centre within a human being, streaming through his body and into the energy blockage in Sarah's lower back. After what seems like five minutes, but is only

thirty seconds, Brahma sees the energy from Samuel flow out of Sarah via her root chakra.

“You’ve got that one,” Brahma says to Samuel, his trademark smile returning to his face.

Samuel removes his hand from Sarah’s back, then gestures to Brahma to handle the next one.

“We’ve cleared an energy blockage in your lower back,” Samuel says to Sarah. “But as you heard from Brahma, there are a few more that will need clearing to allow your body’s energy flow to return to normal. Would you mind if we trained the students with us to assist with this?”

Sarah replies, “Do what you need to do. It’s all good.” She felt only a slight warmth when Samuel touched her back, but once he had cleared the first blockage, she felt every muscle in the affected area relax. A stiffness deep within the backbone of that part of her back left her in an instant. She was ready for more of that.

“You need to request permission from Sarah’s higher self before assisting her,” Samuel instructs his group. “You first, Brahma. Do you need me to guide you?”

Brahma feels very confident that he can copy what he has just seen from Samuel, so he responds, “No thanks, Samuel, I will be okay.”

Brahma closes his eyes and takes ten purposeful breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. He feels his mind and body relax and finds himself (in his mind), standing in front of an energy mass that he can instantly recognise as Sarah’s higher self. The communication is non-verbal, but he feels the energy figure gives him the okay to assist Sarah.

Brahma, once again, through non-verbal communication, calls on the light of healing from the city of light. He can feel the energy

entering his body through his crown chakra, down his spine, and waiting for release from his right hand.

He then opens his eyes to see the location of the next energy blockage on Sarah's back, placing the tips of his fingers on the spot where he can feel a slight heat difference in Sarah's skin temperature, between the affected area and the unaffected area. The area where he can see the blockage is slightly warmer than the surrounding skin.

Brahma places two fingers on this spot and releases the energy flow. He feels the temperature of the skin in that area rise as he does this, and then the heat dissipates once the energy starts to flow through Sarah's root chakra.

"Nicely done, Brahma," says Samuel, as he witnesses the release of tension within Sarah's back. "Now release the excess energy through your own root chakra. Close down your connection, and protect your aura again."

Samuel asks Brahma, "Is there anything you noticed while clearing that blockage?"

Brahma explains how he had noticed the heat difference in the skin, which means the others, by touching Sarah's back and feeling for that difference, should be able to clear the remaining blockages without Brahma needing to position their hands on her back.

By the end of the treatment, Brahma can see that Sarah has an energy flow through her body that is similar to everyone else in the room. It is then that he realises he had subconsciously noticed her disrupted energy flow as soon as she had entered the consultation room, but had not understood that it was something he could help rectify, so he let that information slip to the back of his mind automatically.

When Sarah sat upright on the bed, smiling from ear to ear, Samuel asked, "Is there anything else we can help Sarah with today, Brahma?"

Brahma looks again at the energy flow through Sarah. Everything looks fine except for parts of the flow through her head, the brain in particular. The energy appears to be arcing (jumping) in some spots, as though some of these areas are not grounded with the rest of them or are in some type of reverse polarity to their surroundings.

While explaining this to Samuel, Brahma has an idea pop into his head. "It may be possible to ground or change the polarity of these areas," he states.

"What do you propose we do?" asks Samuel, extremely intrigued by this idea.

During the same time this conversation is taking place, Brahma experiences a download of information from his higher self. It only lasts for two seconds, but the information he now has access to is similar to a how-to instruction manual on rectifying human ailments. Brahma understands that this knowledge is now constantly available for him to access at any time.

"We will not need to do anything; Sarah will do all the work," Brahma discloses to Samuel and the others in the room.

Brahma then explains to Sarah how to conduct the meditation, cleansing, and grounding process she will need to complete daily for the following two weeks, and then weekly thereafter.

He informs her that this will restore the energy flow in her body back to normal and eliminate the electrical arcing taking place in her brain. The arcing is what has been causing the epileptic seizures she has been experiencing for so long. Brahma is about to explain that Sarah's human being's basic programming has been playing havoc with her spiritual connections, as her being has been trying to be as efficient as possible and has attempted to shut down certain access points, but he figures she will eventually learn this on her own or that it would not matter to her, so he lets it go.

Once Sarah and Philip feel competent, they leave the room after thanking everyone for their efforts. Samuel addresses everyone.

“It has always astounded me how much we can learn from individuals outside our field of expertise,” he states. “Brahma, I had forgotten how much of a role the patient is required to play in rectifying their ailments. Thank you, my friend, for this reminder.”

“We will now review the next case,” Samuel smiles.

By the end of the day, each of the advisors has seen at least twenty patients.

Tara has discovered that she is able to change a person’s perception of what they are feeling, on demand, with precise control. Although extremely hesitant to take part at first, she soon understood that the connection she now had with her higher self was facilitating a far grander understanding of the human physiology than she believed herself capable of.

She can change pain to pleasure, anxiety to fortitude, rage into happiness, and she has taught her group how to assist people in overcoming many chronic mental disorders, as well as enlightening them to the fact that some mental disorders are not truly disorders at all but simply misunderstood spiritual connections. Over fifty percent of the patients had their beings’ programming interfering with their spiritual connections.

Sophia had discovered that she was not only able to hear a person’s thoughts, but could also understand the thoughts of parasite entities that attach to, disrupt, and drain a human being’s aura energy.

She also discovered that she now understood the delicate vibrations taking place within the human being’s eardrum. She had gained the understanding of how to shift the mind’s translation programming to pick up these vibrations from different locations within the body, and

she had taught her group ways to help rectify certain types of hearing loss, as well as sound therapy that could alter a person's state of mind.

Michael had discovered that he did indeed have unlimited access to the Divine Cosmos knowledge vault. Knowledge would appear in his mind before he even asked for it; he simply needed to start the thought process, and it was there.

He recognised he had precognitive abilities, answering questions before they were asked, catching items before they fell, and stopping wrong decisions before they were made. He had taught his group many long-forgotten natural remedies, as well as a new and simple system for diagnosing difficult medical afflictions, which involved connecting with the patient's higher self to get the answers.

Apollo had discovered that he could also gain access to a person's mind, allowing him to view what they see, their memories, and their thoughts. He also found that he could project images and thoughts into the minds of others.

He had taught his group several ways to bring sight back to the blind, by using a patient's other senses to develop the scene in their mind. He showed them ways to view energies and entities, as well as how to access psychic surgeons for carrying out extremely delicate surgery that human hands could not perform.

Brahma discovered that he not only saw energy but could manipulate, draw, store, and redirect it. He taught his team how to locate, view, and clear energy blockages within the body, allowing for the treatment of epilepsy, strokes, and an array of other energy disruption ailments.

All the groups gathered back in the first room they had entered that morning. Douglas was there, thanking everyone for the work they had done today, while people chatted excitedly about the new things they had discovered in each of the groups.

Douglas cleared his throat to attract everyone's attention.

"The work done here today can only be described as miraculous. Every patient seen has either been cured of the ailment that brought them to us or now has a treatment plan in place to alleviate or eliminate the ailment." Douglas paused, taking in his audience for a moment, then continued, "I look forward to reading the reports from all five groups tomorrow night. For today, everyone should go home and take a well-deserved rest."

Chapter Nine

Brahma A.K.A. Vidyut

Born August 8th, twenty-six years earlier.

Vanakkam, I am Brahma Matkindrah. I was born into an extensive family in Coimbatore, South India. My parents, father Maaksharth, and mother Camelia, both tell me that although my birth was straightforward with no complications, there was an intense lightning storm taking place directly above the hospital as I was being delivered. This in itself would be of no consequence, as August is the monsoon season for that area, but the strange thing was that there were no clouds to create the lightning.

My parents worked at multiple jobs to support the eleven of us: six sisters, four brothers, and me.

I still fondly recall my early childhood, with the extreme heat that we experienced growing up. Even when fully grounded, I was always able to generate static electricity, slightly shocking people. The static

shocks tickled me, but I soon discovered that most others were averse to them. I had great fun shocking all my brothers and sisters.

The older I became, the more advanced my ability to see electrical faults within equipment became. I began routinely fixing up discarded junk from the local area in order to sell it and earn money.

By the age of twelve, I was providing enough additional income to our household that my mother was able to quit her jobs and focus on caring for the household, myself, and my siblings.

Everyone in the local community knew that if something electronic or electrical was broken, they would bring it to Brahma to be fixed. The word of my electrical capabilities then began to spread to many of the local hospitals, and they started requesting that I repair many of their expensive electronic medical appliances that would quite often break down. This brought in a lot more money to the household and allowed my father to focus on finishing the construction of our family house.

My father was an adept builder. Any spare time he had would always be put towards the building of what he liked to refer to as “future house.”

Maaksharth had started building our house after the birth of my fifth-eldest sibling. He told us he had become tired of the flooding that was now a yearly occurrence, instead of once in one hundred years, and decided that he needed to do something about it. Whenever it rained in Coimbatore, it rained for days. You might think that living in a near-perpetual drought for almost the entire year, then finally receiving rain, would be a blessing. No, not when it was a year’s worth of water poured down in the space of a week and a half. It just caused damage, destruction, and sometimes death.

As the land was always dry and compacted, the rain would not sink into the ground; it would flow across it in torrents, picking up the

dust, dirt, sewage, motorbikes, cars, and whatever else was in its path. Whatever water did not pool in the low-lying areas would flow out of the city, trying to make its way to the rivers, creeks, or canals.

The block of land that Maaksharth built on had been in our family for generations. It used to have a small storage facility on it, but this had been destroyed, firstly by the consistent flooding, then some careless squatter had set the remainder of the place ablaze with some sort of makeshift oil lamp.

After clearing the site, Maaksharth had dug, by hand, four holes, each two metres deep, centred a three-metre-long load-bearing pole in each, then filled each hole with a homemade geo-polymer, a concrete-like material that used much less water than concrete, was stronger than concrete, and less prone to weathering from floodwaters.

He then built a base structure from the same geopolymer material, which he aerated by mixing in soap bubbles. The bubbles created tiny air pockets within the geopolymer, making it lighter. He built this base around the load-bearing poles protruding from each filled hole, incorporating a sealed bearing around each pole.

Our father had worked on this project for two years before moving our ever-growing family into the construction. It was far from complete when we moved in, but with the cost of living continually increasing, he and my mother felt they had no other choice. The property's location was another factor, as it was on Patel Road, very close to the central business district, making for easy access to employment for both of my parents.

By the time I was born, Maaksharth had extended the height of each pole by another six metres, finished construction on the ground floor of the house, was halfway through the construction of the second floor, and had started on the framework of the third.

Over the years, the house endured many floods. Each time, the entire house would rise on the four poles protruding from the ground, and then, as the water subsided, the house would settle back onto the ground.

I recall assisting my father with installing a solar power system for the house when I was only eight years old. We had put together a system that supplied the entire household's needs and then some, made from scrap and rubbish that people were throwing away.

Throughout my schooling, I excelled academically and socially. I was one of those people whom most others liked as soon as they met me. Whatever it was, my social networks were incredible.

Through my academic achievements, I won a scholarship to the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and graduated with degrees in electrical engineering and physics. During my university years, some of my professors invited me to assist with various projects, Toto's lightweight gel battery being one of them.

The Toto project turned out to be one of the best I was involved with, not only for the discoveries my team and I helped make, but also for the discovery of a young lady who stole my heart.

The project itself was based on old technology. Back in 2004, a New Zealand engineer and an Australian scientist received a patent for the new gel technology. Unfortunately, they never brought the technology to market because of a lack of funding. The original project was based on the Vanadium Redox Flow Battery, which many companies sought to commercialise in the pursuit of making energy storage more efficient.

Flow batteries was an area that I had never taken any time to research, so I first set about learning. The battery works by pumping two different liquids past a cathode and an anode to release the stored electrical charge within the liquids.

The flow batteries performed extremely well. They stored vast amounts of electricity within the liquids, especially after the discovery that using different electrolytes and additives enhanced performance, with very little storage degradation.

It translated into massive savings for all power generators by enabling them to store much more of the power they generated daily. The average power generator loses over sixty percent of what they produce daily.

The largest drawback of the system was the amount of energy required to pump the liquids past the cathode and anode, not to mention the size of the area needed to house all the equipment necessary.

The 2004 patent called for turning the liquids into gels that could not be pumped, structuring one gel to act as the cathode and the other as the anode, and inserting a controllable, one-way membrane in between the two gels, allowing for charging, storing, and discharging of electricity.

After I had read the project brief handed to me by my professor, being a Toto project, I quickly understood the benefits that the company could gain by completing the project. I negotiated a benefits package for myself with Toto directly.

I had correctly surmised that the reason behind developing the new gel battery, if it could be done, was not only to assist with the development of the Switch-It Battery exchange network but to open new markets into the aviation, space exploration, and travel, as well as new avenues into the robotics industries, just to name a few.

I also understood that Toto's philosophy was not to change people's habits to suit the new technology, but to adapt the technology to suit people's existing habits. There was a great deal of advancement to be gained by Toto.

For years, the entire world had been pulling into fuel stations to refill their internal combustion engines with petrol, diesel, or liquid petroleum gas. When the average price of fuel rose to over ten dollars per litre worldwide, many governments around the world made a big push for the switch to electric vehicles, driven by the skyrocketing price of oil and some concern for the planet.

This faced strong resistance from the world's population. The majority did not want to wait for their vehicles to charge, as this put limitations on travel times, but they also could not afford to keep paying the exorbitant prices for fuel.

That is when Toto entered the market with Switch-It, the rapid exchange system for the battery. Instead of recharging the car, people could now just swap their almost empty battery for a fully charged one and drive on, just like they did with their old internal combustion car when it was running low on fuel. This was the move that allowed Toto to capitalise on the stored electric energy market, and since they only sold the vehicle and not the battery, the sales price of their vehicles catapulted them to global dominance.

Once Toto accepted my proposed benefits package, they immediately supplied a laboratory close to the university campus and set me in motion as head of the project.

It only took my team and me two months to develop the electrolytes into lightweight gels, grow a suitable separation membrane, and determine the size of the cell needed to hold a given electrical charge.

During these two months, a young scientist attached to the project, and I began a very passionate romance. Felicity Faraday and I were unable to keep our hands off one another; it all started in the first week of working together.

The head of Toto India arrived on the first day I visited the laboratory. He showed me around and introduced me to the team, which comprised engineers and scientists from all over the world.

When I was introduced to Felicity, she extended her hand to shake mine, and I received a static shock from the connection. This had not happened to me since I was a child, when I would deliberately antagonise my siblings with static shocks.

Over the following two days, whenever Felicity walked past me, she would reach out a hand, almost touch me, and send me a zap. It was her; she was the one shocking me. By the end of work on the third day, I had asked Felicity out for dinner, where I discovered she shared many other similarities with me, not just the ability to send static shocks. I suggested going to a club after dinner, but Felicity thought it would be better to go to her place for sex.

She was not wrong. When we kissed, I felt every cell in my lips, tongue, and mouth came alive with electricity.

We undressed each other, enjoying every caress and brush of hands upon the skin. There was a passionate tingle with even the slightest touch. By the time our naked bodies were intertwined, we felt as though every cell within our bodies had found its counterpart in the other person.

There was little sleep that night, nor on most nights after. The relationship was so passionate that we had to force ourselves to work in different areas of the laboratory each day. Just the sight of one another triggered an instant longing to be close.

Both of us found that the two-month development period flew by quickly. The project was very successful; the results achieved far surpassed the initial parameters. The unexpected feelings we developed for one another were intense.

The last day of the project arrived, and I handed over all research files, notes, and prototypes to the Toto stored power development team. They would now begin fitting out a new factory dedicated solely to manufacturing the gel battery.

After all, a battery that weighed half as much as its closest competitor, held at least ten times the electrical charge, had close to zero degradation, and was one hundred percent recyclable, deserved a dedicated facility.

Felicity was due to return home to Sweden for a three-week holiday before being sent on another Toto project based in Singapore. I informed the university that I would be travelling for three weeks and would catch up on my studies upon return, then booked myself on the same flight as Felicity.

The night before our flight, I received a call from my mother informing me that my father had suffered a minor heart attack. This put everything on hold for Felicity and me. The following morning, I took Felicity to her flight, told her I would join her as soon as I had made sure my father was cared for, and flew back to my hometown.

Part of the deal I had negotiated with the Toto corporation was a medical insurance package for myself and my entire family. Upon arriving at my father's hospital bedside, I saw the fruits of this negotiation: a private room in the most prestigious hospital in town. My father was in good spirits. The doctors were going to insert a valve stent in his heart the next day, and he was happy to see me. As we sat talking in the hospital room, my attention fell on the media broadcast screen on the far wall.

'Passenger plane shot down over Pakistan, 368 confirmed dead.' It was her flight. Felicity was gone.

I felt tears streaming down my cheeks as a low moan from my throat slowly escalated into a higher-pitched cry. I sank my face into

the blanket on my father's hospital bed and cried for what felt like an hour.

I recognised my father's hand patting my back, silently asking what was wrong. Through my sobs, I managed to say that my good friend had been on the plane.

Maaksharth recovered fully, and doctors discharged him within two days of the surgery. Not knowing what else to do, I returned to my studies, initially lost in grief, but gradually pulling myself out of it.

After completing my degrees, I established a local power system modelling company, which then grew into the entity it is today.

Now, I am the owner of an international advisory company, assessing power losses and theft across vast power networks worldwide. Recently, New Zealand Power requested my company's advice on their national network.

Chapter Ten

Learning New Skills

Douglas, carrying a large cardboard box between his hands, led the group of five back through the side entrance they had come through that morning, following the paved tunnel and re-entering the house.

Mary, of course, is at the door to greet them as soon as Douglas places his foot on the first step to the doorway.

She looks glorious in a vivid white, snug-fitting sarong. She takes the cardboard box from Douglas at the door. “Go take a bath or shower, change into the sleeping garments I have laid upon your beds, and we shall all meet in the dining room in thirty minutes,” Mary passes gently into their minds, in her normal, harmonious style.

Dinner, once again, is glorious, but with the conversations at the table regarding the happenings of the day, nobody eats anywhere near the amount they had the previous night.

After dinner, they all follow Douglas back to the room with the cushions. Sophia decides they should call it the study, as this is what

they have done there from the start. She takes a leaf from Mary's book and implants that information into everyone's head without talking.

Everyone, including Douglas, turns to look at her as they walk, smiling, and nodding in agreement with her suggestion, and impressed with her new ability.

As they enter the study and take their places around the table, everyone looks at the large cardboard box that is sitting in the centre of the table. It is the same box that Douglas had carried back with him earlier.

Douglas opens the box, reaches in, and pulls out what looks like a picture frame. He gazes at it and then passes it to Tara.

TOTO WELLNESS CLINIC

FREE ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE CLINIC

NEW ZEALAND

This certificate identifies

TARA WRATHBORN

As a qualified practitioner of
ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

After handing each of the five framed certificates to the correct person in the group, Douglas removes the box from the table and takes a seat on his cushion.

Brahma is the first to speak. "I believe this is the first time that I have seen the Toto Group get involved with the alternative medicine industry. What is your connection to Toto?"

"Does that mean that the facility we worked in today doesn't charge the patients for their treatment?" Apollo questions.

"Why do we need this certificate?" asks Sophia.

“What are we going to learn next?” enquires Michael.

“All excellent questions,” smiles Douglas. “I will answer them all for you over tea.”

Just then, the study door opens and Mary enters, carrying a tray of cups and a large pot of tea. She places out the saucers, then the cups, and pours tea into each cup. The speed and grace with which she does this are amazingly captivating.

As they all sip the green tea that Mary has just served, Douglas explains he is the founder of the Toto Group. His company covers all the expenses of the clinic and uses it as a tax deduction against the profits it makes in New Zealand. The clinic that they worked in today is the first of many to come.

“Every patient is treated for free, but asked to donate what they can afford or whatever they feel is fair compensation for the treatment they receive,” Douglas explains.

“The five of you,” Douglas continues, “once your training is completed tomorrow, will be tasked with the training of the staff in some of the new facilities to be opened in different towns and cities around the world. This will be the perfect cover for the other tasks that your higher selves have indicated that you will be expected to perform.”

“Now, you all need to get some sleep, as you will start your combat training tomorrow. Some places we will be opening the new clinics are not so safe,” Douglas says, launching himself to his feet.

Douglas leaves the room, and the group sits in silence, looking at one another for a minute, before Sophia implants ‘what the fuck’ into each of their heads and they all talk at the same time.

They are overwhelmed by the information that Douglas has just imparted to them, by the experiences they have all had this day, and by the realisation that their lives are never going back to what they had known just two days ago.

It had only been two days since they had met for the first time on that rain-drenched forest floor beneath the massive Kauri tree. Until that point in each of their lives, they had understood that they differed from most other people they had interacted with throughout their lives, but did not have a true understanding of just how different they each were.

Connecting with their higher selves had not only awakened each of them to an understanding of the skills and abilities they each have access to, but also to the planned path they had each committed to follow before their arrival on the earth plane.

They each knew within their being that they were now on their life's true path, and Douglas was guiding them to comprehend the skills they required to traverse this path.

Mary appears at the door and implants in their minds, "The tea that you have partaken of will make you drowsy in five more minutes. You should now make your way to bed."

The following morning, before sunrise, they all make their way to the kitchen, where Douglas and Mary are both waiting for them.

They are all dressed in identical workout gear: black shorts, black compression t-shirts, and running shoes, which they all correctly assume Mary placed in their rooms.

As the group sits down to eat, Douglas speaks. "We have moved through your training quickly, and I believe that your higher selves have imparted to you the reason for this speed." Douglas looks at them all, waiting for someone to answer.

"Humanity is running out of time, and so is the planet," Michael answers.

Michael never backed down from a fight, but he also didn't look for one unless someone caused him great pain.

Before his connection with Esmeralda, Michael would have simply walked away from a situation like this, telling himself that it was not his problem. Humanity could and would sort itself out, and everyone knew the planet was doomed.

He remembered how passionate she had been about making everyone aware of what was to come if humanity did not sort out its collective mess.

He now found that his whole being was driving itself towards assisting humanity and the planet. This was his purpose. He would do whatever it took to achieve the results that his higher self had shown him were required. He had no doubt that he would achieve these results.

Earlier that morning, before meeting for breakfast, Sophia had popped into each person's thoughts, expressing similar views and confirming that they all shared the same thoughts. Michael knew that as a group they would all do whatever needed to be done.

After eating a small breakfast, they follow Douglas outside again, this time walking down the large driveway they had used to enter the property just three days prior, until they come to a small gate in the fence.

As they step through the gate and pass through a gap in the large evergreen hedge that runs the length of the fence line, a very large shed becomes visible. They follow Douglas along another paved path that leads directly to the shed.

It is an older-looking structure, painted white with a grass-green roof and green trim around the windows and doors.

As Douglas nears the end of the path at the foot of two large wooden doors, he makes a sharp right turn through an archway entry that is only visible at this distance, as it sits at an angle of one hundred and thirty-five degrees to the path they are on, into another nature

tunnel that brings them out at a very modern-looking door with a biometric scan pad, on the opposite side of the shed.

Once Douglas has entered his code, he scans his left hand and places his face close enough to allow the facial recognition system to view him. The door slides open with a 'hiss' from a pneumatic air piston.

They all enter a small, dark room, lit only by two red lamps on either wall. When the door closes, the lights change to yellow, and they feel the whole room drop. They soon understand that they have entered a lift. The lights turn green, and the opposite wall from their point of entry slides open.

The room they step into is like the classroom they had entered at the medical centre the previous day, but it noticeably has three doors on each of the three walls where the lift is not. Each of the doors is numbered from one through nine.

There are fourteen people, all dressed in the same workout outfits the group had put on earlier that morning. They are seated and all staring at Douglas and the others as they exit the elevator.

"Good morning," says Douglas to them all.

"Good morning," they reply.

"Sophia, you are working with Janice today," Douglas states as he gestures to a young female sitting in the far back corner. As Sophia walks towards her, Janice jumps up and stands next to the door with the number three on it. Janice places her hand on the biometric scan pad beside the door, then swipes an identity card that she wears on a retractable lead attached to her hip. This changes the scan pad's colour from green to blue.

"Give me your left hand, please," Janice insists, in a deep southern American accent.

As she obliges, Janice guides Sophia's hand onto the scan pad. Sophia can see the scanning light bar moving from bottom to top and

then back again. The pad turns green, and the number three door slides open.

As the two of them step through the doorway, Sophia notices they pass immediately through a beam of light just inside the door. Once both ladies are through the light, she hears the hydraulic actuator engage and the door slides closed behind them.

The passageway they are now walking down is brightly lit by down lights placed in the centre of the ceiling approximately four metres apart. The walls are vivid white, which helps make the lighting appear even brighter than it is. With no windows or doors in sight, just climate control vents between every second ceiling light, they follow a consistent left-hand bend with a slight downward gradient.

Janice is much shorter than Sophia. She sports short black hair, still with enough length on top to support a style. Sophia can tell from her muscle structure that she likes to keep herself fit.

“How long have you known Douglas?” Sophia asks her.

“Oh, I first met Douglas when I was seven,” Janice replies, her southern American accent now prominent. “My parents thought I was crazy because I told them I was hearing voices. After getting nowhere with conventional therapy, they approached Douglas for help at a seminar he was running in our hometown on alternative medicine and energy healing.”

“Douglas helped me develop my ethereal auditory ability, which is why you are with me today,” Janice concludes as they approach a door at the end of the passageway.

This door has a normal handle, which Janice turns and pushes to open into an enormous room. A set of stairs with seven steps leads both ladies down to the floor of the room. The ceiling is at least ten metres high, with more, brightly lit down lights covering it, as well as lights on the walls and floor.

There is a computer terminal set up to the right of the small staircase. Janice walks up to it, uses her identification card to log on, and with a few keystrokes, Sophia hears more hydraulic actuators activate as a table with a bench seat on either side rises from the floor.

“Please take a seat,” Janice requests.

Janice walks to the table and places on it a deck of cards, a shiny metal ball bearing, and four balloons that she has removed from her pocket. She blows up one of the balloons and ties the end.

“Sophia, yesterday you began to understand more of your ethereal auditory abilities as well as discovering that you can redirect or reconstitute sound into physical waves,” Janice states in a relaxed, matter-of-fact tone. “Today, I will show you what I can do first, explain how I can do it, and then we shall see just what you are capable of,” she concludes with a smile.

Janice removes the deck of cards from the packaging and places them on the table. She then holds out her straightened hand at a forty-five-degree angle to the deck, about one hundred millimetres away from the cards. Sophia can see Janice’s hand start to vibrate as she notices a low rumbling sound. The cards slowly begin to shake and move away from Janice’s hand.

Janice then cups her hand and places the heel of her palm at the far end of the table. Sophia again sees the vibration in her hand, accompanied this time by a high-pitched buzzing sound, as the ball bearing rolls slowly down the table towards Janice’s cupped hand.

Janice then smacks the inflated balloon with her palm in an upward direction. She makes a fist and punches the air in the balloon’s direction. Sophia watches the balloon move as though the punch has connected, hearing a low thumping sound at the same time Janice punches the air.

"I not only hear sound but also feel its physical vibration, on this plane and the Ethereal," Janice begins. "Our bodies are like a tuning fork or crystal glasses. When they vibrate, they make a sound. We can take the sounds and form them into physical waves via our bodies."

"You try," Janice finishes.

Sophia straightens the pile of cards and positions her hand as Janice had done. She feels her connection to her higher self instantly strengthen. Her consciousness is guided to hear and feel a mild roar. She feels her hand vibrate slightly, experiences a wave of energy flow down her arm through her palm, and watches as the deck of cards scatters to the other side of the room.

Janice almost jumps out of her skin at this sight and is smiling from ear to ear. "Douglas said you would be a fast learner, but I had no idea," she exclaims. "Now the ball bearing."

"You are going to pull the sound waves through the ball bearing back into yourself," Janice instructs.

Sophia cups her hand and places the heel of her palm at the far end of the table, just as Janice had done. She feels her connection grow in strength, senses the high-pitched sound waves from the lights in the room, and pulls that sound towards the palm of her cupped hand through the metal ball at the other end.

The ball flies down the table towards Sophia's hand at tremendous speed, as though fired from a rifle. Sophia stops the ball bearing before it hits her palm by circulating the energy into a rotating energy ball in her hand. The ball bearing glows red hot as she drops it back onto the table.

Janice is now so excited that she is jumping. She runs to the computer, pushes a few buttons on the keyboard, then touches some icons on the screen. "I'm launching a training simulation in this room," she

says. "You will see 3D holograms appear in here. I want you to push or punch only, okay?"

Sophia gives her the thumbs-up sign.

The lights in the room dim. A masked man with a handgun appears on the far side of the room. He looks lifelike. Sophia makes a fist and punches the air in his direction, feeling a blast of energy release from her fist. The hologram disintegrates, and Janice lets out a "Whoa" of disbelief. She turns back to the computer to shut down the rest of the simulation.

"So, I should tell you this holographic programme senses the energy readings you generate and translates that into approximate real-world damage to the holograms it presents to you," Janice says slowly and purposefully. "I think we should work on power control as you already seem able to generate your sound vibration on call," she suggests, smiling again and raising her left eyebrow.

Sophia spends the next two hours learning how to control the power of the vibration she can now generate. She can send a light gust, like wind, to move a feather or send a massive hurricane-like gust that can demolish a brick wall.

She learns how to direct the vibration through one finger to a precise point or disperse a shockwave 360 degrees from her whole body.

"The more you use these skills, the better you will become. That is it from me today. Let's go back and see how your friends have done with their training," Janice says, shutting down the computer and heading up the steps to the door.

On arrival back at the first room they had entered earlier that morning, Sophia notices it is empty, and there is nobody at all. Janice walks to the door with the number 7 on it, places her hand on the biometric scan pad, and the door slides open.

Upon entering, Sophia sees the stairs ascending in a spiral. The yellow steel staircase ascends at least 10 metres. At the top is another door with the same security as the previous one. Once through this door, Sophia can see Michael and Apollo seated in front of a computer screen, a table filled with food, and Douglas seated behind a desk on the far side of the room.

Chapter Eleven

Sophia A.K.A Vibration

Born August 8th, twenty-three years earlier.

Salve, I am Sophia Antonol. I was born the only child of Cedro and Valentina Antonol in Cosenza, Italy. Both Mama and Papa informed me that although my birth was without complications outside the hospital, a storm unlike Cosenza had ever seen was raging. It stopped the instant I was born.

People throughout Europe knew my Mama Valentina as the finest custom jewellery designer on the continent, and my Papa Cedro amassed millions of dollars in personal assets through various trading platforms and savvy business investments.

When I was born, Papa moved our family into a newly designed underground house set into the hillside, below State Highway 45, ‘Strada Provinciale 45’, halfway between the city of Cosenza and the coastal town of Fiumefreddo Bruzio.

It was a view of unparalleled beauty, a stunning vista of valley, foothills, and ocean. As a baby, Mama and Papa would simply set me

in front of one of the monstrous windows, where I would stay quiet for hours looking out the window.

The architects designed the house elegantly and with the latest environmental protection. Papa always said nothing but the best for his family.

Built into the topside of a hill face overlooking the valley, there were two entries onto a suspended parking platform that sat just below the house. The glasslike panelling running the length of the house was now a part of the hillside.

The parking platform also doubled as a landing platform for personal air vehicles (P.A.V.). A long, snaking uphill driveway from the bottom of the valley led to the house, which overlooked it, or a shorter, steeper driveway from the highway served as another entrance for the house built below it.

I received so much love and attention from my parents as a baby and a toddler; they never left me alone, and one of them was always with me.

Both Cedro and Valentina worked from home. Cedro had his office built into the house at one end and had a workshop built at the opposite end for Valentina.

When I started school, I remember I was so excited at first to be surrounded by other children, but this soon wore off as, apparently, I started showing some very different traits that frightened the other children.

Many of the children began to tease me and call me names. I soon worked out that if the other children were not moving their mouths, they were only thinking about what I was hearing.

I would hold conversations with the voices I heard when alone at home, but my parents soon discovered this and started therapy for me by the time I turned eight.

The therapist that I began seeing was Emma Russo, a young, pleasant lady with whom I felt very comfortable talking.

Over the following four years, I would visit her twice a week, every week. I informed Emma that I was able to hear others' thoughts, as well as other sounds and voices, and I really did not know where they came from.

Emma never once asked me to prove that I could hear the thoughts of others; she would not buy into what she thought were a child's delusions. We discussed the idea that I may be delusional or have schizophrenia. Emma tried a few different medications on me over the years, with nothing working.

When I turned twelve and a half years old, the voices in my head stopped. Or at least, that's what I told Emma and my parents. I had become bored with Emma; there was no belief on Emma's part in whatever I would tell her, so I decided I should keep my secrets to myself from then on.

Over this period of my life, my grandmother Cedro's mother Sofia, my namesake, frequently visited to care for me, because both my parents needed to travel more for work.

Cedro had diversified some of his investment interests into some environmental technologies that held great potential. He would visit various sites in different countries, viewing the progress that was being made.

Valentina was receiving custom jewellery orders from a staggering number of new customers, which required her to visit a new customer in person to gain a feel for the correct style and design to present to them.

When I turned fifteen, as a birthday gift, Cedro booked a ski holiday at Cortina d' Ampezzo for later in the year. Unfortunately, I fell ill

before the holiday, so Cedro asked his mother to take care of me whilst he and Valentina enjoyed my birthday holiday without me.

That was the last time I saw my parents alive; they died three days later when a massive avalanche came crashing down on top of the villa they had been staying in. The unexpected avalanche took one hundred and seventy-two lives.

My grandmother then became my legal guardian, and she moved me to Vienna, Austria, where my grandmother Sofia lived with her new husband, Jonas Huber, who was a major player in the ruling political party of the country.

Moving from an Italian-speaking country to a German-speaking country would be daunting for most people. For me, not so much. It turns out that although the spoken languages are different, thought translation basically stays the same.

Someone might have been thinking a thought in German, but I could understand it within my head in Italian, Spanish, or English, as I was fluent in all three. Within three months, I had mastered the German language as well.

It was around this time that I started playing with my gifts and messing with my classmates. I could hold multiple lines of conversation in my head at the same time. Often, I would be talking with a teacher, listening to the words from his mouth, and the thoughts from his mind, as well as picking up on the thoughts of the others in the class. I knew all their little secrets and kept them to myself unless someone threatened me.

By the age of eighteen, I had reached my full height of 181 centimetres. My looks attracted the attention of everyone everywhere I went.

Any romance I was involved in only ever lasted a very short time. I discovered early on that most people could not be trusted to be honest;

they would say one thing but think something completely different, and of course, I had access to those thoughts.

When it came to relationships, I had decided they were not for me. I would enjoy a one-night stand here and a dirty weekend away there, but I would not attempt to start any kind of committed long-term relationship.

There was one time, nearing my nineteenth birthday, when a group of four local boys from my university got me very drunk intending to violate me. When I understood what was happening, the building we were in began to vibrate as if an intense earthquake was taking place. All four boys left the room. I locked the door and then slept the alcohol off.

When I met each of the boys involved over the following week, I placed a thought into each person's head: 'I know what you were going to do,' and set it on repeat. The individuals involved avoided me and never spoke to me again. I wonder if that is still repeating in their heads?

My twenty-first birthday marked the day I received full access to my substantial trust fund, making me an instant multimillionaire.

I moved back to my family's house in Italy, where I partied daily for almost two years straight, trying to drown out the voices I was now hearing constantly. I was no longer just hearing thoughts. There were voices from elsewhere talking to me, saying things I could not or would not understand.

I thought I might be going crazy until one hungover Sunday morning, whilst sipping on an iced Bloody Mary by the pool. The pool was set off to a shaded side of the parking platform. I heard the voice of my father calling my name.

Hearing Cedro's voice made all the other voices stop. The space inside my head was quiet for the first time I could remember in my

life. I was experiencing a ringing in my ears, but the constant noise and chatter that had been in the background of my thoughts for my whole life had now stopped.

“Papa, is that you?” I asked, tears forming in my eyes.

Cedro’s voice came again. “It is, Sophia, but you must take note of what you are doing with your mind right at this moment,” he said. “You have switched off all the other voices to listen only to me. You have done this, not me. This power will set you free.” His voice trailed off, and I started to reflect on his words.

I thought about how I had recognised Cedro’s voice, focused my mind to pick up just him, then shut everything else down, like turning down the input channels for a track on a music mixing board.

In my mind, I pictured a mixing board and started moving the slide controllers up and down, hearing unique sounds, voices, and volumes whenever I did.

I placed a label on one slide with my mind, Cedro, and turned up the volume.

“Papa, are you still there?” I asked.

“You were always a brilliant girl,” Cedro’s voice said. “I have a message for you, so please let me talk,” he continued. “Sophia, you must follow your own path now. Go to our family lawyers and request my investment portfolio. Amongst the companies that you now own shares in, there is one named CloudSeed. It is based in New Zealand, and that is where you must go.”

“I love you, Sophia,” Cedro said to me as his voice disappeared from my mind.

The following week, I visited the lawyer’s office and found the information on the company named CloudSeed, as well as a few others that appeared to be very interesting.

I contacted the company and spoke with David Philips, who introduced himself over the phone as the CEO of CloudSeed, New Zealand.

After that conversation, I booked myself on a first-class flight to Auckland, New Zealand, leaving the following day.

On my arrival, as I was organising a self-driving vehicle to take me to the Paparoa Region, in Northland, New Zealand, which was where David had told me CloudSeed New Zealand was based, I heard Cedro's voice return, telling me I must go to Dargaville after I meet with David Philips and wait for further instructions.

I booked the vehicle for the week and proceeded to Paparoa.

Chapter Twelve

Working as a team.

After reporting back to Douglas, Sophia and Janice sit down for food, before Janice leaves the room through the door with the spiral staircase behind it. The door has Main Access Hub written on it. Douglas asks Sophia to take a seat at one of the computer screens to view the training the others have just completed.

The screen, which is a touchscreen, displays five icons. The icons are caricature images of the five of them, detailed enough to tell who is who. After selecting the Michael icon, the screen lists the camera options across the top. There are four main camera view options to choose from, including a zoom button, with the operation details shown beside it.

They had set up the room Michael entered as a close-combat training facility, similar to those used by elite police or military forces. He entered the room with four others and was speaking with one of them while the other three moved out of sight.

Once the conversation finished, Michael began searching the room. He immediately found the three people who had gone out of camera view, as if he knew exactly where they would be. He sparred with

all four for the next ten minutes. By the end of the fight, he was anticipating every move his opponents made, avoiding every strike thrown at him, and then incapacitating each one in a manner that looked like a scene from an old Asian fighting film.

For the next twenty minutes, he located and disarmed booby-traps and bombs around the room, while avoiding sneak attacks from the others.

The video ends, and Sophia taps the caricature image of Apollo.

Apollo had entered the room with three others. This room was narrow, long, and classroom-like. He and one other took seats at one end of the room, while the other two sat at the far end on either side. Each person had a computer tablet in front of them.

After conversing with the man seated next to him for a minute, Apollo activated his tablet, as did the others, and they all began entering information. All four different camera views zoom in to show a close-up of each tablet screen.

Apollo was entering information the same way as the others. Apollo and the person on the far right would both enter 539723228; however, Apollo would add FR. The person seated next to him would enter "A pink popsicle licking rhino," and Apollo would write the same with NR next to it. This went on for five minutes, with Apollo entering the same information as the other three.

They all looked up as the person next to Apollo addressed them. Then Apollo started entering information, and the other three entered exactly what Apollo was entering. The person seated next to Apollo spoke with him for another minute before the two people at the far end began acting strangely.

One of them was brushing his hands over his whole body as if trying to get something off himself. The other collapsed into a heap on the floor, covering her head as if something large was attacking her.

Tara's icon appeared on the screen as she walked through the door into the room where the others were seated. As Sophia, Michael, and Apollo clicked on it, they caught a brief glimpse of Brahma's icon appearing just before the viewing screens for Tara came up.

Tara entered the large empty room with three others. One stayed next to her, one walked to the centre of the room, and the other walked to the far wall.

The very tall man, who stood next to Tara, got her to sit down with him at a small table and began talking with her.

A blank screen appeared, and the words "Fast forwarded to the event" came up. Then, the four camera views reappeared on screen.

After a brief conversation with the man beside her, Tara touched her left shoulder with her right hand while looking at him. She then looked at the woman in the centre of the room and touched the sole of her right foot. After that, she grabbed her left buttock as she looked at the girl against the back wall.

All three then removed a small thumbtack from the areas Tara had indicated.

The man next to Tara leaned towards her and spoke again. He then began crying uncontrollably. The woman in the centre looked very lost and dazed, and then fell over, while the girl at the far wall was jumping and laughing hysterically.

They all stopped at the same time and walked towards Tara. Yelling what looked like 'NOW,' the man beside Tara leapt at her, only to fall to the ground, writhing in pain, clutching his left leg. The woman who had been in the centre fell to the floor, screaming and dragging herself along as if her legs no longer worked. Close to the back wall, the last girl began rolling on the ground, and everyone watching the footage could see her arms, legs, and face blister as though she were being burned.

As soon as Tara saw what was happening to the girl, she ran towards her. The man and woman picked themselves up and rushed over as well. The girl no longer seemed in pain, but the blisters were still visible. Tara grabbed her by the hand and ran her hand over the girl's body, keeping about 50 millimetres away from her skin. The blisters all disappeared.

The video ended, and after looking at one another, as Sophia had implanted "WTF" in Michael and Apollo's minds, they touched the caricature of Brahma.

Brahma entered a room similar to the one Sophia had used, accompanied by one other person. They sat down at a table and began talking. After two minutes, the man with Brahma placed a pot plant, a small wooden ruler, and a small steel ruler on the table in front of him, taken from a box he had carried into the room.

The man was pointing to the pot plant and then at the wooden ruler when the screen went blank again, with the words "Fast forwarded to event" flashing across it.

The four camera views returned just in time to show the life being drawn out of the plant by Brahma's hand, which was positioned about 100 millimetres away.

He then picked up the steel ruler and brought it close to the wooden one, and an electrical arc shot from the end of the steel ruler, burning the wooden ruler.

The screen went blank once more, with the words "Fast forwarded to the event" flashing across it.

When the four camera views came back on, the lights in the room were dimming and flickering as if there were a power brownout, and 3D holograms were just becoming visible.

Lightning arced from Brahma's hand and incinerated a very large man wielding a machete, then a blast of red energy, like the kind seen

from ray guns in fictional space battles, shot from his other hand and disintegrated an unsavoury-looking gunman.

The holograms faded, the lights came back up, and the man who had been in the room with Brahma stood at the computer terminal shaking his head in disbelief.

The screen went blank, and the words “Control and target practice” appeared. When the footage resumed, Brahma was blasting energy beams and arcing lightning bolts at 3D holographic targets near the back wall of the room.

Once the targets were removed, Brahma’s immense power was evident in the scorch marks on the back wall.

Sophia, Apollo, and Michael, having now watched everyone’s training, relaxed together with beverages, snacks, and conversation until Brahma and Tara had also reviewed all the training.

“Now that you have viewed each other’s abilities, we shall move back to the hub,” says Douglas, walking towards the door with ‘Main Access Hub’ written above it.

They all enter the main hub via door number 7, as Douglas gestures for them to take seats at the back of the room. The door with the number 9 on it opens, and the fourteen people who had been with them earlier enter the room and take seats in front of them.

Douglas addresses the room. “Both Sophia and Brahma have displayed the ability to manifest power that affects our physical realm. Apollo and Tara have displayed abilities that affect a person’s perception, and Michael has displayed precognitive abilities.”

“I would like the group leaders who were with Apollo, Tara, and Michael to come to the front and give us all a debrief,” Douglas orders.

The first person to make his way to the front of the room is a short, fat, balding man, who had been with Apollo. He begins speaking just as he reaches the front. “Apollo first displayed the ability to view what

we were seeing in our minds, with distance and light manipulation not proving to be a distraction.” He states.

“He then displayed his ability to implant information in the form of pictures into our minds, regardless of distance and light,” he says in the same tone as before.

He then inhales deeply and says in a worried, fearful voice, “Apollo then displayed that he was able to alter what we were seeing with our eyes. I was blinded, Dave was being attacked by hundreds of spiders and Sue was about to be eaten by what she described as, to use her words, ‘a fucking huge dragon’.”

The man gives a worried look to Douglas and walks back to his seat.

A very tall man, well over two metres tall, walks to the front. “Hi everyone, I’m Jacob, and I had the privilege of working with Tara earlier today,” he says in an extremely jovial voice.

“Tara’s first task was to ascertain where each of us in the room was feeling pain, which we inflicted on ourselves by inserting small thumbtacks into areas of our body. The test was conducted over different distances from her, as well as with sound waves, some of which were outside the standard human audible range, being emitted to create interference,” Jacob states, still in a jovial tone. “She identified each location without difficulty.”

Jacob continues, “Tara’s next task was to ascertain what level of emotion she could project onto others. Again, this was conducted over different distances, with non-standard sound waves being emitted. As you would have seen from the visual footage, the experiment compelled me to feel overwhelmingly sad, put Linda into a drunken stupor, and made Angela feel euphorically happy.”

“The final test was to assess what level of pain Tara was able to inflict on others,” Jacob says, now in a serious tone of voice.

“It felt as though my left thigh bone had snapped and protruded through my thigh muscle. Linda experienced the feeling that all the bones in her legs and lower back had been crushed, and Angela experienced the sensation that she was being burned.”

“I can tell you it felt real, and Angela’s skin even blistered as if it was being burned, even though we knew this was only in our minds,” Jacob informs in the same serious tone.

Jacob’s voice reverts to its jovial self. “I watched Tara treat Angela’s blisters afterward; she ensured we felt relaxed and comfortable after the ordeal.”

Jacob walks back to his seat as a much shorter, older but extremely fit-looking Asian male walks to the front.

“We assessed Michael on his ability to locate threats first, and he completed this task to my satisfaction,” he states with the dry, authoritative voice of a career military man.

“We then assessed his close-quarters combat effectiveness. In all my years of close-quarters battles, I have not met his equal,” he continues. “We were unable to land any damaging blows on our opponent, and he was fully aware of the attack formations my group was putting into play. In my assessment, Michael’s combat style is unbeatable.”

“Michael then demonstrated his ability to search, clear, and make safe a combat zone successfully,” the man continues with a tone of disbelief. “He even made safe my dead-man switch, which until today had never been successfully done.”

As this man walks back to his seat, Douglas makes his way to the front again.

Douglas addresses everyone in the room once more. “Now I guess it’s time for our combat simulation. Please prepare yourselves. Militia, through door nine, and you five,” he says, looking at Michael, Apollo, Sophia, Tara, and Brahma, “let’s go through door eight first.”

Walking through door number eight, they find themselves again in a long white corridor lit by down-lights in the ceiling. This one descends on a right-hand turn. At the end is another door with a biometric scan pad and no handle. Douglas places his left thumb on it and says, "We need to enter this room one at a time" as the door slides open.

One by one, they all place their left thumbs on the pad next to the door. It opens for each person individually, and they each walk through.

Everyone is now in this brightly lit room, set up as a workshop with an array of different machines, both floor and bench mounted, tools and implements in toolboxes on shelves, parts and materials placed near each bench, and six mannequins on the far side of the room dressed in what can only be described as combat suits, spacesuits or maybe, super suits.

Douglas walks them all to the front of the mannequins and says, "These will offer you some basic protection. They have been constructed with a new lightweight armoured material and are powered by a small version of Toto's gel battery technology."

The suits are all white, with areas that look to have some slight padding. Uncovered areas, where boots and gloves should be, show a gap between the suit's legs and the footwear soles. A thin metal rod runs from the end of the suit leg at the rear, down to connect it to the sole. A similar situation is evident at the end of each sleeve, where you would expect gloves to be. The sleeves end with a bulbous protrusion on the upper side of the sleeve, where someone's hands would exit. The protrusion is situated where the rear of the wearer's hand would be. There is also a thick collar sticking up about 150 millimetres at the back of the shoulder area.

Douglas undresses the first mannequin, hands the two parts of the suit to Michael, and directs him to one of the changing rooms behind the mannequins.

He then stands the remaining four in front of a mannequin each and tells them to take the suits and change into them in the other changing rooms.

The internal structural frame and dense outer shell panelling make the suits slightly rigid, requiring some effort to get into. The two parts of the suit comprise a lower half, which has two panels that cover a side of each of the wearer's butt. To insert their legs, the wearer pivots these panels up and out to the side; then, they push the butt plates down and back to lock them in place. The upper half opens at the rear, each side moving on a pivot action centred in the suit's front. After the wearer inserts their arms, holding them straight ahead, they must move both arms backward as if stretching; a mechanism then locks the two halves together at the rear. It is a good thing that each changing room has detailed instructions being broadcast on a monitor for each person.

Once they are all suited up, Douglas turns on a large screen that lies flat on the surface of the closest workbench and tells them to watch the instructional media that is to follow as he heads to another area in the workshop.

The screen flickers to life as a 3D hologram displays the suit they are all wearing. Then, a female voice talks. "Welcome to this presentation for the Kinetically Enhanced Environment Protection Suit, which the Toto marketing division has abbreviated to K.E.E.P.S., and simply pronounced as keeps."

"Toto Industries International has developed this suit to assist in protecting peacekeeping and military personnel in war zones, urban confrontations, emergency life-threatening situations, hazardous environments, space exploration and other non-atmospheric activities."

“Manufactured from Toto Industries’ latest blend of natural Nano fibres and tungsten carbide technology, with kinetically charged cybernetic skeletal and muscle enhancement systems, this allows the user to remain majorly invulnerable to close-quarter weaponry, ballistic projectiles, blast damage from explosives, as well as enhanced strength and reaction times.”

A cover on the left forearm of the hologram glides back to reveal a screen underneath. “The touchscreen control panel located here allows the user easy access to activate a hostile environment shield in case of gas, low oxygen, or other adverse conditions.”

From the collar on the back of the holographic suit, a helmet-shaped cover abruptly erupts, encompassing the back and side areas of the head. It then seals with a flexible glass-like bubble where the helmet finishes around the collarbone area of the suit, then tints so the wearer is no longer visible.

The list titled “Other Enhancements” replaces the dissipating holograph on the screen.

Apollo reads: camouflage, energy absorption-redistribution, and adhesive mechanisms before Douglas turns the screen off.

“I’m just going to insert your suits’ power cells,” Douglas says as he slips open a small panel on Tara’s right-side hip. “Then we have one more stop before going to room 9.”

After the power cell is inserted and Douglas closes the panel, the suit activates with a flash of green light in thin lines around the padded areas of Tara’s suit. They all watch as thin white rods appear from the protuberances at the end of each sleeve atop Tara’s petite hands.

Five rods on each hand grow to the exact length of each of her fingers, then, as if the rods are made of the liquid metal Mercury, but white, they envelop each finger, then cover her palm to seal back to the lower part of the suit’s sleeve.

Looking down at her feet, they see that a similar action has taken place there as well.

As they had each climbed into their K.E.E.P.S., each one of them was aware that their feet had no covering. But looking down at Tara's feet now, they see a perfectly fitted boot, the same colour as her suit.

After inserting power cells into the other suits, Douglas allows them a little playtime to get acquainted with their new toys, providing answers to their questions. After which, he leads them all back to the main hub, up the spiral staircase, through to the opposite end of the space where they had viewed each other's training videos, and through an unimpressive door on the far end of the space.

There is a very short passage this time; they all walk straight ahead to another door 20 metres from the entry.

On entering the room, they see it is set up as a monitoring or control room, not only for this site but, from the images on the screens, for sites all over the world.

The approximately 30 people within the room are seated behind large table-mounted monitors carrying out various tasks.

Douglas walks the group to a large desk in the centre of the room and introduces them. "This is Steve and Cameron," gesturing to two men seated at the desk. Steve is an older, jovial-looking gentleman with a grey beard, and Cameron is in his early thirties, clean-shaven except for a thinly shaped dark moustache on his top lip.

"They are the people who will be coordinating your up-and-coming missions. All reporting will be done via the communication channels they set up for each of you. Their task is to supply information on the areas you will be entering, as well as intelligence on any threats," Douglas concludes.

Steve stands, walks around the desk, and addresses the group. "It is a pleasure finally meeting you all. My team and I have prepared for

this day for the past three years,” Steve said quietly and politely. “We have many resources out in the field, so to assist us from an operational standpoint, we have given your team the call sign, Namuh. This allows everyone quick recognition of your team.”

“Today you will finish your training with a combat simulation of both 3D holograms and real opponents,” Steve continues.

“The K.E.E.P.S. will protect you and your opponents from serious physical harm, but I would like to request both Sophia and Brahma to dial down the output of your energy abilities. Apollo, Tara, if you would use your abilities in short bursts only, please. We have instructed the team to react to the bursts you give them as if they were ongoing,” Steve concludes.

Cameron strikes a few keys on the keyboard in front of him. The Namuh’s K.E.E.P.S. light up with a narrow fluorescent blue light around the padded areas for a few seconds, then dim again, and each of their helmets activates.

“Do you read me?” comes Cameron’s voice inside Michael’s helmet.

“Yes, I do,” replies Michael.

“Your call sign is Mystic, which is short for the Mystic Warrior, which is the nickname that the team has come up with for you, based on the abilities you have shown,” says the voice. “I will be providing you with intel during this mission. Refer to me as Control.”

They set Apollo’s call sign as Eye, short for Minds-Eye. Sophia’s is Vibe, short for vibration. Tara’s is Sense, short for Sensation, and Brahma’s is Vid, short for Vidyut, which is the Hindu name for the god of lightning.

Cameron and the team had been toying with the name ‘Power Current’ for Brahma, but it was thought that the call sign ‘Curry’ may offend him, so they discarded that notion.

On the inside of their helmets, they found they had a HUD, a heads-up display, where they could view each other's location.

They each slip open the control panels on their left forearms at the same time and touch an intercom icon Douglas had shown them. This now enables them to talk amongst themselves.

They receive the control operator through their right ear, and they receive the intercom through their left ear.

The Namuh leave the room and head back to the main hub before entering door 9. Michael says in an authoritative voice, "I will go through first; my precognitive abilities should help us avoid any surprise attacks."

They open door 9 and walk inside, entering a similar room to the one Michael had gone into earlier that day, only five times larger. Each of them is now receiving instructions from Control.

"Vibe, Vid, move forward. Check your heads-up display for heat signatures." Cameron's voice came into Sophia and Brahma's right ears.

As they move forward, their displays show several red dots that they identify as enemies. The dots are positioned behind a wall that the Namuh are approaching.

The display does not block their normal vision; it is more like an overlay, similar to how you view the road through the windscreen of a vehicle where bugs have been splattering for half an hour, slightly annoying but workable.

Sophia feels pressure above her left breast, just below her shoulder. She looks down in time to see a projectile fall to the ground. It has not hurt her as the material that the K.E.E.P.S. are made from has absorbed most of the impact and distributed it into the kinetic power pads around the suit for later use if necessary.

She looks up and to her left to see the barrel of a sniper's rifle protruding from the top of a three-story structure.

Sophia cups her right hand and points it in the direction of the rifle. The rifle comes flying toward her; she stops it in mid-air three metres from her, then allows it to fall to the ground.

Brahma points his hand, palm down, fingers apart, and lets arcs of lightning fly from his fingertips.

Initially, the lightning forms what looks to be a ball of arcing electricity around his hand, but with a little more focus, Brahma sends five separate arcs of lightning through the wall to give a brief jolt to five of the enemies on the other side. On the display inside their helmets, they see the five red dots turn grey.

"I thought I was going to have to throw that ball," says Brahma, over their private comm. "The suit glove is conductive as well. I needed to refocus the energy flow once it passed from my hand to the glove."

"You keep on proving just how good you are with those fingers, Bramah," Tara jokes.

"Come on, you guys, let's get serious. I don't think we are supposed to be playing around." Michael says in his best authoritative voice, all the while smiling at Tara's jab.

Sophia runs quickly to the wall and takes a quick look behind it to see two more enemies. They look like holograms and are not real. She makes a fist and punches around the corner; two more red dots become grey on their displays.

Michael then leads the team deeper into the room, locates, and disarms three booby-traps. He also locates two more snipers that he leaves for Tara to deal with.

Tara gives one sniper the feeling of hyperthermia and makes the other feel the grief of losing the closest member of his family, both just for an instant. The two snipers both touch a surrender icon on

the control panel of their own K.E.E.P.S. This turns the red dots, indicating them as active, to grey as well.

Apollo blinds four more would-be attackers as Brahma disables an armoured attack vehicle bearing down on the team by shorting out the electric drive motors and giving the driver a little shock.

Michael was about to physically take down two guards when Tara made them feel so tired that they needed to sleep. They both drop to the ground like puppets having their strings cut.

On their displays, the group sees four more red dots inside one building.

“Apollo, can you see through their eyes and implant those images in me?” asks Michael.

This was something new, but not at all difficult once Apollo attempted it. He could implant the view that each of the four people had of their surroundings directly into Michael’s mind.

“Sophia, can you please knock on the door for me?” Michael requests.

Sophia makes a fist and punches at the air toward the door. Being made of wood, the door splinters apart as Michael runs into the room.

Firstly, using one finger on a pressure point on the rear right-hand side of the neck, Michael incapacitates the first opponent inside. He then dives into a roll to get to the back of the room where his next opponent is positioned.

As Michael stands up from the roll, he grabs the weapon from the hands of the next opponent and knocks him to the ground in one continuous movement, from dislodging the weapon from his opponent’s hands to striking the side of the helmet with the butt of the weapon.

By this time, Apollo is inside the heads of the last two opponents, where he installs an image of the building collapsing around them.

They are both on the ground, covering their heads until Apollo ceases his projection, and then they both touch the surrender icon on the control panel of their K.E.E.P.S.

“Okay. That’s it for the day. Wait there and I will come to you,” says Douglas into the team’s left ears.

Douglas congratulates the Namuh on their teamwork as he walks them to another elevator at the back of the combat room.

Douglas and the Namuh all enter the large elevator. Douglas pushes the top button on the control panel. The doors close, then they feel the elevator rise. With their helmets now having receded into their suits’ collars, the Namuh are talking excitedly amongst themselves when the elevator door opens, and Mary is there to greet them. The elevator has brought them to a back room inside Douglas’s house.

Chapter Thirteen

Moving

All five of them struggled when changing out of the K.E.E.P.S., as their sweat was causing the material to cling to their skin. Michael had already come up with a possible solution for the problem and decided to bring it up with Douglas after a shower.

They met in the dining room again for dinner after showering and changing into some casual clothes that Mary had laid out for each of them on their beds.

The meal again was glorious. There were dishes from Cambodia, Africa, and Argentina. Mary informed everyone about the origins of the dishes and subtly hinted that they would soon travel to these places.

The dish from Argentina was named Provoleta. It was made with pungent, sharp, sliced discs of cheese topped with chilli flakes and herbs, and then grilled. The nearly melted cheese was served crisp and slightly caramelised on the outside, gooey and smoky on the inside. It was topped off with a spoonful of chimichurri, which is a tangy, garlic salsa that is famous in Argentina.

The dish from Africa was Lowombo, named after the method of preparing the meat. The chicken had been combined with a rich peanut-based sauce, and then steamed within a banana leaf, leaving the meat tender and extremely flavoursome. This dish was also served with Matoke, which was made from steamed and then mashed plantain bananas. It had a starchy consistency, and almost had a banana flavour, but not quite; the taste was slightly more savoury.

The dish from Cambodia was fish amok, which was diced fillets of freshwater fish that were smothered in coconut milk, eggs, fish sauce, and palm sugar. Kroeung, which was a paste made from pounded spices and other ingredients, was added to create a delicate creamy curry.

Everyone was in a happy and energetic mood. They were all excited to try the new food, and whoa, it was good.

The conversation around the table was mostly regarding what they had learned about themselves and each other, about what they now could do, and speculating on what may be possible for them in the future.

After the meal, Douglas walks the group to the room directly opposite the one with the elevator. Inside is a large round table in the centre of the room, eight black high-back chairs around the table, a metallic briefcase in front of 5 of the chairs, and bookcases lining all the walls of this room except for the far wall, on which a very large screen is mounted.

Douglas directs each of them to a specific chair, and as they sit down, they understand why.

Each of the briefcases has an emblem on the handle: a tick or checkmark indicating something true or correct: for Michael, an eye; for Apollo, an emblem resembling internet access on a computer; for

Sophia, two people with an arrow from one to the other; for Tara, and a lightning bolt for Brahma.

“Now, before we get started with the business of business, I have news of Patricia,” says Douglas, standing at the end of the table with both his hands resting upon it.

“She was born on Mars, which is why she is in a Grav Rehab. She has been there for the last month, attempting to build her muscle and bone mass enough to allow her to handle Earth’s gravity. Her doctors tell me that she is making tremendous progress, but do not see her being able to join us for at least another eight weeks,” Douglas states.

“When she is ready, I will have her brought here for training first. Find out what she is capable of, then we shall get her into the field with the rest of you,” Douglas concludes.

Douglas notes that both Tara and Sophia are about to ask more questions, but he holds up his hand in a gesture to indicate stop, then says, “That is all the information I have so far. I have been unable to talk with her.”

“Now, before each of you is a case, each has a biometric lock next to the handle on the left-hand side. We have already coded them to your left-hand thumbprint,” Douglas says as he takes a seat at the far end of the table.

“If you will all please open the briefcases in front of you, I will take you through the contents while we wait for my legal team to arrive. There are some employment documents that you will all need to sign,” Douglas instructs.

They all open their cases, and then Douglas explains the contents. “As you will see, there is an envelope on top. Please open it and place the contents on the table.”

They all follow his instructions and empty the contents onto the table. There is a set of vehicle keys, a credit card with the name Toto

International on it, another smaller envelope with what appears to be an address written on it, and something bulky inside it.

“When you get to your first destination, I have arranged for you each to have an individual apartment. The keys and access cards are in the small envelope with the address on it. You will each have access to a vehicle of your own. We will cover your living expenses and any other additional costs via the credit card,” Douglas says to the bemused group.

“When and where are we going?” Brahma asks, concern etched across his face. “I can’t just leave my business, you know.”

“I have a solution for you, and Apollo, if you need it,” replies Douglas, then smiles. “Brahma, I will introduce you to an individual later this evening, whom I believe to be the perfect CEO for your company, whilst you take a well-deserved rest, or at least that is what you will tell your staff.”

“No, you do not understand,” Brahma states in a rather upset manner. “I am the only one in my company who can assess the energy losses from the power grids due to my gifts.”

Douglas smiles again and says, “Brahma, you can still do the work if you want to. After you meet with the person, I will introduce to you tonight. You will be able to make an educated decision.”

“Apollo, have you thought about what you want to do with your business?” Douglas asks.

“My business is just myself, Douglas, so I can shut up shop tonight if I need to,” Apollo replies.

“One thing I would like for you all to understand is that you are each to be paid two million dollars per year whilst you are on mission with this team. That is why we are waiting for my legal team. You do not need another job, but if you would like to keep your companies

running, I will support you in that decision,” states Douglas to the group.

The door to the room opens. Steve enters, escorting two gentlemen dressed in suits, Endang, the doctor from the clinic who had worked with Apollo, and an attractive young Indian lady.

Douglas introduces Brahma to the Indian lady. “Brahma, I would like you to meet Chetana. She has worked with me for the last three years in India, as my CEO for Toto India. I will leave the two of you to talk.”

“Apollo, you remember Endang from the clinic?” Douglas asks.

“Yes, of course,” replies Apollo.

“Endang has also studied massage therapy, and I thought you may consider letting her run your business for you. That way, your clients will be looked after, and Endang can manage your business until you return. You should be able to allow Endang’s higher self access to some of your healing potential via your higher self, and I will pay her salary,” Douglas suggests. “I’ll let you two talk it over,” he says as he walks back to the others at the desk.

Douglas and Steve help the two gentlemen in suits to organise the documentation for each person in the group to read and sign. Douglas also instructs them to prepare the documentation for Brahma and Apollo. Should they require it.

Whilst Brahma and Apollo are talking with the ladies, they each receive information from their higher selves regarding the state of the planet if they fail with their intended goals, this helps them decide that Douglas’s idea of appointing the ladies to run their companies is a good one. They understand that the work they now need to focus on will ensure they still have a business, and a world in which to run that business.

The fact that one of Toto's new inventions, which Chetana has just shown to Brahma, can now read energy movement and loss when pointed at any circuit, makes Brahma's power-tracking abilities redundant. This also means the company can now be expanded, as it is no longer limited to Brahma's abilities.

The lawyers take everyone through the documentation, starting with the change of directors for Apollo's and Brahma's companies. After the lawyers complete their paperwork, Douglas invites Chetana and Endang to join everyone for breakfast the next day, and Steve escorts the ladies out of the room.

Everyone understands they are to be employed by Toto International as advisors. Their official role is to train the new staff for the healing clinics that are to be opened soon.

This is a cover. Their primary mission will be to locate, teach, and train people like themselves in each part of the world to which they are sent, and to act as a task force, eradicating any influences actively interfering with humanity's needed new direction.

They are each given a new bank account with accompanying debit applications to download onto their communicators, along with bank codes. Logging on via the secured computer, also built into each briefcase, they each confirm access to an account with two million dollars.

The lawyers leave the room just as Steve returns. Everyone sits down, except for Steve, who stands in front of the large screen on the far wall.

Steve picks up the screen controller from a nearby pedestal and says, "OK, now you get to see where you are all going, and some of the challenges you may be up against." Steve presses a button on the controller.

The screen lights up with a map of Uganda on it. "Our first international clinic officially opens in two weeks, in Hoima City, which

is about 200 kilometres northwest of Kampala, Uganda's capital, and largest city."

He then uses the large screen behind him to bring up some pictures of Hoima City, the new facility that has been constructed, the location, the layout, and some of the key staff they will be advising and working with. He shows them a map of where the clinic is in conjunction with the apartment complexes they will be living in.

What follows are charts and graphs depicting crime rates in and around the city, sales of illegal drugs, weapons, stolen items, brutal crimes, and human trafficking.

The last images to appear on the screen are of what look like military troops in their hundreds, along with seven close-up headshots of different men.

"These are the leaders of three distinct groups operating within the broader area you will be entering," Steve informs them, as he uses the laser pointer on the controller to indicate all seven headshots. "There are others, but from intelligence gathered over the last three years, these are the major players," Steve concludes.

Douglas stands and walks to the screen as Steve takes a seat.

Douglas begins, "You will use your internal guidance for these projects. Your higher selves will guide each of you on the appropriate force that will be required to eradicate these groups and allow the community to continue its development uninterrupted, moving forward on a fresh path."

"You need to liaise with Steve daily for up-to-date information on these groups, the staff you will train at the clinic, and the patients who require treatment," he continues.

"This Friday, so in two days, you will all travel to Auckland Airport by 10.30 in the morning to board a Toto International corporate

jet, which will fly you to Hoima City,” Douglas ends, adding, “Any questions?”

The Namuh each think.

Sophia thinks, of course there are questions, having only met each other a few mornings ago. We pulled up to a stranger’s house, where somehow we each knew we were supposed to be. But she can not think of any questions she needs answers for. Her path was clear. She needs to do this.

Michael, still systematically processing everything that has taken place over the last few days, gaining knowledge of abilities he had not been aware of, quickly understanding why he is on Earth.

They had discovered they were destined to work together to assist humanity and the planet, even before they were born.

Nobody asked questions. They each understand and accept that the path before them is now the only option for them.

“Your evening tea is ready in the study,” Mary communicates to them.

The following morning, a car arrives with Endang and Chetana at seven in the morning. Steve escorts Endang and Chetana into the dining room as everyone, already showered and dressed, enters.

After breakfast, Brahma and Chetana conduct video conferences to introduce Chetana to Brahma’s administration, development, and maintenance staff. Brahma also introduces her to a few of his largest and closest clients.

During these conferences, Brahma understands Douglas’s reasons for suggesting her for the role. She has answers to most of the questions that arise, showing she is a perceptive listener and able to think on her feet to reach amicable decisions for all parties.

They have concluded everything by lunch, and Brahma finally feels comfortable letting go of the reins of his company.

Apollo and Endang have meditated together after breakfast. Apollo has been able to transfer a small portion of his healing knowledge and abilities via a link that their higher selves have made. Afterwards, they both go through Apollo's schedule, talk about some of the ongoing treatments he has for certain customers, contact a few of the sports physicians who keep Apollo's number on speed dial for the sports teams they consult to, and then discuss what goals Apollo has for his business in the future.

They finish around ten in the morning, and Endang then walks over to the clinic to start what will be her last shift for a while.

Sitting down for lunch, the group notices that Douglas is absent from the room.

Mary communicates, "Please enjoy your meal. Douglas will be joining us momentarily."

Tara looks at Mary and, intuitively, asks, "Where exactly are you returning to?"

Mary returns Tara's gaze and then glances around at everyone else as they all look at her. "I am to return to the Ethereal Plane, as my task here is complete. You have accomplished everything that your higher selves demanded of you up to this point," Mary communicates to them all.

Just then, Douglas walks through the door into the dining room. "I see I am lucky enough not to have missed your departure, Mary," Douglas says as he takes a seat at the table.

"What we are about to witness is Mary's transition from the Earth Plane to the Ethereal Plane," Douglas states. "I have witnessed this on a few rare occasions in my life, when helping others find their way back to where they belong, but I have never seen an angel transition."

Douglas conveys his gratitude, thanks, and love to Mary through the look in his eyes as he gazes upon her, the warmth in his heart that

Mary can sense, and the love emanating from his higher self, which, of course, Mary can see.

Everyone sits perfectly still, in utter amazement, as an extremely bright white light, in the form of an oval, appears directly behind Mary. As Mary's being disappears into the light, everyone at the table feels the joy, excitement, and love streaming from Mary for the place she is going. The light fades. They all look at one another with tears of joy flowing down their cheeks, smiles on their faces, and love in their hearts.

"That was the single most joyous feeling I have ever experienced," blurts Tara.

They all nod in agreement, but not another word is spoken for the next five minutes. They all sit still, enjoying the wonderful feelings left with them from this experience.

Douglas is the first to speak. "The first time I experienced that, I was about thirty-five years old, which is many years ago now. One of my dear friends had a lost spirit hanging around her aura."

"I asked the spirit if it needed help, asked my higher self for guidance, then, to my surprise, the gate opened behind the spirit, just as it did for Mary," Douglas says, tears still flowing down his cheeks.

Douglas wipes the tears from his face and looks at each person sitting at the table "The reason you have all been allowed to witness what has just taken place is to put things in perspective for each of you," Douglas says with a firm voice.

Douglas continues, still firm. "You will all be put in positions soon where you may be required to kill human beings."

His voice softens slightly. "Your higher selves need you to understand exactly what you may be killing. They are people who have been corrupted and have no hope of connecting with their higher selves

on the Earth Plane, or people who will not connect with their higher selves in time to stop certain catastrophes from taking place.”

Douglas’s face and voice both lift this time. “In effect, you will release that person’s higher self from the Earth Plane, allowing them to rejoin the divine cosmos or be reborn for another life.”

“Do you all understand what I’ve explained?” asks Douglas.

They all nod in agreement, looking at each other and Douglas.

The group spends the rest of the day training in their K.E.E.P.S., organising the return of hire vehicles left in and around Dargaville, making calls to family and friends, and ensuring they have everything packed for their departure the following day.

Chapter Fourteen

Toto Corporate One

It was just after 7.30 a.m. on Friday when the Toto Electric Aviation Bus, in self-flying mode, landed on the driveway of the house. Everyone had woken by 5 a.m., showered, dressed, finished packing for the trip, and prepared their breakfast, as Mary was no longer present, and they were ready to leave on time.

Douglas gave each person a very strong hug and told them all to ‘take care’ and that he would be in touch soon. He also said that if they needed any questions answered by him, they should simply inform Steve or Cameron that they needed to speak with him.

It was about a one-hour flight to Auckland Airport, and as everyone was so excited about the start of their first mission, the group did nothing but talk about all their experiences over the last few days for the entire trip.

On arrival at the airport, Cameron met them at the aviation bus, which had landed at a private hangar, owned by Toto Corporation, of course. Three New Zealand immigration officers and two New Zealand customs officers, seated at two temporary tables just inside the entrance, greeted them as they stepped through the hangar door.

Cameron handed each immigration officer a red A4-sized envelope, then gave a white A4-sized envelope to one customs officer and a blue one to the other.

“Apollo Davidson,” said one of the immigration officers after opening the first envelope. He motioned for Apollo to step forward.

As Apollo approached, he could now see that the officer was looking at what appeared to be his passport, though his own was still in his pocket. This one had a red cover, and Apollo could make out the words ‘Toto Corporation Diplomatic Mission’ embossed across the top.

The officer stamped the first blank page, handed the passport to Apollo, and directed him to the other table for customs.

At the customs table, the officer with the white envelope took Apollo’s passport, matched his name with the declaration documents from the envelope, made Apollo read the documents, and then had him sign them. The officer who had received the blue envelope carried the same process out.

Once everyone had passed through immigration and customs, they all boarded the flight capsule.

The flight capsule is a lightweight alloy cylinder, slightly longer but about the same height as the old-style twenty-foot shipping containers that had once been used for transporting ocean-bound cargo. The introduction of flight capsules had removed the need for boarding areas at airports five years earlier, as passengers could now be seated directly for their flights before the aircraft arrived.

This particular capsule was fitted with six luxury long-haul flight pods, allowing the traveller to sit, swivel, recline, or lie flat like a bed. There was a flight service module at the front and an ablution module at the rear. The sunlight reflects off the polished outside surface as it sits in front of the hangar, waiting for the passengers to load. The

roll-up entry port on the side closest to the hangar door is open, ready for them to enter.

A large forklift-like machine lifts the flight capsule after it's loaded and sealed; the machine picks up the capsule at one end with a clamping tool that completely seals around a reinforced section. It then inserts the capsule into one wing of the enormous aircraft waiting on the tarmac 50 metres from the hangar. The aircraft is too large to fit inside.

This was yet another Toto design solution for the aviation world, created in response to the rise of radical groups attempting to take over international flights mid-air. Toto eliminated this risk by sealing passengers, along with a robotic flight attendant, inside a flight capsule that was entirely separate from the flight crew and control pod. If needed, the capsule could eject and land safely using self-deploying parachutes; alternatively, the captain could induce sleep within the capsule using the climate control system.

The aircraft's design resembled the shape of a massive boomerang, with four powerful engines: one near the end of each wing and one on either side of the control pod, which sat at the front centre of the wing.

They were nicknamed the Toto wing, as they looked like two thick wings rather than the old-style long, cylindrical aircraft with skinny wings sticking out on each side. Each Toto wing could safely carry forty flight capsules.

The economy flight capsule could carry 33 passengers, business class would hold 18 to 20, and first class would hold up to 10 people maximum.

This Toto wing was from corporate. It had two electric turbine props inserted into each side of the wing, halfway along each, allowing for vertical take-off and landing.

As the passengers felt the aircraft lift into the air, the captain's voice came over the in-flight communicator. "Welcome aboard, Toto Corporate One. Soon, when we reach our thrusting altitude, you will feel a small amount of G-force as we accelerate to the speed of sound, 1235 kilometres per hour or thereabouts." His voice was pleasant, calm, and very youthful-sounding.

"Our flight time will be just over 11 hours. Feel free to stretch your legs, exercise, sleep, work, or enjoy the in-flight entertainment," he concluded.

Each pod had an entertainment and communication terminal, which was connected via a pivot arm to allow for a multitude of positions for passenger use.

Michael had taken the seat directly opposite Sophia upon boarding the flight capsule. He swivels his seat so that he is now looking at her.

"Sophia," Michael starts inquisitively, "since we have 11 hours to kill, do you mind if we ask each other questions to get to know one another better?"

"I think that is a wonderful idea, Michael," Sophia replies, as she too swivels her seat so it faces him. "I think we should all do this, as none of us knows each other's past very much at all."

Everyone swivels their seats so they are all facing one another, even Cameron, who is seated next to Brahma. All six people look at one another, smile, then everyone looks to Cameron and unanimously says, "You first, Cameron, tell us about you."

"If you insist," Cameron replies, as he uses the thumb and forefinger on his left hand to stroke the thin moustache sitting above his top lip. "I am originally from Andorra, a small country bordered by both Spain and France."

Cameron's accent is a mixture of European, Australian, and New Zealand. It is easy to understand, but no one would ever be able

to guess where he was from. Cameron continues, "Douglas rescued me when I was sixteen from a large crime syndicate operating in the capital, Andorra la Vella. I was hacking corporate cloud-based systems for the syndicate when one of Toto's computer crime stopper teams brought the complete operation down in a ten-minute sting."

"Aside from being scared out of my mind, you can imagine a kid of sixteen being bundled up by a security team, then handed off to the police. I was also impressed by their ability to gather enough information about our operation to shut us down so quickly and efficiently," Cameron states. This memory recall triggering a grin to form on his face.

"Anyway, once the police had me in a cell, Douglas visited me. The visit was more like an interview. He offered to drop any charges against me and a job with Toto International if I promised to work with him for at least one year," Cameron says with his grin growing into a smile now showing in his eyes.

"That was 15 years ago. At first, I was apprehensive about the type of work Douglas had me doing. I thought he was crazy. Once I understood his motivations, I was all in."

"Since then, I've primarily worked in Australia and New Zealand. I fly home every year to visit my family in Andorra with my wife and two children from New Zealand. I think that's me," Cameron finishes.

"Andorra is such a beautiful place," states Apollo. "I have never been outside New Zealand, but as you were talking, somehow I accessed your memories and was able to view how you see it."

As Cameron had been talking, Apollo experienced the memories that Cameron was recalling from his mind, as though they were memories of his own. Unaware of why this took place made Apollo a little uneasy.

Unannounced, a service robot rolls out through an automatic sliding door that has opened in the centre of the service module, located at the front of the capsule. “Hi everyone, I hope you are all enjoying your flight with us today. My name is Chrissy, and I am your attendant for this flight,” Chrissy says in a sweet voice with a thick New Zealand accent. The robot is the size of a kitchen rubbish bin, has eight appendages protruding evenly around its body, and moves by rolling on six motorised balls affixed to its underside.

“Before I relay your in-flight information, I would like to try out a joke on you.” Chrissy’s voice increases mildly in volume and becomes robotic. “What do you call a witch at the beach?” Chrissy waits three seconds for a response. When none is forthcoming, Chrissy says, “A sandwich. Ha, ha, ha.”

Not missing a beat, Chrissy begins. “There is an open bar on the left-hand side of the service module that you may help yourself to or simply hail me with the call button positioned on the right-hand control panel of your entertainment terminal,” Chrissy continues. “You may also select your in-flight meals and snacks via your terminals. You can get a sandwich. Ha, ha.”

Chrissy then turns and re-enters the service module.

The group spent the next five minutes working out how to use the terminals and discussing how bad Chrissy’s joke was before returning to their conversation, detailing more of their history.

Tara explains, “I was born to an English father and Indonesian mother in Jakarta, Indonesia. My father held a managerial position at a large accounting firm from when I was born until I turned ten.”

“My time in Indonesia was wonderful. It still feels like home to me. I miss it very much.” Tara relays to the group, a look of sadness behind her eyes.

Each noticed the look disappear as she says, "Then daddy moved us to Milton Keynes, England."

"It wasn't so bad, I suppose. My mother taught me how to cook extremely well. I think that brought us closer." Tara sits still for a moment, her face taking on a distant look, before continuing. "My parents had me committed to a psychiatric facility for two years because of some extreme mood swings I was having. They medicated me for years, with the doctors unable to determine what was wrong with me."

"I went through all of that because I did not know how to make the spiritual connection needed to supply the answers I required." Realisation dawns on her as she makes this statement.

She tells them of the horror she witnessed at Glastonbury and explains that it was a major factor in her decision to backpack around the world, starting in New Zealand. Tara also informs them she had always found it difficult to build relationships due to her internal emotional turmoil.

Brahma informs the group that he was born into an enormous family in Coimbatore, South India, and that his father built the family house by hand so that it floats when it floods.

He tells them how he had always been able to see electrical faults within most equipment and routinely fixed up junk to sell and earn money. This led to him graduating from the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, with degrees in electrical engineering and physics.

Brahma also informs them about the work he did for the Toto Corporation during his university years and that he now owns and runs an international advisory company assessing power losses and theft across vast power networks around the world.

Sophia enlightens the group that she was born an only child to a family in Cosenza, Italy. She describes their family home in detail, how

her father had it designed with the best environmental technologies available at the time of construction.

Her face almost displayed the emotion of sadness, almost, but not quite, when she explained that mother and father passed away when she was fifteen, and her grandmother brought her up in Vienna.

Sophia informed them that a few years ago, she gained access to her trust fund at twenty-one, had become a party girl for a couple of years, trying to drown out the voices in her head.

She had only just discovered that her father had invested heavily in some well-known environmental change companies, and that brought her to New Zealand.

Michael tells the group that his mother and grandparents raised him in Pecos, Texas, and he never met his father.

Growing up, he started learning karate and now holds black belts in three forms of martial arts. He became the state chess champion at a very young age and the State Junior fencing champion soon after.

Texas banned him from all casinos because of his consistent winning streak.

Retribution against some people for a very evil crime they committed meant he needed to skip town quickly. The farthest place he could think of was New Zealand.

They could all tell that he was controlling his emotions, not wanting any of them to delve deeper.

Apollo was the last of the group to spill his beans.

Born to a medium-sized family in Invercargill, New Zealand. He told of the entities he had seen and interacted with throughout his entire life. His descriptions of what Tara assumed were fairies and many other amazing entities drew her deeply into his story.

Apollo informed them he had two older sisters, but one had died in an accident, and one younger brother.

He had some difficulty fitting in throughout his school years; most people thought he was strange and talked to imaginary friends.

He had always seen spirits and entities from other realms, but only realised he could communicate with them when he was eight. They would create visual messages in his mind, signs or images that allowed him to interpret what they needed to convey.

Apollo informs the group he holds a bachelor's degree in therapeutic and sports massage and is now the most sought-after masseuse in New Zealand because of the results his customers achieve from his treatments.

During these conversations, Chrissy brought around refreshments and lunch for everyone. The robot explained that at the rear of the module, there was a toilet and a shower for their convenience, as well as giving everyone a rundown on the use of their travel pods.

Once everyone had finished, Cameron suggested that they all try to get some rest as it would be around 1 p.m. when they landed in Uganda, and the group had a lot to cover before they could sleep again.

Chapter Fifteen

Combat

The captain's voice wakes everyone. "We will arrive at Hoima International Airport within the next hour. Take this time to freshen up and collect your belongings; Toto Corporate Uganda will escort you from the disembarkation platform directly to the new Healing Centre."

After everyone who needed to use the toilet and shower facilities had done so, and each person had retaken their seat, they feel the aircraft slow down to a hover before descending.

The landing is very gentle. Then, as they hear the locking mechanism of the flight module docking machine, each of them feels the jolt of the module being removed from the wing, a dropping sensation as it lowers to a safe travel height, and forward movement combined with a few bounces from some uneven surfaces as the module is driven across the tarmac.

As the door to the module opens, everyone hears the repetitive ring of gunfire from semi-automatic weapons. Michael reaches through the doorway and drags a very bewildered-looking dignitary into the

module. "What's happening?" demands Michael of the shocked man, now on the inside of the module.

"I don't know." He replies, "It only started when your module was released from the Docker."

Apollo is already getting a picture of what is happening from all the people in the immediate vicinity.

"There are five gunmen dressed in airport security uniforms just outside this room at the far-left door," Apollo informs the group.

Michael looks at Apollo and Tara, then asks, "Apollo, please make these fools see their weapons explode and blow their hands off at their wrists? Tara, bring the pain."

Apollo implants the positions of the gunmen into Tara's mind. She places her emotional net onto each person's mind and then waits until she feels Apollo make his thought incision.

The agonised screaming of the five gunmen replaces the gunfire.

Before the actual airport security takes the five gunmen into custody, Apollo manages to scan their minds for information and gets a lot more than he thought he would.

Balondemu, the dignitary that Michael had dragged into the module when the gunfire started, knows significantly more than he had shared.

Sophia had been listening to the five gunmen's internal voices after they were restrained by airport security and had heard Balondemu's name. As soon as Apollo mentioned that Balondemu might have a connection to the five gunmen, Sophia glared at Balondemu and started digging into his thoughts.

"A local warlord named Mukisa Bokassa has taken his son and two daughters captive," Sophia relays to the group. "Balondemu gave the warlord our arrival time and location in exchange for their safe return," Sophia ends.

Balondemu is standing, leaning against the flight module, staring at the team in disbelief, amazement, and shock.

The sweat running down from his forehead is partly from the 35-degree Celsius day they are experiencing, partly from the extra 20 kilograms he is carrying in body fat, but mainly from the shock that his body has started to endure.

“You must help my children,” Balondemu pleads with Sophia. “If Mukisa learns his men were captured, he will kill them. He will think I gave them up.”

The team from Corporate, which comprises two females and one male, approaches Michael, Cameron, and Apollo.

“What do you need from us?” asks the tall, well-built man as they approach.

Cameron says, “Damba, it is very good to see you again. I will confirm with the team first, but I think they should retrieve Balondemu’s children. This will put the corporation in good stead with the local government, as well as providing the best possible opportunity for the children’s survival.”

By this time, everyone in the group has gathered and taken in the information that Cameron is suggesting.

“I think we are all up for that,” says Michael. “Can you get us in front of the gunmen?”

Damba, who has just sent the two ladies who were with him back to the clinic, directs the group, including Balondemu, to follow him to the holding cells.

Meanwhile, Cameron has grabbed a customs official, urging him to organise immigration stamps for everyone’s passports, insisting that the official then escort him to the freight disembarkation platform to assist with the import documentation for the freight. He understands the urgency required for powering up the group’s K.E.E.P.S.

It does not take the team long to retrieve the location of the hostages and some very helpful tactical information from the five gunmen, with Apollo and Sophia entering the minds of each gunman simultaneously.

They also discover that Balondemu's children are not going to be given back. The human trafficking syndicate operating out of Somalia placed Balondemu's children among a large group of twenty children to be sold into slavery.

When Tara hears this, she returns the pain that the men had felt previously when they thought their weapons had blown up, until Michael requests she release them.

After directing the team to Cameron at the freight platform, Damba leaves with Balondemu, saying he will meet them at the clinic when they are done.

The team changes into their K.E.E.P.S. and then climbs into a self-driving minibus the clinic sent to meet them.

Brahma quickly inputs the new destination, and they are off, leaving Cameron to find his way to the clinic.

The minibus travels mostly northwards for forty-five minutes. The location that Brahma has input into the vehicle's navigation system is only 31 kilometres from the airport, as the crow flies, but the navigation system has chosen the quickest route to their destination, which has extended the journey to 65 kilometres. This route keeps the bus mostly on main roads instead of traversing a multitude of dirt tracks through many small towns and villages.

The vehicle has certainly not been designed to accommodate people wearing kinetically enhanced environmental protection suits, as the Namuh cannot sit. Instead, they are standing in the bus's aisle as it traverses the roads and highways from the airport to their destination.

With the excitement on pause, Sophia says, "Is it just me, or did the temperature increase dramatically from the time we stepped out of the flight module until we climbed into our K.E.E.P.S.?"

"It is now 42 degrees Celsius with a storm on the way," says Brahma. "I believe it was around 34 or 35 degrees when we arrived at the airport." Aside from seeing electrical flows within various types of equipment, Brahma has always been capable of pinpointing temperatures around him, as well as forecasting the state of the weather for the next few hours.

"I have been reading that many places on the African continent have started experiencing numerous uncharacteristic tornadoes over the past few years," Tara states, looking past Sophia to Brahma.

"That's correct, Tara. The ever-increasing temperature of our planet is having a dramatic effect on weather systems all over the world," Brahma smiles. "I do not predict any tornadoes today, though. Maybe a little whirlwind of action from us is possible."

The navigation system alerts the passengers of their approach to the destination, just past a town called Kioroby, to an abandoned salt mine and an almost abandoned village named Kibiro, on the edge of Lake Albert, with three short beeps and an English-speaking male voice saying, "You are approaching your desired destination."

They stop the minibus a few streets away and approach the salt mine on foot.

'Street' is an overstatement for the dirt path they now walk upon, surrounded by makeshift accommodation housing the local population. This is not one of the affluent areas of the city.

The local population is going about their business, children running and playing on the street, and there is bicycle traffic, with no motorised vehicles apart from two or three derelict junkers parked off to the side of the street.

Upon seeing five individuals dressed in what looks like combat armour alight from a minibus and begin walking towards the old salt mine, the adults hurriedly gathered the children, and everyone disappears from the street, retreating into whatever shelter the makeshift housing can provide.

Apollo is already assessing the sight of seven civilians close to the building, three visible guards perched as lookouts atop the buildings within the fenced-off salt mine, as well as two guards behind the gate and a group of six people inside the compound playing cards.

He transfers these visions to Sophia when the group is two streets away from the salt mine and requests that she assist him in digging for information.

Sophia finds a reference to the location of the room where the children are being held, and Apollo digs out a visual map that he implants into each Namuh's mind.

Sophia subtly begins introducing probing questions into the minds she has accessed and gets a reference to Mukisa's location and information on explosives rigged with trip wires and remote detonation systems to defend against incursions.

Just one street away from the mine entrance, Sophia passes the information to Apollo, who, upon receiving it, correlates it to a visual map and passes on the information with the map to everyone else.

After receiving the information, Michael suggests via their internal comm that Brahma should short-out the remote detonators. He will make safe the trip wires, Apollo will need to blind the three lookouts, Tara is required to incapacitate the two guards and the people playing cards, and Sophia must block Mukisa from hearing anything until they can get to him.

"We should be invisible to the three lookouts now," says Apollo over the comm. "They won't see anything out of the ordinary."

As Michael approaches the main gate, he speaks into the comm, “Sophia, can you check my six?” Sophia turns in time to spot a young man who had been buying cigarettes from the small shop across the street, lifting his weapon. He aims and pulls the trigger; his weapon has been set to automatic fire.

As the gun releases a spray of seven projectiles at Michael, Sophia instinctively raises her hand and swipes the air in front of her. The bullets all return to the young man who fired the weapon.

His body ripples with the impact of all seven projectiles tearing through the flesh and bone of his body. He falls to the ground, his body making a deep thud as his back slams into the road, and his weapon makes a muffled clattering sound as it falls to the dirt beside him.

“Apollo, help Tara see,” yells Michael as he kicks into a run directly towards the gate.

Brahma, picking up on the detonator frequency, sends a charge from his right index finger to disrupt it.

Apollo passes a god’s eye vision of the two guards and six people to Tara, who, until the gunfire, had been playing cards, but now, are scrambling to pick up their weapons. In a panic, and from the shock of seeing the young man die before her, she instills extreme sadness into each of them.

These hard men fall to the ground in tears, crying with uncontrollable shudders.

Michael quickly disarms two tripwires and enters the gate as Brahma sends three arcs of lightning from his hand to the three lookouts on the rooftops of the buildings.

All three men perform a very impressive dance before dropping. One falls off the roof he was on, landing headfirst with a loud crack, splash, and thud as his head, then body, hits the ground with force.

Michael calls on the comm, "Apollo, I'm going for the kids. Can you give me some backup?"

Apollo kicks into a run. As he passes through the gate, he sees some people who, only moments earlier, had been playing cards, now squirming on the ground, crying.

As the rest of the team enters through the gate, one of the crying men takes a pistol that he has had tucked into his belt, places the barrel in his mouth, and shoots himself. This blows the back of his head directly into the face of another man; they both slump to the ground and stop moving.

Upon seeing this, Tara almost throws-up but immediately puts them all to sleep. The crying stops. She feels her hands and legs shaking, but continues to follow.

Everyone catches up to Michael, as he has had three more tripwires to disarm, just as he is opening the door to the room where the children are being held.

The room is dark, hot, and smells vile. They have had no access to bathroom facilities during the duration they have been in this room.

The children are all scared, dirty, in shock, and hungry. Tara transfers feelings of safety and hope to the children. Michael asks Tara and Brahma to take the children outside the compound and contact Cameron or the clinic for transport.

Michael, Sophia, and Apollo continue to walk down the passageway to the room where Mukisa is, hopefully, unaware of what has just taken place.

Apollo enters Mukisa's mind at the door before they open it. Mukisa is on his computer, corresponding with the syndicate head from Somalia, organising the transport of the children.

The plan was to load the children onto a fishing boat at the salt mine to get them to the Congo side of Lake Albert. They would then

be driven in the back of a truck through jungle tracks in the Congo jungle until they could cross, without detection, into Tanzania.

After this, they were to travel to the Bagamoyo Sea Fish Market, where they would load the children onto another fishing boat bound for Somalia. On arrival, the syndicate would organise payment to Mukisa's militia accountant.

Apollo informs both Sophia and Michael of what they have planned for the children.

"Is it time to fucking knock yet?" asks Sophia.

Apollo and Michael both nod. Sophia sharply pushes the air near the door, and it flies off its hinges directly to the other side of the room.

Mukisa spins around on his chair, surprised, just as Michael taps a pressure point below his collarbone on the right side of his upper torso. This paralyses him, and then Michael taps another point on the back of Mukisa's neck, knocking him out cold.

By the time Apollo, Sophia, and Michael have carried Mukisa and his computer out to the compound, they can see that reinforcements have arrived.

Cameron and Damba have arrived with two trucks full of military special forces, the Hoima City Police chief, along with a fully enclosed armoured police truck, a squad of local police officers, and a bus.

After a quick debrief from Michael for all the newcomers, the sound of ambulance sirens is audible to everyone.

Tara and Brahma assist the children to a seat on the bus; they are to be taken to the clinic for treatment. Tara travels with them just so she can provide positive emotions and a feeling of safety.

Cameron climbs onto the bus as well, while Damba rides with the others in the minivan.

Chapter Sixteen

Healing

Damba opens the front doors of the Healing Clinic with a swipe of his access card across the panel, which is situated at the front of the building. The newly constructed building stands five stories high, thirty metres across, and is covered in factory-grown green mirrored glass for solar power generation.

As they all enter, Sophia can just make out a conversation between three women and one man behind the reception counter, who are currently engaged in a discussion about the clinic not even being open yet, and already they are expected to receive patients. It does not dawn on her they are speaking Swahili until she has already passed them by.

Damba escorts the Namuh to a bank of three elevators, swipes his card on the wall panel, and the elevator door on the far-right slides open. Once everyone is inside, Damba pushes the button for the fifth floor. The placard next to the button reads ‘Executive Offices.’

On the fifth floor of the Healing Centre, as they exit the elevator, there is another reception desk. This one has only one person sitting behind it. “This is Masiko,” says Damba, motioning towards her with his hand. “She runs the executive floor of the centre. She is your liaison

for both the centre and your corporate tasks, and she is a walking database of information on almost everything,” Damba finishes.

“Welcome to Uganda. The male showers are at the end of the hall on the right-hand side, and the female ones are on the left,” Masiko directs with a welcoming smile and hand gesture pointing down the hall.

“You each have a locker to secure your K.E.E.P.S. They will open when you place your thumb on the scan pad. I have also placed your medical uniforms in each,” Masiko finishes.

The Namuh all proceed down the hallway to where Masiko has directed them. Upon entering the palatial rooms, they are all taken aback by the opulence afforded them inside. Each door opens into a luxuriously furnished lounge room. There is another hallway running along the outside wall of the building, providing access to the individual changing rooms, including bathroom facilities and a large, lockable walk-in wardrobe for each of them.

Everyone struggles to remove their K.E.E.P.S. They each take a while in the shower, washing away the dust, sweat, and smell of the room that had served as a prison for the children. As they exit the changing facilities and return to the reception desk, Masiko takes them into a conference room directly behind her reception area.

Cameron is working on a communication tablet, seated at the large oval table in the centre of the room with ten leather high-backed chairs placed around it. He gestures for each person to take a seat as Masiko brings them in.

A screen slides down from the ceiling, blocking out the windows, and comes to life once fully in place. The four camera views divide the screen: Douglas appears in the top left section, Steve in the bottom left, while the two on the right remain blank.

"It seems to have been a very eventful arrival," comes Douglas's voice through the sound system in the room.

Steve speaks next. "We need to understand why this attack took place."

Douglas instructs, "Apollo, you will conduct a distance reading on Mukisa to understand the motivation for this move."

The screen on the top left flickers on, showing Mukisa sitting in a steel chair, both he and the chair chained to the floor of a concrete police cell.

Douglas explains to Apollo that although his target is kilometres away, it is their higher selves that will exchange the information. Therefore, physical distance holds no bearing on his communication.

"Think of it as though your higher self is placing you and Mukisa beside one another. He could physically be on the other side of the planet, and you would still be able to do this," Douglas explains.

Apollo looks at the image of Mukisa on the screen and attempts to force his mind into Mukisa's mind. After twenty seconds, he looks at Douglas's screen with a look of frustration on his face.

"Apollo, firstly connect with your higher self, then connect with his. Allow your higher self to provide the guidance you need," Douglas advises.

Apollo closes his eyes. He can instantly feel the connection of his physical being to his spiritual being, a universal flow of understanding now pulsing between his physical body and his spiritual self. Apollo sees himself in front of an energy being that he recognises as Mukisa's higher self. The entity standing before him shows him the path to Mukisa's mind.

Apollo gleans that the attack was a kidnapping of doctors, as Mukisa believed they were being brought in to train the local staff. He did

not know who the team truly was; he was simply after a potential profit.

Apollo also gathers that the head of the Somalian syndicate, who had suggested the kidnapping notion to Mukisa, was a different kettle of fish. There had been clear tact behind how he had manipulated Mukisa into orchestrating the attempt.

Upon hearing this information, Steve stands up behind his desk and states, "Alright, I'm on it." His screen then goes blank.

Douglas chimes in, his voice far more empathetic. "Good. Let's treat the children and attempt to get them back to their families, shall we?"

Cameron remains glued to his communication tablet as Masiko escorts the team down to the second floor into a fully equipped emergency ward that occupies the entire floor.

The children have all been bathed, patched up, and dressed in hospital gowns. Each child has a bed and is now being fed as the Namuh arrive.

Adora, who is the head doctor and was actually the first doctor to arrive at the clinic after Masiko sent out an emergency call for additional staff, approaches the Namuh with his assessment of the children.

Tara can sense that the fear the children had been emitting has now subsided, giving way to hope. She walks past each bed, passing on feelings of safety, friendship, and home. She is halfway around the room when she stops at one bed, tilts her head to the side, and gives the young lady in the bed a wink.

"How long have you been able to do that?" Tara asks the attractive young teenage girl, who looks to be approximately sixteen years old.

"Since I was a babe, ma'am," comes a tiny, timid voice.

Tara senses this girl has abilities similar to her own.

As Tara takes a seat at the end of the bed, Adora finishes his briefing with the others and leaves the room.

“She is the only child without parents to pick her up,” Tara hears Sophia’s voice say in her mind. Although Sophia is on the other side of the room, it is as though she is right beside her.

“So, you have been giving the other children feelings of hope and love?” Tara asks. The young girl nods her head.

“What is your name?” Tara inquires.

“It is Afiya,” she answers softly. “And may I know yours?” she adds in her timid voice.

Tara replies with a smile, “It is Tara.” As she prepares to ask the next question, she instinctively passes on feelings of love and support. “How long have you been on your own?”

Afiya looks directly into Tara’s eyes, her own eyes beginning to fill with tears, and replies, “I saw them kill my mother and father when they broke into our house and took me hostage.”

“Do you have any relatives who can take care of you?” Tara continues gently.

“No, I do not,” sobs Afiya.

“Do not worry, Afiya. I will find out what we can best do for you,” Tara says reassuringly, as she passes on feelings of comfort, love, and hope, standing up and placing her hand on the young girl’s shoulder.

As Tara returns to the group, three of the nurses from downstairs at the reception desk enter the room. They each go to a child, help them dress in the new clothes they have brought, and then escort the children out of the emergency room to reunite with their parents waiting in the lobby downstairs.

After Tara explains Afiya’s situation to the others, Michael suggests they speak with Masiko for potential solutions. Tara uses the

wall-mounted communication panel to contact Masiko and explains the situation.

By the time Masiko enters the emergency room again, the three nurses have already returned twice more. Tara escorts Masiko to Afiya's bed.

Once all the other children have been reunited with their parents, Masiko, Tara, and Afiya share a hug, and Afiya thanks both Tara and Masiko warmly.

Masiko has arranged for Afiya to be accepted for an internship at the Healing Clinic, allowing her to work her way into a nursing role once she completes her schooling. The clinic is now taking on responsibility for her accommodation, education, and daily needs. The healing clinic community will, in essence, raise Afiya.

"Afiya will earn a modest salary during her internship," Masiko informs Tara. "I have arranged for this to be placed in a Toto Bank account under a high interest rate, and she will gain access to it when she turns eighteen years old."

One nurse returns with fresh clothing for Afiya to change into. Afterward, Masiko takes Afiya to a fourth-floor accommodation room, telling her she will stay there for two to three weeks until they find more suitable housing.

Damba and Cameron had already organised for everyone's luggage to be delivered to their apartments. This had all happened during the rescue operation, but Cameron had ensured that each person's briefcase was returned to them at the clinic. Once they were all ready to leave for the night, a shuttle pulled up in front of the clinic to take them to their new accommodations. As Cameron was only staying short term, he was dropped at his hotel first. It was near the clinic.

They drop Sophia and Tara at the entrance to their new apartment block next, then the shuttle continues two more blocks to drop off the remaining three.

Sophia and Tara are on the same floor in the apartment building. As they exit the lift, they both notice the sign on the opposite wall indicating that their apartments are in opposite directions. Sophia says goodnight to Tara and turns left towards her new home.

Sophia retrieves the access card from her briefcase, places it against the lock mechanism on the door, and hears a soft click as the lock unlatches. With a gentle push, the door swings open slowly.

As Sophia steps inside and closes the door behind her, she notices the entranceway is only about three metres long and one and a half metres wide. She turns right at the end and steps into a dining area. Looking to her right, she takes in the small kitchen, with what she assumes is either a laundry or a small pantry behind a closed door next to the refrigerator.

Looking to her left at the wall closest to her, she spots a placard above two lift buttons that reads 'P.A.V. Rooftop Parking.' The lounge area, which begins just beyond the dining space, which has been opulently furnished with two oversized three-seater couches and two personal massage chairs. A media screen on the far right-hand wall matches the size of the massive windows lining the wall at a right angle to it.

Walking through the lounge, Sophia glances at the door leading to her bedroom. The rest becomes a blur. She puts her briefcase down on the floor, lies on the bed, and falls straight to sleep.

Chapter Seventeen

Growth

Over the following two weeks, the Namuh settle into their new apartments, their training roles at the clinic, which has opened its doors almost two weeks early, and their way of life in the new city.

Working at the clinic brought unexpected benefits. The staff, patients, and local community are going out of their way to make the newcomers feel extremely welcome. The staff, patients, and community invite them to luncheons, dinners, and parties, places unknown to the average visitor or tourist.

They are introduced to the best street food, cafés, restaurants, and clubs that Hoima has to offer.

The clinic has become a tremendous success within these two weeks. Appointments for treatments are already booked out for the next four months, but the clinic will, of course, still accept emergency cases when local hospitals cannot assist or patients cannot afford their treatment.

The doctors, nurses, and healers appear to be working together extremely well. A triple-check system ensures that a doctor, healer

(who also checks in with the patient's higher self), and a nurse or administrator verify every treatment before any action is taken.

The news of the successful results that the patients are achieving, as well as the free health service being provided by the clinic, has spread like wildfire throughout the community.

More and more people are coming forward to offer assistance in many forms.

Some are offering to clean for a few hours at no charge, others are providing food to help feed the patients admitted for treatments over longer periods, and there are many other offers to supply equipment or services to the clinic, either free or at extremely reduced rates.

In just its first two weeks, the healing clinic has already become a major part of the community. Everyone within the community understands that the institution has been established to help those who require it the most, and as the clinic is helping the people, the people want to help the clinic.

Michael, making use of his access to the cosmic knowledge vault, has designed and implemented a new training programme for the clinic staff. This allows an absolute novice starting at the clinic to be scheduled onto the staff roster as an unsupervised individual within three days.

This, in turn, has freed up the staff who would have been conducting the training or supervising, allowing them to focus more on the needs of the clinic's patients. The clinic staff still supervise all members, but they do so using the triple-check system now implemented in standard operating procedures.

Tara has been spending time working with Afiya, helping her to understand and develop her abilities. Afiya is fast becoming known to all the staff within the clinic as a hardworking and determined young lady who makes everyone feel happy and welcome.

Tara is also spending a great deal of time with Apollo. They have a lot in common; they are both comedians; they enjoy each other's company, and there is a chemistry between them that is yet to be acted upon.

It is Friday morning, 7.15 a.m., and the group gathers in the conference room on the fifth floor of the clinic. Masiko has organised everyone's morning beverage of preference and appears to be in an extremely excited mood for some unknown reason.

Cameron has taken a seat in his usual spot, communication tablet in hand, as the others enter the room, and is just getting the large screen into position. Once everyone is seated, Cameron activates Steve's window on the screen.

At that moment, Masiko re-enters the room, her smile beaming, with Douglas on her arm.

"Good morning, everyone," says Douglas in a pleasant tone, as Masiko leads him to take a seat on the far side of the table.

They each stand to greet Douglas, but he waves his hand and insists, "No time for pleasantries today, sorry. I am only here for one hour, then I am back on the wing."

Douglas looks around the room, smiling at everyone, before his face takes on a more serious manner.

"Everything has gone extremely well except for the event that took place on your arrival. That was extremely horrifying and unexpected," he says.

"I felt as though I needed to be here in person to discuss what happened with you all," Douglas continues.

Douglas stands and slowly begins walking around the table, placing a firm hand on each person's shoulder as he passes them.

As he does this, he speaks firmly. "You all acted so courageously during the incident, but the shock of taking another's life is something

that stays with you for a long time. I am sure that some of you are still struggling within yourselves over what took place two weeks ago.”

Michael, looking across the table, sees tears forming in Brahma and Tara’s eyes as his thoughts return to their arrival in Hoima. He glances beside him and sees tears running down Sophia’s cheeks.

It is only then that he realises that only he and Apollo had not taken anyone’s life that day. All three of his other friends had.

When Douglas’s hand clasps onto Michael’s shoulder, Michael suddenly feels as though he is more like an unfeeling robot than a human, for not having brought this up with Sophia, Tara, and Brahma before now. He had simply carried on as though it were something that happened regularly, like getting a coffee or doing his washing.

Douglas returns to his seat, sits down, and says, “The emotions you all have about this incident are mostly being generated from your human body’s ego, or the operating system of your biological unit, if you will.”

“The reason none of you became too highly emotional during or after this occurrence is because of your connections with your higher selves,” Douglas continues.

He adjusts himself in the chair and offers, “I believe it will be extremely beneficial for us to conduct a group meditation. This will be slightly different, as we are going to join our higher selves together to allow for a deeper understanding of one another.”

With a nod from Douglas, Cameron dims the lights, shuts down the screen, and leaves the room.

“My spirit guides have led me to believe this is a very simple process, but you may experience some extreme emotions afterwards,” Douglas states.

“Close your eyes and connect with your spiritual self. Once you are connected, simply allow yourself to view everyone else’s spirit there with you,” he instructs.

As the Namuh and Douglas each connect with their higher self, they can view one another’s spiritual selves. These entities comprise light energy in a multitude of colours.

Michael finds himself thinking that they appear as one might view a distant galaxy through an extremely powerful telescope. Each entity seems to consist of clouds of coloured gases and stars, and each entity is enormous.

In an instant, all six entities join. They are no longer six separate beings, but one. Michael, Apollo, Sophia, Tara, Brahma, and Douglas have just joined together in spirit.

They experience each other’s feelings as if they were their own. It feels as though there are no longer any secrets; they are each laid bare to one another. There is no judgement, fear, or shame. Each of them experiences an all-encompassing love for everything.

As this single entity, they each experience what took place on the spiritual level for every one of the people whose human lives ended in the battle two weeks earlier.

Each criminal’s spiritual self emitted a frequency interpretable as a being in turmoil, violently flashing lights, sparks, arcs of lightning, high-pitched ringing, deep, low rumbling, and a feeling of complete dread.

Each had tried to communicate with his or her biological unit; those communications were being shut down by the ego or operating system, as Douglas had put it earlier.

When the criminals’ biological units were shut off, killed, the spirits immediately stopped emitting the turmoil frequency. There was an upload of light frequency to each spirit from the biological units they

had been attached to. Each entity appeared to expand, then they were all reconnected to newly born biological units, some on the earthly plane and some elsewhere.

The single entity, which was the six of them combined, reverted to six separate entities in an instant, and they each knew it was time to reconnect with their biological units.

As they each open their eyes and look around the room, there is now a newfound understanding of each other, of humanity, and of their combined mission.

Chapter Eighteen

Plan of Action

Douglas, rising and walking to the door, declares, “Steve and Cameron are closing in on the leader of the Somali syndicate.”

Cameron had been talking with Masiko at the reception desk while waiting for them to finish what he categorised as a training session with Douglas. He was excited to be going home to New Zealand with Douglas today. He desperately missed his family and friends back home, though he understood this would only be a quick trip.

He needed to return quickly to assist with some of the next projects Douglas had planned for the team to complete in Hoima, before the move to the next city that he, Douglas, and Steve had selected for them.

As Cameron takes his seat in the conference room, he reactivates the screen to find a close-up image of Steve taking a massive bite of his dinner: a foot-long sandwich with what looks to be three different types of meat, perhaps more, and a slight sprinkling of lettuce. Steve holds up his index finger in a gesture indicating ‘wait a second’ while he turns his head away from the camera to finish chewing his mouthful of food.

“Sorry about that,” chuckles Steve. “I thought I would have time to knock that sandwich off before we started again.”

“Well, here is the information we have so far relating to this syndicate from Somalia,” Steve mumbles, talking while brushing the remaining sandwich crumbs from his beard with his hand. All the screens next to him erupt with information, windows, graphs, and photos. They are all easy to understand and similar to the information he had presented to them regarding Hoima.

“We are close to finding the location of this Assad Abdriahim. He is the one we suspect may be commanding many of Africa’s warlords at the moment,” Cameron announces as he uses his laser pointer to show the man’s photo on the screen.

The photo of Assad shows him sitting on the front of an assault tank. He wears military fatigues, his face clean-shaven except for a thick flavour-saver moustache under his nose. His skin tone appears a little lighter than most. His dark, steely eyes that project anger and hatred dominate his unsmiling, long face.

“Our efforts in Somalia are being severely hindered by the government’s unwillingness to help locate him. I can only assume that Assad has bought most of the government,” Cameron concludes.

Steve then guides everyone through the information on the screens before them. The statistics on government corruption are outrageous and deeply disturbing.

“Government corruption is widely known and accepted as part of everyday life in Somalia. Large multinational companies pay the government large under-the-table sums to conduct business in the country. Many big national companies are owned by corrupt government officials, and most of the local population feel powerless to enact any change, as they have witnessed others who took a stand against the government and had their lives ended,” Steve states.

Steve continues, "The death rate in Somalia is unacceptable. Not only are the murder rates the highest on the African continent, but thousands die each year from malnutrition, drought, and internal warfare."

"The excessive poverty, extreme mistreatment of vulnerable citizens, and internally displaced populations numbering in the millions is horrifying," Steve ends.

The photos Steve uses to depict the statistics are, to say the least, disturbing.

Douglas then stands from his chair and walks around the conference table, saying, "Getting involved in the politics of a nation is something the Toto Corporation will seldom condone, but simply standing by and watching millions of human beings die from mistreatment and starvation when we can do something about it is something I cannot condone."

"To this end, I have already instructed both Steve and Cameron to develop a strategy that will turn the situation in Somalia around fast, to save as many lives as possible," Douglas concludes before sitting back down in his chair.

Tears are falling from Tara's cheeks like two little unstoppable rivers, splashing onto the table and creating a puddle. She is beyond sad. The feeling she is experiencing is a combination of extreme sadness, the kind you feel when losing a loved one, absolute helplessness, like when your entire world drops away beneath you, and dread for another's situation, where the pit of your stomach reacts to the pain another person is forced to endure.

Apollo reaches over, takes her hand in his, and projects the image he had seen of her spiritual self during the prior meditation. The stream of tears stops as Tara regains control of her emotions.

As Steve is not physically present in the room, he does not notice any of the happenings taking place in the conference room and simply continues with the presentation.

“So, the basic outline we have for this so far is...” Steve stops mid-sentence and says, “Cameron, would you like to present this? After all, it is mostly your idea.”

Cameron looks over to Tara, who is still holding Apollo’s hand, and asks, “Tara, are you okay? Do you need a minute?”

Tara looks back at him, smiles, and replies, “I am fine now, Cameron, but thank you for asking. Please continue. I need to understand how we are going to stop these bastards.”

Cameron begins his basic overview of the plan. They need to oust the existing government, install a new government that already has the support of much of the Somali population, and require a trustworthy military to protect the population and the new government from any repercussions or further incursions by former governmental or militia factions.

“The first steps of this plan are already being taken,” Steve chimes in. “Our operatives are working with various-sized groups scattered along the border between Somalia and Kenya. All of these groups have opted for Toto’s remote farming system to be implemented in the areas they are now inhabiting.”

As Steve and Cameron continue, everyone in the room focuses intently on what they are saying. This plan has merit; it has hope; it offers a way forward for the people of Somalia. It could mean the end of any warlords’ rule, even the eradication of criminal militias throughout the entire African continent, if all goes to plan.

Chapter Nineteen

Growing A Solution

After the meeting, as the others disperse to their respective duties in the clinic, Michael and Brahma head straight to the basement, where their makeshift workshop awaits.

For the two of them, the workshop had become a sanctuary for innovation over the past two weeks. Focused on developing a natural membrane for seamless integration into the K.E.E.P.S. suit, Michael, with a seemingly newfound passion for bioengineering, aimed at making the suit easy to put on and take off. The current struggle during the removal process was a concern for the team, especially after physical exertion or battles.

Various materials had been tested, with Merino wool thermal undergarments proving to be the most promising. However, Michael was determined to find a solution that could be directly applied to the suits without causing discomfort or excessive sweating.

Brahma, on the other hand, was delving into the intricacies of the K.E.E.P.S. power current flows. His focus was on understanding the suit's capabilities thoroughly and, ultimately, improving its overall

operation. The duo's collaboration aimed to enhance both the external and internal aspects of the suits simultaneously.

Amid the humming of machinery and the occasional sparks from Brahma's experiments, Michael's voice echoed through the workshop. "Eureka!"

Intrigued, Brahma rushes over to witness the source of Michael's excitement. Michael is placing a tray just removed from an incubation unit onto his workbench. A mysterious substance coats the tray, instantly catching Brahma's curiosity.

"Go on, Brahma, touch it. You know you want to," implores Michael with a mischievous grin, in an 'I dare you to' manner.

Brahma begins extending his hand towards the tray, but just before contact, Michael seizes his hand. "First, bring the thought of water to the forefront of your mind," Michael instructs.

Releasing Brahma's hand, Michael demonstrates by placing his hand on the membrane-covered tray. Brahma feels an unusual viscosity, akin to touching a surface coated with cooking oil. As Brahma withdraws his hand, he is surprised that there is no residual stickiness.

Michael then instructs Brahma, "Now place your hand on the tray again, but once you have it there, bring the thought of solid matter to the forefront of your mind."

Brahma does as he is instructed. As soon as he thinks of solid matter—a large rock in Brahma's case—he finds the tray feels as though it has become a part of his hand.

He lifts his hand into the air; the tray stays with his hand. Despite hitting the tray on the bench, he can not budge it. He tries pulling the tray off with his other hand, only to find it is useless; the tray is stuck.

Brahma looks to Michael, who has been smiling the whole time this performance has been going on. "Bring the thought of water back to the forefront of your mind," Michael finally says, still smiling.

On doing this, Brahma's hand comes away from the tray, and he places the tray back onto Michael's workbench.

With a look of astonishment, Brahma inquires, "How is this possible?"

"I have managed to tap into the Ethereal plane to develop this membrane," Michael explains. "You see, with our stronger connection to the plane, whenever our minds are directed to certain thoughts, our Auric energies change their light frequencies slightly. This membrane simply reacts to the change in light frequencies and becomes viscous or solid, just like an on/off switch," Michael concludes.

Brahma considers the tray with the membrane on it for a moment, staring thoughtfully at it on the workbench. A cunning smile spreads across his face.

"What do you think would happen if I zapped it with a bit of electricity?" he asks.

"I don't know, but I think we should try it," Michael replies, looking directly at Brahma and smiling with excitement.

Without hesitation, Brahma unleashes an arc of electricity from his index finger. Upon contact with the membrane, it disintegrates into millions of tiny particles that erupt into the air, forming an oval-shaped cloud over the tray. The particles then slowly sprinkle back down as tiny liquid droplets.

Brahma wears an expression that suggests he has no idea what has just happened, but Michael's mind is already racing with possibilities.

Grabbing a glass beaker from the table against the back wall, Michael pours the liquid membrane into it and equips a small spray nozzle. "Can you bring me a fresh tray from the table behind you, Brahma?" Michael requests in an excited voice.

Brahma hands Michael the tray, who then places it on the table next to the tray from which the membrane came.

Michael pulls the trigger of the nozzle a few times until he sees a fine mist exit the nozzle. With a few spritzes, he covers the surface with a fine layer.

Placing the newly sprayed tray down on the workbench in front of him, Michael then places his hand onto it. With the thought of water as his focus, his hand slides easily across the surface until he brings the thought of a solid to the forefront of his mind, and his hand sticks fast.

Lifting his hand from the workbench with the tray stuck fast to it, he smiles.

“Well, we know how to apply it to the inside of the K.E.E.P.S. now,” Michael laughs.

“If this stuff reacts as it has to my power, what reaction do you think it would have to Sophia’s sound waves?” Brahma asks Michael.

“I don’t know, but I think we should find out tomorrow,” Michael replies, still smiling.

With this newfound breakthrough in the workshop, Michael and Brahma cannot contain their excitement. The innovative membrane has the potential to revolutionise the K.E.E.P.S, making them not only easier to wear but also quite possibly an extension of the wearer themselves.

Chapter Twenty

First Spark

Tara has just finished saying good night to Afiya when Apollo approaches her at the elevator door. “Do you feel like having dinner together tonight?” he asks.

“Sure, why not?” She replies with a smile and her trademark eyebrow lift.

The elevator doors open, and Apollo gestures for her to enter first. He prides himself on his ability to be courteous to others.

Once inside, Apollo touches the screen for the rooftop parking lot. This is where the five of them park their P.A.Vs, personal aviation vehicles.

It is only the two of them in the elevator, and Tara feels the need to be close to him. Moving closer, she turns her head up towards his, and their lips meet in a very heated, passionate kiss.

This is the first time either of them has acted on the emotions that have been building between them over the last week and a half. She can feel the warmth of his lips against hers, the moisture of his tongue

as it gently darts out and into her mouth. Tara responds by meeting his tongue with hers, the two tongues gently caressing one another.

Tara becomes aware of the lust building inside herself. She is also conscious of Apollo's growing desire and can feel his penis becoming engorged as it presses into her abdomen.

As the elevator slows, they break away from the kiss but linger in each other's eyes for a few more seconds until the doors slide open.

"Do you really want dinner?" Tara asks in a sultry voice, smiling as they step out.

Apollo, adjusting himself so his erection will not impede his walking, looks at her and says in his best deep, manly voice, "Your place or mine?"

They settle on heading back to Tara's apartment. Each climbs into his or her respective P.A.V.s and launches off the roof.

Operating the P.A.V.s is very simple. Anyone can pick up the flight technique without too much difficulty, and the anti-collision software embedded in its programming makes it one of the safest aircraft ever built.

The axial flux motors used for the lift and thrust blades produce impressive power. The top speed of a P.A.V. is around two hundred kilometres per hour, but most people stick to under one hundred when flying around a city.

Most of the time, when Apollo is in his P.A.V., he allows himself the time to enjoy the freedom that flying one of these fantastic machines brings. Tonight is different. His thoughts are not on flying, but on Tara.

He was attracted to Tara from the first day they met—the day that changed everyone's lives.

Having the ability to see beyond the three-dimensional sight that humanity dictates as reality, Apollo has become an extremely accurate

judge of people. He can read anyone's character simply by the colours and movements of their aura.

On the day he met Tara, the first thing he noticed was just how beautiful her aura was, then he saw her.

She had dark brown eyes that he knew he could get lost in. Her smooth olive skin seemed to glow in the morning sunlight as it crept through the forest. He saw her face as perfection, and he would describe her body the same way.

Things had been far too hectic to act on the attraction he felt for Tara until the last week and a half. They had worked together with a few patients at the clinic in the first couple of days after arrival. Apollo used his charm and humour to build a closer bond with her, or so he thought.

Tara, of course, had sensed how Apollo felt from the start. She found herself equally attracted to him.

The great depth with which Apollo viewed the world was revealed in his deep brown eyes. His face showed a combination of youth, wisdom, playfulness, and caring. His tall, dark, muscular body was usually the first thing most girls noticed about him. Tara had to admit to herself that it was a bonus.

One of the best things about having a P.A.V. is that parking is never a problem. Tara and Apollo land their P.A.V.s next to each other on the roof of Tara's apartment block.

They scramble out, and Tara grabs Apollo's hand, running with him to the rooftop elevator that would stop at her apartment. She slaps her access card against the security screen, then spins around, grabbing both sides of the front of Apollo's shirt, and pulls his face down to her level for another kiss.

This time, the kiss is more urgent. Their tongues entwine instantly, each tasting the other. Tara presses her breasts into Apollo; he feels her

nipples become erect as she leans in just a little more. She can feel his penis becoming engorged again.

The elevator doors open. As one, they move inside, and Tara places her hand on the scan pad without looking once.

When the doors open into Tara's apartment, again moving as one, they both step out.

Tara breaks away from the kiss and says, slightly breathless, "Welcome to my home," giving her trademark eyebrow lift again. She takes Apollo by the hand and whispers, "Let me show you the bedroom."

Tara, having removed her clothes in an instant, assists Apollo in removing all his clothes. Now, both standing naked at the foot of the bed, they embrace in another kiss before Apollo picks her up and places her gently on the bed.

Apollo, still standing by the side of her bed, places his hand on the side of Tara's face, then slowly starts moving it down her neck. He lets his large hand gently caress her shoulder before sliding it to the top of her luscious breast on her left side. He feels her nipple react to his touch.

Apollo kneels beside her bed and puts his other hand on the opposite cheek of Tara's face, and kisses her again, ensuring that he brushes her ear and the back of her neck with his hand before bringing it down to caress her other breast.

As the first of Apollo's hands makes its way down her abdomen, Tara's body gives a slight shiver, and he feels her attempt to release a moan into the kiss.

Tara relaxes into Apollo's skilled approach to lovemaking. He is unlike many of her past lovers, who were mostly interested only in their gratification. Apollo takes his time, teasing and playing with every sensation her body can experience.

They make love throughout the night, finally exhausted and falling asleep in each other's arms.

Chapter Twenty-One

New Age of Farming

Michael had sent a message yesterday evening for the Namuh to assemble in the workshop just before 7 am. All are on time except Tara and Apollo, who arrive five minutes later. Both look a little tired but happy with themselves.

On entering the workshop, Tara's thoughts are of the passionate night she and Apollo have just shared, until she notices Sophia looking directly at her with a smile and raised eyebrow, the 'oh really' look on her face showing that her bedroom antics with Apollo are no longer secret.

Tara produces an embarrassed smile, projected at Sophia, then very quickly erects a mental blockade around her thoughts so as not to disclose any more information about their nocturnal escapade.

Once Tara's thoughts become shielded, Sophia turns her attention back to Michael, thinking to herself, 'It's about time those two got it out of their systems.'

Michael gains everyone's attention and starts by unveiling the breakthrough membrane spray. Holding the spray bottle with the atomised membrane inside it out in front of himself, he says, "This bio-engineered marvel promises a revolution in the fitting and removal of the K.E.E.P.S."

He continues explaining, "The membrane's purpose was originally designed to eliminate the need for us to apply underclothing while wearing the suits. I had only just perfected the formula yesterday when Brahma zapped it with a small jolt of electricity from his finger, atomising the membrane and turning it into a liquid substance."

"I'm proposing that we apply this spray to the interior of our K.E.E.P.S. I have a feeling there's a lot more that we may be able to do with this membrane. That's why I asked you all here this morning to see just what we can do with it," Michael completes, then places his hand flat on top of the tray in front of him. With his hand still flat on the tray, he raises his hand, and the tray rises with it.

Apollo, who has been trying to understand why he is feeling embarrassed, and only realises the feeling is emanating from Tara just seconds before, exclaims, "The tray has become part of you. I mean, it is sharing your aura. There is no disruption within your auric field."

Apollo continues, "Normally, inanimate objects cause ripples or disturbances within a person's aura, but this tray looks physically attached to you. Your aura is encompassing the tray as if it is now part of your hand."

Internally, Apollo is confused. Normally, he could view a definitive distinction between a person's auric field and an inanimate object, but this is unlike anything he has witnessed in his life. The tray has become Michael, or at least part of him. There is no joining of the tray to Michael; it is one with him, like a hand or a foot, and Michael's aura now encompasses the tray.

Michael is about to ask Sophia if she will attempt to manipulate the membrane with some different sound frequencies when Masiko and Damba enter the room to inform them of a field trip that Douglas has asked them both to organise.

The meeting ends with Michael saying, "Well, I guess this can wait," and thinking to himself, I knew I should have sprayed the inside of my K.E.E.P.S. last night.

As everyone walks towards the elevator. Michael pockets the small spray bottle with the atomised membrane instead of returning it to the storage container he had been keeping it in. His internal dialogue is, 'You never know when this will come in handy.'

The Namuh's daily tasks at the clinic have been reallocated to other staff members by Masiko, and Damba has organised for everyone to be collected from the rooftop landing pad by the latest taxi service on offer in Hoima city, a flying minibus.

Much like the P.A.V. personal aviation vehicle, the taxi is simply larger. It can carry up to ten passengers and a travel range of over 1800 kilometres per battery charge, with additional range added via the solar charging cells atop the canopy and sidings, as well as scoop-style wind turbines that use the airflow created by the vehicle's thrust to generate a charge, which is added into the power matrix.

The name being tried out for it is a Group Aviation Vehicle, or G.A.V. The Toto Group was going to try Medium instead of Group, but M.A.V. was already being utilised for their Mass Aviation Vehicles. So, P.A.V., G.A.V., and M.A.V. it was.

They wait in the small, air-conditioned room atop the clinic next to the rooftop landing pad. The day is a balmy 43 degrees Celsius. They are all aware of and feel the increasing daily temperatures. The Namuh speculate on what it is they are about to be introduced to.

They speculate about many things, from sites for new clinics to areas of known criminal incursions.

“Well, if Douglas has requested that we see it, then it must be important,” says Brahma. Just standing around waiting is probably Brahma’s least favourite thing to do. At times like this, he often thinks of Felicity and what could have been if only she had not been on that ill-fated flight.

The G.A.V. lands on the rooftop, and once everyone has taken a seat, Damba begins with an overview. “What you will be seeing today is apparently to be utilised to facilitate the plan that you discussed with Douglas and the team yesterday, so he was adamant that you all pay close attention.”

The thirty-minute flight is uneventful, but they get a bird’s-eye view of parts of Hoima city and some of the outlying townships that none of them have seen previously.

Damba continues his overview during the flight. “We are visiting an E.B.C., short for an Economy Building Community. Toto has established a few of these sites in different parts of the world. Basically, a diverse group of individuals are recruited from the local community, people who are struggling financially, have difficulties finding employment, or are disadvantaged in one way or another.”

“The recruits are provided with housing, food, work, education, and training to allow the individuals to develop some financial stability in their lives. The work that these communities take on benefits the surrounding communities greatly.”

They alight outside a gated community that has been established on the outskirts of a township named Bikonzi, close to the city of Masindi. On the flyover before landing, they were able to take in the view of the communities’ housing, farmlands, and various scattered industrial buildings.

As they walk to the gate, Damba begins a more in-depth explanation of the community. "The community has been located close to an existing small town that previously had trouble treating or disposing of some of the waste streams that the township generates daily," Damba begins. "Sewage is one of the main issues. Our Economy Building Community receives the sewage from the township of Bikonzi, and a few other townships nearby. It has just started receiving some of the sewage stream from Masindi city."

Tara screws up her nose and begins to let her fear penetrate the emotions of everyone within the group until Apollo grabs her hand. This pulls her from the instinctual recall she is having of the devastating festival she endured not so long ago.

When the explosions took place at Glastonbury, they were loud. The feelings Tara experienced were horrific: people dying, their bodies incinerated, torn apart by explosives or shrapnel. But one of the most prominent things that now triggers her fear to return is the stench of sewage. The bombs had been placed inside the sewage tanks of toilet blocks, covering the site in shitty waste, literally.

Each of the Namuh instinctively reaches out and places a hand on Tara, conveying feelings of safety, love, and warmth to her spiritually.

Tara feels her fear subside in an instant, smiles a heartfelt thank you to each of them, and then instructs Damba to proceed. He and Masiko had both received Tara's fear but thought it their own. Tara picks up on this and replaces the fear with a feeling of safety and comfort.

Damba then continues, "The community treats this waste stream within the sewage processing plant. The treated water is cleaned to a standard that most first-world countries would deem sufficient to be released back into the local water table, but the community utilises the water for farming activities instead, which of course adds another natural treatment process before the water reaches the water table."

As they enter through the gates of the community, the three-armed guards, all wearing Toto security uniforms, approach Damba to confirm that these are indeed the guests they had been informed would be arriving today. After a brief discussion with Damba, the guards walk back to their post.

“These guards are from within the community. They are trained in various other areas of operation within the community and receive payment for services rendered to the community via an internal finance system, which will be explained later,” Damba imparts.

“This farming community is extremely profitable. You see, everything that enters the farm operation, the farm makes money on. The sewage received from the neighbouring communities is charged at a few cents per litre to cover the treatment process and a little profit. Then, all the separated products are utilised on the farm. The other waste streams from the townships, Masindi, and even some areas of Hoima are charged per kilogram upon being received onto the farm for processing,” Damba explains.

As they walk through the community, Damba goes on to explain that this community had originally been established with families who were struggling financially, struggling retirees, domestic violence survivors, physically and mentally disabled individuals, and unemployed youth. Each person or family is provided a modest home with a personal income pod that allows them to earn some additional income on top of the income they earn for working within the community.

Damba stops everyone in front of a large, two-storey structure. It is painted white, with light green trim encasing the dark green glass in the windows and doors. “This is the community centre,” he states, whilst gesturing towards the building with his outstretched arm. “On the lower floor, the centre houses the community kitchen, dining hall, a community shop, recreation room, and the medical office.”

“The second floor is where the administration, sales, training, and management facilities are located,” Damba says as he points upward with his index finger.

Gesturing with his arm again, Damba directs everybody’s attention directly behind them, opposite the community centre. “That is a basic tiny house design within this community. Next to it on the left, you will see three small townhouses, and on the right of the tiny house is the expandable modular home design that is also used within this community.”

As they take in the new structures Damba has just introduced to them, Tara asks, “May we look inside them, please, Damba?”

“That is fine. These particular accommodations are used only to house visiting guests in the community. I do not believe we have any visitors today,” replies Damba with a smile. He is quietly pleased with the attention the Namuh are paying to the information he is providing. Aside from being instructed by Douglas personally ‘to make sure they pay attention to everything,’ he also has a personal connection with this community, having been involved in selecting the initial candidates.

They all walk over to the tiny house. The structure is made of what looks to be basic cold room panelling. The main body of the house is approximately three metres wide on the front profile, with what appears to be a pop-out room to one side, adding close to an additional two metres. There is another pop-out room at the front of the structure, and with two large windows set into the front, they can all make out a kitchen area.

They walk under an awning that protrudes from the opposite side of the structure to the pop-out room. The awning runs the length of the structure, which is approximately seven metres long. There is a set of outdoor furniture near the back of the covered area, comprising a

small table, two lounge chairs, and two stools. Damba enters his master code into the electronic pad next to the door in the middle of the structure's wall.

As they enter the tiny house, the Namuh are taken aback by how much space there is inside. The open-plan design flows seamlessly. Looking past the small but functional dining area, they can see the kitchen area in the front of the house. It has everything one requires for cooking a family meal.

Looking at what everyone had correctly assumed was a pop-out room, they see an electronic viewing screen attached to the front wall of the room, with a beanbag couch and two individual beanbags that are hovering on magnetic seating platforms. Behind the seating, they spot a home office with a desk, chair, and computer screen.

A set of stairs, almost ladder-like, lead up to a loft, which Michael ascends. He quickly informs everyone that it is a bedroom. The ceiling of the house is angled to rise from front to back, providing additional height for the loft.

Opening a door at the back of the house, next to a washer/dryer, Tara discovers the toilet and shower facilities.

"This style of home is what the community uses for single people and couples without children," Damba relays. "The townhouses comprise two or three bedrooms, and the modular housing can be expanded to accommodate up to six bedrooms," he concludes as they exit the tiny house.

Masiko, who had seen herself into the administration area on the second floor of the community centre on arrival, is now sitting inside the air-conditioned electric mini-bus, feeling extremely relieved to be out of the heat, just in front of the tiny house. "Climb in, everybody. It is time to see the rest of this operation," she exclaims.

Over the following four hours, the Namuh are shown around the rest of the area that the community covers. They see the waste recycling areas, from the treatment processes of the three wet waste streams (septic, oily water, and muddy water), to the metal, plastics, glass recycling, and construction aggregate separations.

Viewing the way the operation produces a myriad of products from the different waste streams, either to be used within the community or sold externally, broadens the Namuhs' understanding of just how effective this type of community could be in any location where one is established.

The farming side of the community offers a complete re-education for them. The types of crops being farmed are eye-opening: Camelina, used for making biodiesel (still used in some older aircraft, power generators, and old-style internal combustion engine-driven farm equipment), and another waste product from the Camelina crop is processed into a livestock food additive.

A plant named Kenaf, on the other hand, not only produces the whitest paper without requiring bleaching, but by separating the long stem fibres from the short ones, provides the vehicle industry with highly sought-after long stem fibre for manufacturing internal fibre panels. It is also used in the security and space industries for manufacturing Kevlar and other armoured protection materials.

After the tour, Masiko and Damba introduce the Namuh to the village elders in one of the training rooms on the second floor of the community centre. "The elders are selected from within the community by their peers," Masiko explains. "This is Nora. She has been selected as the spokesperson for this village."

Nora, who looks to be in her mid-forties, walks forward from the group of elders and gestures for the Namuh to take seats at the front

bench table of the training room, while the rest of the elders, Damba, and Masiko all take seats near the back.

Now standing at the front of the room, looking as relaxed as a veteran school teacher before her class, Nora explains in a sweet but raspy voice, “When an individual or family is accepted into the community, they receive a non-interest loan from the community in the form of a cryptocurrency named ‘Totoken.’ This allows them to purchase their home, personal income pod, and electric vehicle if they choose.” Nora continues, “There is a buyback system that the community has in place for anyone deciding to leave the community, move to a different community elsewhere, or if an individual passes, which has happened with some of our more mature intakes, the monetary amount is paid out in line with the individual’s last wishes.”

Nora adds, “Being part of the community, we refer to the community as E.B.C. (Economy Building Community), entitles the individual or family to two meals per day from the mess hall, work clothing, basic hygiene necessities, and basic medical services. Anything else we need can be purchased from the E.B.C. store.”

“Everyone is given a communication device with their loan. There is a crypto wallet built into each device. Once within the E.C.B, we all work and receive the cryptocurrency as payment for work completed. The more work we do, the more we get paid. The Totoken is easily transferable into local currency, as it is backed by Toto International, if we require purchases outside the E.C.B.” Nora walks to a lectern off to the side of the room. After taking a drink from a glass of iced water, she informs everyone, “There are cups and a chilled water dispenser at the back of the room if anyone is thirsty.” She points to the rear of the room.

Both Michael and Apollo stand and walk to the back to get water.

After Michael and Apollo return from acquiring water for the team, Nora continues, "The management office, along with us elders, works with each member of the E.B.C, establishing the best areas of work for them, the work rosters, the repayments on their loans, and the establishment of an income-generating portfolio."

Nora goes on to explain, "This E.B.C has been running now for three years. There are 120 families within it. Every family has already repaid its initial loan, except for the twenty families that were taken on this year. Another twenty families have left to establish ten more E.B.C.s in different areas, which has made room for more to come in."

Tara senses the pride that Nora holds for her E.C.B., as well as the kindness in her heart. "So, it sounds to me like you are educating everyone within the E.B.C. to become independent, self-sufficient, and to develop a community spirit," Tara directs her statement to Nora.

The Namuh understand the plan. This is the best way to help the population of Somalia. They can all feel the gratitude that each elder of the E.C.B. holds for the opportunity they have been given, and the difference they are making for themselves, for others, and for the planet.

It is now time to fix the atrocities being inflicted on the people of Somalia.

Chapter Twenty-Two

You Thought You Were the Bad Arse?

The order had come directly from Assad Abdriahim, who had contacted Mohammed Hasan Yalahow by communicator that morning.

“You need to send a message to that fucking clinic and the greater community. The reports I am receiving have me very concerned,” Assad spits, his voice low and harsh as he glowers into the communicator on his desk.

“They need to understand that life is tough, and you do not get anything for free. That clinic needs to be put in its place or shut down.” Assad pauses for a moment, thinking. Then he continues, his usual methodical speech pattern returning. The clinic founders must at least begin paying protection money for their staff, though this might still be insufficient. Taking a deep breath and allowing his gaze to bore into M. Hasan, Assad finally says, “The hope the clinic is bringing

to the people of that community will be devastating for our militia recruitment. You need to fix this problem now.”

Mohammed Hasan Yalahow, or M. Hasan as he is known to the men of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), had assumed command of the ADF over twenty years ago by killing its then-leader on Assad Abdriahim’s order. He was only twenty-three years of age at the time.

By the age of twenty-three, M. Hasan was already a ten-year veteran in militia warfare, having been recruited by Assad himself from his village in Somalia. He had risen through the ranks of the militia quickly, showing obedience, loyalty, a passion for learning, and a lust for violence towards whomever Assad told him was the enemy.

M. Hasan was a big man, in stature as well as importance within the ADF. Standing at almost two metres tall, one hundred ninety-eight centimetres, he towered over most men, had the build of a gorilla, and the demeanour of a cornered lion. He followed Assad’s orders blindly, as a young boy follows the orders of a father he idolises, but no one else. He considered himself the top man, second only to Assad.

“Ensure that all the staff are afraid to go to work. Show them who is in control in your city,” Assad finishes, before turning off his communicator.

Afiya’s bloodied, battered, and naked body was thrown from the open side door of the black van onto the footpath directly in front of the Healing Centre. The shocked staff from the reception area rushed outside to assist her, but soon realised it was too late. Her body was cold, the blood dried, and there was no sign of life left in the young girl’s body.

The police were called. They arrived quite quickly, with sirens blaring, negotiating the amassed crowd of hundreds of people from within the local area.

Once Afiya's body had been removed from the pavement, the police began to question as many witnesses as possible. Oddly, unlike many other crimes perpetrated within the City of Hoima, most of these witnesses were helpful. Some were able to describe the vehicle, others gave a description of the driver, and a few people reported seeing the direction the vehicle had been travelling after it had left the scene.

Even with so much information, the police work slowly. There is a definitive reluctance from most of the senior officers on the case. From the descriptions gathered at the scene, most of them know who the perpetrators of this crime are, but they all fear the retaliation that will come down on them and their families should they dare to act upon the knowledge.

Tara enters the cold room with tears welling up in her eyes. She can feel dread within every cell of her being. It causes unsteadiness in her legs; she feels that her legs are no longer the steady support system her body has been used to her whole life. She desires to turn around and flee, but understands that she must see this for herself.

This is the coroner's holding facility for the city's dead. Afiya's body lies lifeless upon a stainless-steel medical gurney, ready for an autopsy. Tara had been informed of Afiya's death on the flight back from the E.B.C. and had requested Damba reroute the flying taxi directly to the facility holding her body.

As Tara takes in the extent of Afiya's brutal injuries, she feels the transition of the feeling of dread into raging anger. Apollo, who stands beside her holding her hand, squeezes it to indicate that she may want to rein in her emotional net, as he is experiencing her anger. Tara says to herself, 'Someone is going to pay severely for this.'

Forcing herself to gain a little more control of her emotions, Tara picks up the medical examiner's chart at the end of the gurney, her petite hands shaking. Only a preliminary visual assessment has been

filled in: blunt force trauma causing probable bone breakages, contusions on multiple areas of the body, probable rape, severed arteries from deep neck wounds. These are some of the words she can make out through her tear-filled vision, as her whole body now trembles.

During the previous two weeks, Tara had come to think of Afiya more as a little sister than a friend. They had shared many personal stories. Tara had comforted Afiya as she recalled the night she was kidnapped and her parents murdered. Afiya was a person who was loving, bright, and with plans towards helping others in her newfound path of nursing.

Gazing at her now lifeless body on the cold steel table, taking in all the injuries that her body has been subjected to before becoming this lifeless shell, Tara starts to lose her composure again. She turns to Apollo, places her face onto his chest, and sobs, but only for a moment.

Her sorrow is quickly replaced with a rage that Apollo also feels himself encompassed in. It is raw, maniacal, hateful, and all-encompassing.

Tara looks up into Apollo's eyes. Her emotional rage emanates from deep within, and she knows it is now encompassing Apollo, too. They both know what they are going to do. Turning as one, they walk from the cold, sterile room, saying nothing, but feeling the need to inflict pain upon those involved.

Michael, Sophia, Brahma, and Damba are waiting for Apollo and Tara when they exit the coroner's building.

"We need to find out who is responsible for this grotesque act of violence," Apollo states as they approach the others standing beside the taxi.

Everyone is now encompassed within Tara's emotional net. They each feel the loss of Afiya but are almost in a feverish state of controlled anger directed towards the perpetrators of her murder.

Sophia walks to Tara, embraces her in a long heartfelt hug, and says, "Let's go deal with those fuckers!"

"You should all probably pick up your K.E.E.P.S. from the clinic first, then we can utilise the assets there to help locate the people who have committed this crime," Damba suggests.

There is silence within the taxi. Tara has managed to rein in her emotional net. They all stare out of the windows, engrossed in their internal thoughts. That is, until Sophia pipes up with, "I understand this is hard for us all, but your internal dialogues are drowning out my thoughts."

Sophia turns to look behind her at Tara. "Yes, Tara, we are going to get these assholes." She then looks at Apollo. "She can take care of herself; you don't have to be worried." Looking beside her at Michael, "I think you're right. I should investigate the minds of the local police for leads."

Looking directly in front of her at Brahma, "That is an interesting concept regarding tracking an individual's electrical current. You should examine that more." Then she whips her head to Damba, seated across from Brahma. "You need to explain that to us all now!"

Everyone looks to Damba, who has just taken on a very sheepish posture.

"Well, you see, it is still very experimental, and I do not know if I am allowed to discuss the topic with you all," Damba stammers.

"You do realise that if I project your thoughts to everyone here, we will find out anyway, don't you?" Sophia states to Damba with a look of disdain on her face.

"Oh, very well then," a now very ruffled Damba starts. "One of the corporation's projects is a computer tracking system that has recently been given access to almost every monitoring system within Hoima City. I was thinking that maybe we could use it to assist with our

tracking efforts.” Damba blurts out just before the taxi lands on the rooftop landing platform above the Healing Centre.

On exiting the taxi, Michael says to Damba, “We will get into our K.E.E.P.S. and meet you in the conference room to discuss this further.”

The Namuh hurry to fit themselves into their suits, then head for the conference room. Michael, who has the bottle of the liquid membrane with an atomising spray nozzle, takes the longest as he applies the membrane to the inside of his suit. Then, wearing only his underpants, he slips into it.

Keeping the thought of water at the forefront of his mind, he is able to slip into the suit with ease. It is as if the interior surface of the suit has a film of olive oil coated on it. Once fully suited, Michael thinks of a solid and instantly feels the suit become an extension of his own body. He feels the tile under his feet. Reaching out to close his locker door, he feels the handle as if it were his naked hand upon it. Michael is even aware of the chilled air coming from the central air conditioning, even though his body is completely sealed within the suit.

By the time Michael enters the conference room, Damba has Douglas on the screen in the bottom left portion of it, Steve is on the one in the bottom centre, the bottom right area is showing a room with three people sitting behind computer screens, all staring into their screens, tapping away on keyboards in front of them, and at the top of the screen, the words SEEKER V.

Without preamble, Douglas says, “What you are all about to gain access to is the latest version of a tracking system that the Toto Corporation has been developing for over two decades. It is an ongoing project that I am sure you will all see the benefits of and be able to add to during future operations. For now, it is being uploaded into your

K.E.E.P.S., hence the frantic work being done in that room shown on the bottom right of the screen.”

Douglas taps a couple of keys on a keyboard just off-screen, and the words at the top of the screen are replaced by a computer-generated golden humanoid-shaped face that moves its mouth, as well as all other facial features, with lifelike movement. Then it begins to talk in a businesslike female voice.

“Hi everyone, my name is See Vee, short for Seeker V (five). I began as an AI tracking program, advanced artificial intelligence; however, after Douglas and Steve explained my purpose—that it involved possibly guiding humanity toward a more viable path—I chose to expand on that programming.”

“I have recently gained access to ninety-eight percent of all audio and visual hardware within Hoima City, security systems, communicators, satellites, just to mention a few. I can locate just about anyone or anything in this city. How may I assist you today?” See Vee’s facial colour now changes to the pigment of human skin.

Douglas informs, “See Vee, today there was a murder of one of our staff from Hoima City Healing Clinic. The staff member was Afiya Atugonza. Her body was thrown from a black van toward the front of the clinic at approximately 3.30 pm. The police have taken witness statements, which are still being uploaded to their system. We require you to obtain as much information as possible regarding the perpetrators of this event and locate their whereabouts.”

The top of the screen erupts with a multitude of video feeds from all parts of the city. Some are clear; some are unfocused. There are so many angles that the video feeds are coming from, including infrared videos showing heat signatures. Then the sounds of vehicles, engines, tyres on the road, and people’s voices come from the speakers within the room.

Finally, See Vee shows a storyboard of paused videos, photos, and frames labelled 'audio,' depicting the story of the people who entered the black van, and how they grabbed Afiya from the kerbside as she was leaving her accommodation for her short walk to work at the clinic, the instant Afiya was thrown from the van in front of the clinic, the escape route used by the van, the torching of the van, and the two other vehicles used by the seven people involved in the murder, including the two people who drove the extra cars.

The final frames are mugshots of each person involved. There are nine mugshots in total, including one of Mohammed Hasan Yalahow, the leader of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and Assad Abdriahim, listed as the one who ordered the murder.

There are addresses under each person's mugshot, as well as probable locations for each in thirty-minute increments over the following three hours.

See Vee's voice speaks through the conference room's speakers. "This information has been uploaded into each of the K.E.E.P.S. within this room, as have I. I have also forwarded the same information to all relevant parties involved in this endeavour. I am unable to ascertain locational information regarding Assad Abdriahim, as he is currently not within Hoima City, Uganda."

Douglas stands as he says, "See Vee, I would request that you make yourself available to the Namuh. They are the ones in that room using the K.E.E.P.S., at least until tonight's operation concludes. Namuh, all of Toto Corporation's assets are at your disposal. Good hunting." He finishes.

The Namuh stand as one, walk around their chairs, and exit the conference room door. Not saying a word, they head for the elevator, activating their helmets along the way. During the short ride to their P.A.V's on the rooftop, nothing is said. It isn't until they have all seated

themselves in their vehicles that Michael says, “Before leaving on this hunt, I think it will serve us well to connect with our higher selves for spiritual clarification. I mean, I know that I’m fucking angry about Afya’s murder and I’m ready to take life in her name, but I would like a little guidance on how far I can go.”

They all agree and begin their spiritual connections.

As Brahma closes his eyes while attempting to get his body into a comfortable position within his P.A.V., he finds the connection to his higher self is instantaneous. Unlike previous experiences, there is no need for calming breathing or focusing his mind into the usual area where he experiences this connection; it is just there.

He feels his mind release from his corporeal being and become Spirit as soon as his eyes close. There is no longer thought within his mind, only understanding within his spirit about what must take place on the Earth plane. Brahma understands that what the Namuh are about to undertake is a necessity, not only to assist with releasing other spiritual beings from the terror of having noway of connecting with their biological beings, but also to guide humanity back onto a more meaningful path of life on this plane of existence.

Brahma feels, knows, and fully comprehends as Spirit that the biological beings they are about to eradicate bear no importance to the future path of humanity. If left to live, they will only cause suffering and misery for their attached spiritual beings, as well as for many other humans. This comprehension also brings clarity to Brahma that the more extreme the deaths of the perpetrators’ human bodies are, the more helpful they will be in turning humanity onto a better path.

Brahma senses his hands on the controls of the P.A.V. as he opens his eyes. His body feels charged, ready for the fight they are about to embark on. Looking at the pilots of the other P.A.V’s, he becomes aware that they are also ready.

See Vee speaks into Michael's ear as he emerges from meditation, "Hello, Michael. I noticed that when you started meditation, eighty-seven percent of your body's electrical field focused on your brain, with the remaining thirteen percent utilised for your heart, circulatory, and lung functions. I received this information directly via your K.E.E.P.S., but I cannot connect with the others in this way. Has your suit been modified?"

A momentary burst of pride for what he had accomplished with the membrane pulses through Michael as he quickly explains to See Vee that he has applied an atomised version of a membrane that encompasses certain elements from the ethereal plane within it.

See Vee replies, "Oh, you have just blown some of my circuits with that comment. Maybe we should talk about this later. I have confirmed that four of the murderers and one of the drivers are located at a drinking establishment near the township of Kikube, just off the Kyenjojo–Hoima Road."

Lifting off the rooftop landing pad is instantaneous for them all. Along with the conversation between Michael and See Vee being linked to each K.E.E.P.S., Sophia has taken it upon herself to connect everyone's thoughts.

Landing their P.A.V.s in one of the town's green spaces approximately six hundred metres from the bar that See Vee has highlighted as the target on their heads-up displays, the Namuh walk steadily toward it.

"Can you locate any of them inside?" Michael asks Apollo.

"Sure can," Apollo states after forcing himself to view through the eyes of all eight people inside the bar. He focuses on the table where the five targets are seated, via the mind of the lone barman.

“Sophia, Tara, would you ask and persuade them to come outside, please?” Apollo asks the girls as he implants the positions of the murderers into their minds.

Apollo, still viewing Afiya’s killers through the barman, watches as all five men stand from their table simultaneously and walk out the front door of the bar. In less than thirty seconds, all five are standing outside the bar, facing the Namuh, unable to move.

“I have shut down all cameras within the local area,” See Vee announces.

“We have the location of the rest of them,” Sophia speaks into the minds of the Namuh. Everyone understands that Sophia and Apollo have combined their abilities to obtain this information.

Upon receiving the intel, Tara lets loose. The large man in the middle of the group unsheathes a large hunting knife strapped to his hip. He plunges it into the stomach of the man to his left, then removes it as the surprised victim collapses to the ground, bleeding profusely. Turning to his right, the attacker slashes the man standing next to him, from the right hip, through the stomach, across the ribs, to the top of the left shoulder. The wound is deep in many places where the tissue is soft or there are no bones to block penetration. This man also falls to the ground, blood gushing from the wound.

Tara simply induced a strong feeling of betrayal within the knife wielder toward the person on his left, then she added a feeling of disgust to the first feeling, directing it towards the guy on his right. She then implants the feeling of a small animal moving within the centre of this man’s brain.

Just as the knife-wielding man sharply thrusts the bloodied knife directly upward to enter through his own throat, slicing his tongue, and finally lodging the blade into the centre of his brain, Tara notices a bolt of lightning emanating from Brahma’s hand, crackling toward

the man on the far right of the group, who looks as though he is about to reach for a weapon. The man violently shakes as the electrical energy connects with his body, before his body begins to smoke, blacken, and eventually erupt into a flaming pile of violently wobbling flesh.

As this is taking place, the man with a hunting knife now lodged into his brain falls backwards, as Michael, who had started running toward the last man on the left of the group while the now brain-dead knife wielder first attacked the man to his right, lands his elbow directly onto the chin of the last man.

Michael's body's forward momentum, combined with the forward thrust of his bent elbow onto the man's chin, is enough to shatter his lower jaw and drive bone from the rear of his upper jaw up into the inside of his skull. This man flies backwards, dead.

"The other two who were involved in Afiya's murder, that M. Hasan shithead, and the rest of the ADF, are in a jungle base to the southeast of us. I was able to ascertain an estimate of one hundred and sixty of them in total," Sophia implants into everyone's minds, along with the visual directional information, camp setup, and security emplacements that Apollo had retrieved from the five people on the ground in front of them, prior to them all being dead.

As the Namuh walk back to their P.A.V's, Michael addresses See Vee over their internal comm channel. "See Vee, we're going to engage in a confrontation with about one hundred and sixty enemy combatants. Is there anything you can do for us that will provide more of an advantage than we already have?"

See Vee responds directly to them all on the same channel. "I take it, having seen what you five have just accomplished here, that the goal is to eliminate all the combatants tonight."

"Yes, it is, See Vee," replies Tara coldly, her anger evident in her voice.

"I can assist in enhancing your thermal imaging within your suits. When we get within a two-kilometre radius of the combatants, I can use the computing systems of your P.A.V's, K.E.E.P.S., and three Toto satellites, which I am moving into position now, combined to infiltrate every piece of tech within the encampment. I can also operate your vehicles remotely," See Vee states.

Michael says, "I have a plan. Sophia, Apollo, will you two please take it from my mind and share it with us all?" Michael feels the minds of both Sophia and Apollo as they access his thoughts. He relaxes his mind and lets his plan flow from his mind into theirs. As he feels them receiving his information, he becomes aware of Tara and Brahma's minds; he likens it to when they had joined as Spirit.

Sophia walks slowly through the dark jungle until See Vee announces, "Sophia, that is far enough. You are only thirty metres from those two sentries." She crouches on the jungle floor, closes her eyes, and stretches her audible senses as far as she is able.

She only realises she has gone too far when the multitude of voices now sounding within her mind becomes staggering. It is like the roar of a crowd at a rock concert. Sophia slowly begins to pull her senses back towards herself, edging away from the local people in their homes, within townships and farms dotted around this jungle area. After a minute, she feels confident that she is now only tapped into the minds of the Allied Democratic Forces.

"Tara, Apollo, See Vee, I'm ready," Sophia whispers over their communication channel.

Chaos ensues, weapons fire, grunts, yells, and screams, then the explosions start.

Michael's plan is simple: let the ADF kill each other.

Sophia had shouted “WAKE UP” in a male voice into everyone’s minds. At the same time, Apollo, looping through Sophia’s already connected mind, applied a vision of the Uganda People’s Defence Force infiltrating the encampment to half of the ADF personnel. Of course, what they were seeing was the other half looking like the UPDF.

Tara, also looping through Sophia’s mind, conveyed a mixture of fear, anger, and hatred to everyone Sophia had connected with.

People who were already awake quickly started shooting, stabbing, and fighting each other. Those who had been sleeping grabbed their weapons to join in the fighting, as See Vee began to explode anything that could be exploded via the connection established through the Tec link.

The whole fight was over within ten minutes, except for twelve people still alive, according to Sophia, who could sense them, and the K.E.E.P.S. heads-up display.

Brahma, walking casually through the blood-splattered encampment, zapping anyone with a life sign until there was no life sign left but one, suddenly feels the impact of a projectile on the back of his right shoulder. Turning, he sees M. Hasan, whom he recognises from the mugshot and his size, standing beside a now-burning military tent, pointing an old-style revolver at him.

M. Hasan fires his gun again. The round impacts on the front left side of Brahma’s chest with a dull thud. As he looks down, he sees the spent bullet crumple and fall to the ground, his heads-up display relaying information about the newly gained kinetic energy available for his use.

Brahma keeps walking towards M. Hasan. M. Hasan keeps firing the revolver. The kinetic energy keeps building.

“Sophia, Apollo, do we have what we need from this arse?” Brahma asks over the comm.

“Yeah, we do,” comes Apollo’s response, an odious undertone apparent in his voice.

Brahma reaches out his right hand towards M. Hasan’s chest as he approaches him. Once Brahma feels the resistance of the man’s chest against his outstretched arm, he voices to his K.E.E.P.S., “Release kinetic energy via my right hand.”

M. Hasan, his body and clothing covered in the blood of his men, cannot believe this idiot has just walked up to face him. He raises his weapon, intending to bring it down on the helmet that Brahma is wearing, knowing that he can easily break it apart.

Brahma feels his K.E.E.P.S. stiffen, then he feels the slight impact of the kinetic energy leaving the glove on his right hand. M. Hasan’s chest appears to implode before his body begins its backward flight through the air for six metres, then slides another two metres on the jungle floor before coming to a stop.

The others all arrive at Brahma’s location as he approaches the now lifeless body of M. Hasan. “Although this will not bring Afiya back to us, at least this piece of shit will no longer be able to inflict his misery upon others,” Brahma says, looking at Tara and the others.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Basement Workshop

The Namuh return to the clinic, remove their K.E.E.P.S., shower, change, and then head back to the conference room. As they enter, See Vee's almost holographic depiction of a human female face is displayed on the top half of the screen, while Douglas's image occupies the bottom half.

Taking their seats around the conference table opposite the screen, Douglas addresses them. "See Vee has kept me apprised of most of the action that has taken place tonight. I think we should have the debrief tomorrow after you all get some sleep. I liked that you all connected with your higher selves prior to the operation. May I suggest we take the time now to do the same? I believe we may all benefit from it."

The Namuh all nod in unison, the adrenaline rush of the past few hours finally subsiding and being replaced with a desperate need for sleep. They adjust their posture in their chairs, close their eyes, and are instantly aware that they are Spirit.

As soon as her eyes close, Sophia becomes her higher self. There is no transition from her human awareness merging into her spiritual awareness; she simply is Spirit. As a spiritual being, Sophia comprehends all that has just taken place on the Earth Plane, without the human emotion her being would normally attach to such events.

Sophia becomes aware of the others around her. She understands that the almost galaxy-like appearance of each entity would have been incomprehensible to her physical mind. There is simply far too much to take in. But being here in Spirit herself, Sophia has full comprehension.

Each entity has millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, of points of light, like brightly shining distant stars, swirling around their immensely bright central core, which emanates a base colour unique to the entity. Encapsulated within the swirl are gaseous clouds or nebulae of various shapes and sizes, illuminated by the entity's central core or by one or many of the multitude of luminous pinpricks.

Sophia knows her higher self radiates a beautiful, subtle yellow light. As she looks at Tara's Spirit, she notices it glows with a golden light, as does Apollo's. Brahma's light is more chaotic, with a blue hue and brilliant flashes of white, orange, and red.

Douglas's spiritual being is the smallest of them all and the last to arrive, but there is an immensely calming lavender light radiating from within it. Michael's light is the brightest by far: an intense white light, almost blinding but not quite. She understands it is truth, knowledge, and love of all.

In the next instant, all six spirits merge as one into what would best be described by any onlooker as a mega-galaxy.

They see as one all the freed spirits from the recent actions they have undertaken on the Earth Plane. Many of these spirits are being reborn into new human beings; others are reborn into beings that are

not human, and some are simply waiting. They all exude joy, love, understanding, and belief in what is taking place as the appropriate way of things within this realm.

A spirit glides close to the group. Sophia feels the spirit's request to join them, to which they unanimously respond, yes. As this spiritual entity merges, they comprehend that it is Afiya's higher self who has entered their group. Sophia feels Afiya's love for them all, her appreciation for the Namuh assisting her in completing her mission on the Earth Plane, and an understanding that ending her human life as Afiya was necessary. They all know her spirit will become part of their lives again on the Earth Plane, albeit within a different human being.

Afiya's spiritual energy separates from them and, in an instant, is no longer visible. They take this as their cue to dissolve their joint union and re-enter their beings in earthly reality.

Opening their eyes in the conference room, they all feel calm, refreshed, and at peace with the carnage they brought upon the ADF just a short while ago. "Go home, get some rest, and we will meet here again later at 10 am," Douglas concludes, then his signal blinks out.

As they leave the conference room, Michael gently grabs Sophia by the arm and asks, "Would you meet me in our basement workshop at 9am? There is something I need your help with."

"Well, okay," she replies with a gentle smile, still recalling the brightness of Michael's spiritual being, then walks out the door to catch up with the others.

It was 4 a.m. by the time Michael was ready for sleep. It had been another hot, humid night; these were becoming more prominent, and not just in Uganda; the nights were heating up everywhere on the planet, and he kept being informed every time he caught a news feed.

He had taken his P.A.V. for a short joyride over parts of Hoima city he had not yet visited, just to take in the sights. When he arrived at his

apartment, he was hungry. He made himself a steak, cut some fresh microgreens he grew on the window-sill in front of his sink, threw on a splash of balsamic vinegar and a dash of cayenne pepper as a dressing, then sat in front of the media monitor on the wall.

There was only one local news channel in English, so he was watching that as they covered the brutal murders of five men outside a bar in the township of Kikube. The reporter mentioned the police believed all five men might be connected with the murder of a young woman the previous day.

Michael had just finished his meal when a 'Breaking News' alert flashed across the screen.

Mass casualties confirmed in the Hoima Nature Reserve. Police believe two militant groups were involved in a fierce conflict. Most of the dead have been confirmed as members of the criminal ADF, including Mohammed Hasan Yalahow, the known leader of the ADF. Police are still taking witness statements and searching for suspects.

Michael knew they had just sent a massive signal to all local militant groups in Uganda. For years, the ADF had almost free rein wherever they operated. Now, the Namuh had cut the head off the proverbial snake. There would be some internal fighting and regrouping over the coming weeks, but he had thought of a plan to deal with them all.

Michael awoke after only four and a half hours of sleep, brushed his teeth, got dressed, and then made his way to his P.A.V. on the rooftop. The short six-minute flight to the clinic put him there just before nine a.m. Riding the elevator to the basement workshop, he set about preparing the membrane samples for some tests he wanted to conduct with Sophia.

"How did you sleep?" inquires Sophia as she enters the workshop, already dressed in her clinical smock.

“Well, when I finally got to sleep, I did sleep well,” he replies, placing two more trays atop a workbench.

Michael is not paying attention to Sophia, so he is a little surprised when she pushes up against him at the workbench and implants in his mind. ‘Kiss me.’

“Wha...” is all Michael can get out before Sophia’s soft lips are on his. Her arms wrap around his muscular shoulders as Michael gently grabs the back of her head with his right hand to control the kiss, then draws her body in closer with his left arm now around her waist.

‘Take me now. There is a condom in the right-hand pocket of my smock,’ Sophia implants into Michael’s mind.

“Why the rush?” asks Michael with a smile as he breaks the kiss.

“We must meet the others in the conference room in forty minutes, and I am horny. For some reason, I couldn’t stop thinking of you all night, and I know how much you want me as well,” Sophia says out loud as she grabs each side of Michael’s face and places another passionate kiss on his mouth.

Michael reaches his left hand into the right pocket of her smock, removes the condom, places it on the workbench, then undoes the buttons at the front of the smock. He quickly realises she has nothing on underneath.

They both finish in less than five minutes, Sophia providing guidance by implanting directions in Michael’s mind.

As they get dressed again, Michael manages to convince Sophia to stay a while longer to run the tests.

Sophia’s body, still experiencing the remnants of their hasty love-making, offers one of the most genuine smiles Michael has ever seen from her and says, “You are a bit of a nerd, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, but don’t tell Brahma, because he thinks he is the only nerd among us,” Michael jokes.

“So, what do you need me to do?” Sophia asks as she pulls her smock down over her bottom to sit on one of the stools at the workbench. She stares at Michael, smiles, and then responds, “Oh, thank you.” She had just heard Michael’s thought about her having a nice backside.

Slightly embarrassed but focused on the task at hand, Michael informs her, “Your sound manipulation has different ranges, so I want you to send some different sound-waves through these membrane samples I have created.”

Picking up a tray from the floor, as they had knocked it off during their previous activity, Michael checks that the membrane is still attached, then says, “If we can start with the low end first.”

Sophia raises her right hand and aims the palm at the tray Michael is holding with both hands toward her. She can’t make out anything on the tray, but it does seem to have a sheen across it.

“Hold on to it,” Sophia says as she hears a low rumble from within, like a very slow roll of thunder.

As she feels the energy release from her hand, she already knows it is much more powerful than she intended. For an instant, Sophia imagines Michael being slammed back against the basement wall, shattering his bones and turning his flesh into pulp.

She is relieved and amazed that as the sound emissions contact the tray, or more precisely, the membrane upon the tray, her sound-waves are absorbed.

A concerned Sophia asks, “Are you okay? Did you feel anything?”

“Not a thing,” replies Michael, smiling.

“I honestly thought we would need to pick you up with a straw. The strength of the pressure wave I sent was the largest I have ever created, but it wasn’t intentional. The power of my abilities appears to have increased dramatically,” Sophia says, looking concerned.

“Oh,” says Michael, looking more closely at the tray he’s holding. “It appears the membrane somehow dissipated or absorbed the pressure wave. Let’s try the other end of the scale,” he responds enthusiastically, placing the tray on the workbench behind him. He retrieves another from the workbench in front of him and holds it out.

“Are you fucking crazy?” exclaims Sophia, smiling at Michael unbelievably. “I just told you that I unintentionally fired off the equivalent of a life-ending blast at you, and now you want to try the other end of the scale?” She shakes her head in disbelief.

Michael looks up at Sophia, lowers the new tray in his hand, and smiles mischievously. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained, and all that,” he says.

Sophia looks into his eyes, smiles, and says, “After the meeting, I’ll come back down here with you. We’ll devise a safer way to test the membrane that doesn’t involve you being in a direct line of fire, and maybe we can discover why my abilities appear to have increased in power as well.”

“Um, yeah, okay,” replies Michael as he places the tray back on the workbench.

“Is this the first time you’ve noticed the increase in your abilities?” Michael asks, walking toward Sophia.

“No, last night, or this morning when I was trying to connect with the soldiers in the ADF camp. I had to rein in my focus. I initially connected with way more people—they were from most of the surrounding villages. It felt like thousands of voices in my head,” Sophia replies as they both walk to the elevator.

As Michael pushes the button to take them to the conference room, he says, “Do you think we should discuss it with the others? Maybe someone else has experienced something similar.”

The elevator door opens. Sophia exits and turns toward the locker room. "I'm going to put some clothes on, but yes, I think we should bring it up in the meeting." She takes two steps, then turns her head back toward Michael. "Michael, let's not make a big thing about what we did before the testing. I think we both only want something casual, right?"

Michael places a block within his mind, something he had been practicing over the last week, looks into her eyes, and says, "Oh, sure, that's good." He then turns toward the conference room.

The debrief was completed. Sophia and Apollo had passed on the knowledge they had extracted from M. Hasan's mind before his crushing demise at the hand of Brahma, or more precisely, the hand within the K.E.E.P.S. that produced the concussive blast.

From the implanted information, it was clear to everyone that Assad Abdriahim should be their next target. The understandings attained via M. Hasan's mind were both illuminating and confusing. M. Hasan's mind painted a conflicting picture of Assad. On one hand, Assad was the same mentor M. Hasan had as a new thirteen-year-old recruit, but over the years, Assad sometimes became something else, a completely different person, cold, calculating, and somehow devoid of his humanity.

If Apollo and Sophia had used words to pass on the extracted information, it would have taken hours to convey it coherently. Instead, they simply connected their minds, then connected with everyone in the room. Using a skill Apollo had learned from Douglas, he connected his spiritual self with those of Douglas and Steve. Then both he and Sophia implanted the information directly into the minds of everyone they were mentally and spiritually connected with.

After the information transfer, Michael brought up the issue of Sophia's overpowering in the lab that morning and during the op.

None of the others had experienced anything like Sophia. Douglas suggested Sophia conduct a meditation later that day to request information from her higher self regarding the issue.

Douglas ended the debrief by instructing Steve to get the new information into See Vee and out to the areas of operations that required it.

He then turned his focus from the viewing screen to the camera, so it appeared he was staring directly at the Namuh, who were all still seated. His kind smile returned to his face. "Prior to this meeting, I received information that Patricia should be ready to leave the Grav Rehab within the next day or so. I have one of Toto Corporate's Terra-Link Transporters en route to her Grav Rehab now. The plan is to start her training in New Zealand and then bring her to you when she is ready. Do you all concur?"

They all voiced their agreement with Douglas's plan, and Apollo offered, "Maybe we can bring her up to speed faster if we connect remotely with her."

Douglas smiled and nodded at Apollo, then said, "I will keep you all updated. Bye for now."

Michael, Sophia, and Brahma all headed back to the basement. They filled Brahma in on what had taken place that morning with the membrane, though not with them.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Membrane Implantation

“So, you overpowered and blasted directly toward Michael with him receiving no ill effect?” questions Brahma to Sophia, as they step out of the elevator and into the basement workshop.

“It was like I knew the blast was coming, but then it disappeared when it hit the membrane,” says Michael in response to Brahma’s question directed at Sophia, smiling again, the previous excitement returning within him.

Michael walks to the bench where he has left the tray with the sample of membrane that Sophia had blasted previously, picks it up, and hands it to Brahma.

“Here, look at this. See if you can detect anything different about this sample,” says Michael.

Looking at the tray, Brahma can see the membrane on it. He is also drawn to an image in his mind showing him the molecular structure

of the membrane. "I think we should get Apollo to take a look at this," he suggests to Michael.

Sophia, who had taken a seat on a stool at the workbench, says, "He and Tara are on their way now; you do not want to know what they were doing." She ends, smiling and looking at Michael.

A short time later, a dishevelled Apollo steps out of the elevator, followed closely by Tara.

"Sophia said you guys needed me to look at something," Apollo says as he walks toward the other three.

Brahma turns to face Apollo, holding the tray with the membrane out in front of him. "Apollo, what do you make of this?" he says with a quizzical smile.

"This isn't the same membrane you showed us yesterday morning," Apollo states as he takes the tray from Brahma's hands.

"Why do you say that?" asks Michael, his excitement building.

Apollo, now turning the tray in his hands as he gazes at the membrane upon it, says, "The ethereal connection is completely different from yesterday's one. That one melded with your aura. This one is best described as a window. I mean, maybe a closed window, as it is a little difficult to see through it, but I can see through it to the ethereal realm." His excitement is evident in his tone.

The Namuh look at one another in amazement. Sophia implants 'WTF' into their minds, then Michael speaks up. "I have an idea," he says with a smile on his face and a glint in his eye.

"I think we should 'Go Spirit,' I mean connect with our higher selves to request answers and guidance," Michael reveals.

Sophia, who was thinking Michael was about to suggest something reckless again, smiles at Michael's use of 'Go Spirit,' jumps off her stool, and says, "I'm in, and I like the term 'Go Spirit' better than connecting with our higher selves. Can we use that from now on?"

The Namuh agree in unison with head nods all around, then, finding an empty space on the floor, they sit cross-legged and close their eyes.

Each of the Namuh completes their connection instantaneously. As soon as they have closed their eyes and use their minds to begin the search for a connection to their spirit, it happens. No transition takes place. One moment they are human beings on the Earth Plane; the next moment their awareness shifts to that of spiritual beings inhabiting the Divine Cosmos.

Michael's spirit acknowledges the other spiritual entities around it. How Michael's higher self communicates with the others is best described as a combination of each ability that their beings, as Namuh, have on the Earth Plane, just a lot more intense.

All-knowing, there is no need for questions, as all of life's answers are already there. All-seeing, every sight from every plane of existence. All-hearing, every sound from every plane. All-feeling, the sensation of absolutely everything from every plane. And all-energy, ever-growing forms and limitless. The recognition and understanding of everything everywhere.

As Spirit, the Namuh have the answers that they were seeking before leaving their beings on the Earth Plane, and more. Now they initiate a way for the information to be taken back with them to the Earth Plane. They each download a piece of information pertaining to the individual skill set of the Namuh they inhabit. At the end of the download, each of them is instantly back in their human forms on Earth.

Opening his eyes and standing up from the floor of the workshop, Michael retrieves the tray with the membrane that Sophia had blasted earlier and places it on top of a cleared workbench in the centre of the room.

Tara and Apollo both walk to the tray on the workbench. Apollo projects an image that he has retained from being Spirit into the membrane. The image comprises three cryptograms from the language of a civilisation long lost from the Earth Plane's history. Apollo was unable to keep the meaning of the symbols that he is projecting into the membrane; that information he knew as Spirit, but it has been lost to his Namuh form. He trusts that projecting the symbols is enough.

Tara creates three specific sensations that she has retained from being her higher self. At the same time that Apollo is projecting the cryptograms, she spreads her emotional net to encompass the membrane; she sends the sensations into it. The sensations are not of the Earth Plane, so they are a bit strange to Tara. She has retained only an impression of them. One is a combination of fear, anger, and panic. Another is like the combination of love, courage, and lust. The last is like a combination of hate, self-importance, and domination.

Sophia and Brahma approach the workbench together. Cupping her hand above the tray, Sophia feels through the membrane into the Divine Cosmos and pulls one sound through it onto the Earth Plane. The sound is melodious. It is like a single chord being played on 1,000 violins at precisely the same moment. There is a mad vibration that accompanies the sound. It resonates within the Namuh and the workshop. The entire building appears to be shaking very slightly.

Brahma cups his hand over the membrane on the tray as the vibration begins to dissipate. Feeling for the specific energy required for this task, he draws it from the Ethereal Plane onto the Earth Plane. They all stare at the membrane as it displays every colour of blue imaginable and some that are beyond description. The swirling colours intermingle across the membrane.

Michael picks the tray up from the workbench, holding it in both of his hands. He brings the tray to within 100 millimetres of his mouth

and says in a very deep but quiet voice, “DOOORBREWDARR.” Michael not only feels the word exit his throat but is also aware of an energy from the Ethereal Plane travelling through his body and exiting his mouth with the word. The word, kept from his recent time as Spirit, he understands to be a setting and dividing spell from another plane of existence, meaning that everything that each of the Namuh had done to the membrane was now affixed to it.

He places the tray back onto the bench as the membrane begins to divide itself into six individual pieces.

Each piece is the same size, still swirling with a myriad of blue colours and still showing signs of vibration. Michael is the first one to pick up a piece of the membrane in his hand. He then proceeds to place it on the skin of his throat. At the same time, he brings the idea of integration to the top of his mind as he feels the membrane melt into his skin.

One by one, the others take a piece of the membrane and place it to their throats, bringing the thought of merging the membrane into themselves to the front of their minds. These membrane pieces melt into their skin as well.

Michael loosely rolls up the last piece of membrane and places it into a glass jar that he seals with a screw-on lid. “This one is for Patricia when she joins us,” Michael says as he places the jar on top of a shelf off to the side of the workshop.

“I guess we had better test this out,” says Brahma with an excited smile.

“I am the first target,” announces Michael as he walks to an open area beside the workshop entrance near the elevator to the basement.

“Sophia will,” is all Michael gets out before Sophia’s clenched fist punches in Michael’s direction, firing off a massive sonic blast directly at him.

Chapter Twenty-Five

New Toys

Michael knows as soon as Sophia moves her shoulder to begin drawing her fist back to throw it towards him, he does not need to do anything. The sonic blast that Sophia fires at him simply passes through him and buckles the elevator door.

“That felt weird,” Michael says to the room with a bemused smile on his face.

Michael continues to direct the conversation more towards Sophia.

“I sensed the moment that your sonic wave hit me, but just at the moment that the concussion should connect with my body, I think I phased or something. For just an instant, I was as spirit and not of physical body.”

Apollo, stepping forward towards Michael, exclaims, “Bro, your physical body ceased being on the earth plane for that moment. It happened in a flash, but somehow I just know that your body’s physical matter on this plane transitioned to the Divine Cosmos for that moment, then re-emerged onto the earth plane once the sonic wave had passed.”

“You are giving off a completely different energy signature than you had previously as well. It’s like the blue colour energy that I infused into the membrane,” Brahma states.

“I have a feeling that there is a lot more to this membrane than we are capable of understanding at this time. I also feel that Patricia can provide a bit more insight into other possibilities for its uses,” Tara adds as she walks to the elevator door to inspect the damage.

“I think we may need to use the stairs,” she smiles, turning back to the group.

Although none of them have met Patricia before, there is an absolute connection that they all have felt since that first day when they discovered her presence onboard a Grav-Rehab, orbiting Earth. It is an understanding of the many things that the group still does not know about their abilities, which will become clear with her arrival on the planet. As her time on the Grav-Rehab begins to come to an end, that connection increases in strength. They can all feel it.

Sophia walks to the elevator door, cups her hand, and begins to pull ethereal sound through the door panels of the elevator. The metal doors creak as they move back into a similar shape they had been before the sonic blast buckled them.

“I have way more control now, and my connection to the Divine Cosmos feels closer,” Sophia informs as she turns back to face everyone, who now turn their full attention to her.

Sophia is about to say, “What are you all looking at?” but instead implants the statement into everyone’s minds as the sound of the elevator descending grabs everybody’s attention.

‘I hope the doors open,’ she implants into their minds as well. Everyone giggles.

Masiko exits the elevator, the left door softly scraping on the internal door frame as it slides back into the cavity. Seeing them all staring

at her, she says, “You all have a guilty look on your faces. What have you been up to down here?” Smiling at them all, she walks forward.

“To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?” Michael asks her.

“Douglas has sent through some information that is time sensitive, so I thought I might deliver it to you personally,” Masiko replies to them all. She then adds, “It also provides me the opportunity to see what you lot have been up to down here; did you cause the building to do all that shaking before?”

Brahma and Michael open their mouths to reply when Masiko smiles and says, “I really don’t need to know. Douglas trusts you, so that is good enough for me.”

“You are being picked up from the rooftop in another thirty minutes, to be taken to a military facility that is housing some of Toto’s newest technological advancements in combat hardware,” Masiko informs as she walks back to the elevator to press the call button.

After changing into their K.E.E.P.S., they exit the elevator onto the rooftop just as the military version of the flying taxi alights on the rooftop landing pad. The whole craft is a little larger than the taxi they had travelled in the day before; it allows for the mounting of the larger engines and armaments.

Entering the craft from the single visible open door, they take note of the three seats—two for the pilots and one for what they correctly assume is for the loadmaster. Michael and Brahma take up standing positions in two of the ports in the area where seating for passengers would normally be. As the others follow their lead, they both reach up with their right hands for a cable hanging from the roof of the cabin just above them.

“How come you guys know how this all works?” says Tara as she, Sophia, and Apollo watch on. Michael and Brahma both attach the

hanging cables to the top left shoulder of their K.E.E.P.S. The cable affixes itself with a click, the magnetic locator locking onto the suit.

“During the time we spent in the workshop, Brahma happened to access a secured training app for our suits. It may have outlined a few classified, and yet to be released, features and attachments for them.” Michael replies to Tara while giving Brahma a wink.

Sophia says, “There you go,” as she and Apollo together retrieve the information that Michael and Brahma are using and pass the knowledge directly to Tara’s mind as well.

After taking the military flight position, they each place both hands on the tee bar in front of them, understanding it to be a stabiliser in case of turbulence or combat flying.

“The Air Force base we are to proceed to is only a short fifteen-minute flight from here,” comes the female pilot’s voice through the comm speakers built into their K.E.E.P.S. as the transport lifts off the rooftop landing pad. The Namuh now all understand that the cable attached to each suit is for onboard ship communication, battery recharging, and computer diagnostics.

Michael turns to look at Sophia during the flight and says, “That was a nifty trick you performed. Did you only access the information we had on the K.E.E.P.S. or did you need to take more?”

“I told you that I feel a stronger connection and have more control, so yes, we only got the information you two were keeping from us,” Sophia states, then asks, “Why, is there more I should search for?”

“Nope, no, that was it,” Michael replies, looking away.

The transport lands directly outside a hangar in a remote area of the base. The door slides open, the solid door receding inside the craft’s internal structure. As they alight, they are greeted by Cameron’s smiling face, halfway between the transport and a small door set into one of the main hangar doors.

Gesturing for them to follow, he proceeds directly to the small door.

On entering the hangar, Cameron says, "Well, you guys have had a busy few days since I've been gone, haven't you? Now we're about to get even busier."

Once inside the hangar, they all take in the six stealthy-looking P.A.Vs stored inside. They are slightly larger than the ones they have been flying in and around Hoima. The slimline axial flux motors have been replaced with something resembling two small jet engines. The cockpits are larger, and there are gun turrets slung underneath the nose of each craft.

"You're looking at the C.A.V., the Combat Aviation Vehicle," Cameron starts. "The white outside surface can adopt the view past the opposite side of the vehicle in a complete 360-degree sphere, rendering it invisible to the human eye." He presses a button on the tablet in his hand. One of the six C.A.V.'s disappears.

Michael raises his hand and says, "Hold on, Cameron. What's the intention of bringing us here to see these?"

"Well, um, Douglas asked me to run you through the C.A.V., explain how they work and what they're capable of, then you're to go on an instruction flight with the test pilots to get a feel for them, as you are to use them to meet some important people in Somalia," Cameron says with a questioning look on his face. He's not sure why Michael would question what they're doing.

"Ah, yes, I see," says Sophia, smiling as she looks from Michael to Cameron. "Are the test pilots here?" she asks.

"Yeah, they're in the pilot's room. I need to run you..." is all Cameron can say before Sophia implants into his head, 'Cameron, just get the pilots out here and we'll show you a new trick.'

As Cameron walks off from the group to retrieve the pilots, Michael suggests, "Maybe you should try to include Tara as well, since

the pilots' reactions probably register as feelings, or instinct, instead of thought."

"Yeah, that sounds like a plan," says Sophia, then adds, "We should probably explain what we'll be doing to them. Cameron looks confused as hell."

Cameron walks the 300 metres from the back of the enormous hangar with all five of the test pilots following. The Namuh can tell instantly that the pilots are career military from their habit of being in step with one another and Cameron, their synchronised footsteps creating a definitive echo inside the hangar.

After explaining that Sophia, Apollo, and Tara would be obtaining the required information from them all at the same time and sharing the information between the five of them, the pilots are at best doubtful, but Cameron is now very curious.

"Douglas mentioned that you may have a few new talents, but I could never have thought it would be this," Cameron says, smiling now at them all.

"And done," says Sophia.

Brahma, seeing the look of scepticism on all the pilots' faces, strolls over to one of the C.A.V's and begins conducting a pre-flight check, calling out the part of the craft he's checking and sounding out the standard poem each pilot uses to help conduct pre-flight checks, his voice echoing inside the large, mostly empty hangar.

Then Michael starts rattling off information. "The C.A.V.3 is powered by two electric axial flux motors that have the ability to switch to electric scramjet mode, converting the air from the intake to plasma. The craft is capable of sustaining scramjet mode for a maximum of fifteen minutes due to the power constraints of both storage capacity and nuclear power generation capabilities at this time. Hypersonic speeds of over mach 5 have been recorded during test flights."

“I think I can increase that to twenty minutes of scramjet mode,” throws in Brahma as he walks back to the group. “They are using some outdated capacitors and rerouting power from the generator to charge the batteries when the power should all be going to the scramjet. I can add a microcontroller to allow for proper power discharge from the batteries, and a flash charge top-up from the capacitors.”

Brahma takes Cameron’s tablet from his hands, quickly types a list of the items he requires for the task, hands the tablet back to Cameron, then says, “Let me know when you get them here, and I’ll take the maintenance crew over the proper installation and settings for everything.”

“I ‘really’ want to fly one of these,” says Apollo, sensing that they have managed to get their point across to the pilots and Cameron. He is already anticipating the exhilaration he will experience during the flight; the combination of vision, sound, thought, and the sensations of the pilot’s flight experience is unlike anything he’s had up to this point in his life. He has complete confidence that he is fully capable of flying one of these “Beasts,” the name the pilots refer to the C.A.V.3 as.

“Let me call Douglas first, please,” Cameron requests.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Introduction to Royalty

After placing the call to Douglas, Cameron dismisses the pilots and turns to the Namuh.

“Well, Apollo, it looks like you will be getting your wish. Douglas is organising a meeting for all of you to attend on the Kenyan-Somali border,” Cameron says with a pleasant smile.

His face turns slightly more serious as he says, “You will meet with royalty. Burhaan and Aamiina are descendants of two different Somali clans that were deposed when Assad Abdriahim began pulling the strings of the ruling political party.” Cameron almost spits Assad’s name as he forces it from his mouth.

Regaining his demeanour, Cameron continues, “These two are recently married and now hold the hopes of most of the Somali people for the chance of freedom from the tyranny they have endured for over two decades. They need our help to regain control of the country, but want to meet with you first.”

"Do they know of us?" Tara questions.

"Yes, yes, they do," Cameron stammers a little. "I have told them a bit about the team as a trained combat force, and they have heard of each of you individually from your work at the clinic. They have many eyes and ears all over Africa."

"Douglas is informing See Vee of the operation and providing access for her to accompany you on the mission," Cameron finishes.

At the instant Cameron stops talking, the C.A.V. that he had previously rendered invisible becomes visible again, as See Vee's voice, emitting from the K.E.E.P.S. comm speakers, echoes inside the hangar they are standing in.

"It is good to be working with you all again. Hello Cameron, how was your time off? Oh wow, why am I now able to detect everyone's vitals from your suits? Michael, have you sprayed that membrane on them all?"

Everyone, including Cameron, looks to Michael as he responds to See Vee. "Gee, See Vee, I see why you don't breathe; it would get in the way of talking," Michael laughs a little then continues. "We have incorporated the membrane into ourselves, so it is good to have you confirm that incorporating it into our bodies nullifies the need for us to apply it to the suits. Anyway, that will be why you can sense our vitals."

Sophia directs a question to Cameron. "Why did you refer to See Vee as 'her' just before?"

"Oh, I have been working with See Vee for some time now, and she identifies as her and she, hence the feminine voice she has chosen for herself," Cameron replies, smiling. "You know that is very perceptive, Sophia. Most people gloss over the fact that I refer to her as 'her.' Many refer to See Vee as 'it'."

See Vee's voice springs again through the speakers built into the K.E.E.P.S. "I don't mind if people refer to me as 'it' if it makes them feel more comfortable conversing with me, but I do like it when people I consider friends call me, she or her."

"Well, consider us informed, Madame," Brahma says, smiling broadly.

Brahma is thinking, having worked with the power systems of electronics and computers most of his life, he knows what they feel like to him. He has never thought of them as sentient, but See Vee is showing signs of emotion, and with the connection that she has with the Namuh via the K.E.E.P.S. now, he is able to sense See Vee as well, her mind anyway. She is not cold and calculating as he assumes most people would think of a computer system, but keen, aware, excited, and extremely driven to experience as much as she possibly can whilst assisting those she considers friends.

Cameron interrupts Brahma's thoughts with, "Douglas should have provided the meeting location to See Vee, and she will provide that information to your K.E.E.P.S. They will, in turn, pass that information on to your craft's navigation computers once you each connect to them."

Taking Cameron's statement as an indication to get moving, they all begin walking towards the aircraft. Similar to the P.A.V.s, they have all flown previously; these aircraft require the pilot of the craft to physically climb into the cockpit. The C.A.V.3 requires the pilot to climb up the six-rung ladder instead.

Taking the seat in the cockpit, Tara hears See Vee's voice. "Reach your right arm across your body to take hold of the umbilical connector, then bring it close to your left shoulder. The magnetic locator should snap it into the correct position."

Tara, following See Vee's instructions as well as the experiences of the test pilots they had downloaded, feels the connector pull her hand and hears the click as it adheres to her K.E.E.P.S.

"Douglas informs me that you all assimilated the skills you required from the test pilots of these craft. May I ask how you accomplished this task?" See Vee questions Tara.

Tara, feeling a little apprehensive about flying the Beast, even though she has the assimilated experiences of the test pilots, casts out her emotional net just before See Vee's question, and in almost the same instant feels Apollo and Sophia doing the same. The Namuh are now connected in vision, emotion, and thought. Tara's apprehension disappears as the connection is made.

"Oh, I think I understand," See Vee states in a surprised tone of voice. "Your bodies are all in sync. You each emit the same brainwave signals, have the same pulse, blood pressure, and even skin temperature, which is strange since male skin temperature is usually slightly higher than female skin temperature. You five are very interesting. I have decided that you are now my most interesting friends."

"Thank you for that, See Vee," interjects Brahma into the conversation as each of them begins the start-up procedure for their C.A.V.3.

Brahma continues, "Some of the team have what is normally referred to as psychic abilities, and through our connection, which is why we are in sync, as you put it. We can share these abilities. The assimilation process is very similar to your operating system. When you are provided with access to appropriate information, you are able to assimilate the information into your operating system and then use it at your discretion. So, using these psychic abilities, we were able to gain access to all the internal thoughts, visions, and emotions of the test pilots about the C.A.V.3 and incorporate them into our internal systems."

“Thank you for that information, Brahma. It is an excellent explanation,” See Vee replies to them all. “I have logged the coordinates into your navigation systems. I have a feeling—it is a feeling—that you lot probably will not want to use the autopilot, is that correct?” See Vee ends.

From the tone in her voice, the Namuh all imagine her face smiling.

The hangar doors open at See Vee’s command. The five C.A.V.3s, in a stable hover one metre off the ground, the four sets of hover blades, front and rear, doing the job they were designed for perfectly. They wait for the doors to open fully. Finally, See Vee says, “Flight clearance has been granted. You may proceed outside to the flight pad, then rise directly to 500 metres before initiating forward thrust. I have placed a directional target on each of your flight screens. Follow that until you tire of joyriding, then switch to autopilot to land in the designated landing zone.”

They are already climbing to a height of 500 metres before See Vee has finished talking. The five craft perform like a set of linked computer-controlled drones, each movement precise.

Once at 500 metres, they each push the forward thrust control to maximum and cut power to the hover blades, causing the top and bottom covers to close over the four sets of blades and the C.A.V.3s to drop and gain forward momentum dramatically.

“324 knots, 600 kilometres per hour in 2.5 seconds,” yells Apollo over the comm. They all share Apollo’s excitement, each one feeling the strong G-forces pushing their bodies within the K.E.E.P.S., deep into the craft’s seat.

“This is only with the new axial flux motor. We have to try scramjet mode,” says Brahma, his excitement clear in his voice.

They each feel their connection to one another intensify as they run through the pre-conversion checks on their craft to allow for the

scramjet conversion. The batteries and capacitors are fully charged, the nuclear SMR (small modular reactor) increased to 97 percent of its 45-megawatt capacity, intake cowlings set to fully open, plasma control cones deployed, hydrogen converter on, and hydrogen storage at 100 percent.

Although she knows that she does not need to say anything, Tara speaks into her comm. "I'm all good to go." She and everyone else understand it is nerves. They all have the test pilots' experiences, but none of them has ever piloted a craft past the speed of sound.

Using the connection provided by Sophia, Apollo, and Tara, Michael speaks into everyone's mind, "Ready, and GO."

The ignition of the scramjet plasma reaction creates massive instantaneous thrust, forcing each of the Namuh back in their seats with the weight of 5 Gs. Within 65 seconds, each C.A.V.3 attains the speed of mach 3. As the acceleration lessens and the G-force with it, the C.A.V.3s settle into cruising at that speed. They can view the target location on the navigation screen of each craft as well as an ETA of 17 minutes to the target.

Michael passes his thoughts to everyone: "We will probably need to slow down and switch to autopilot in 10 minutes to allow for landing. It's still going to be the fastest 1,000 km I have ever travelled."

Through their connection, they are all able to feel Michael's confidence in knowing everything will go to plan, his understanding of the outcomes of actions they are taking, and some they are yet to take, as well as his total commitment to the path they are now on. Yet there is one area they all sense is off limits to everyone, and they all let it be.

They can all hear not only each other's mainline thoughts, but they also pick up on Tara and Apollo, thinking about more than work.

"Not only can you not keep your hands off one another, but your minds are going at it non-stop as well. We are travelling at over 3,500

kilometres per hour. Please, Apollo, Tara, give it a rest,” Sophia broadcasts to everyone’s minds.

They all laugh out loud.

“Why are you all laughing?” questions See Vee, over the comm, in a concerned voice.

Brahma replies, “We just experienced a combined thought that amused us all. See Vee. No need to worry.”

“Okay, you will need to slow down soon or you may blow past the target location,” See Vee states.

“Thanks, See Vee. We are aware. Two more minutes and we will switch off the plasma. That should allow enough time to slow to 200 knots before we switch to autopilot, if my calculations are correct,” Michael casually replies to See Vee.

See Vee responds in a concerned voice again, “The only way you could slow down that fast if you wait another two minutes is if you stand the craft at almost a 45-degree angle to the direction you are travelling now and use the C.A.V.3 as an airbrake.”

“I believe you just read our minds, See Vee. Don’t worry, we learned this from some damn good test pilots,” Sophia laughs.

They all knew that there was no real need to conduct the emergency braking manoeuvre, but as it was in the information, they assimilated from the test pilots, and each of the pilots rated it as one of their best experiences during the test flights, the Namuh just had to try it out.

In unison, they each switch off the hydrogen fuel to the scramjets, flare the plasma cones to fully open, re-open the top and bottom covers for the hover blades, allowing them to free spin with the high airspeed to act as generators to feed power back into the C.A.V.3s batteries and capacitors, then they throw the anchors on. Four large plates on the bottom rear of the craft fold down, acting as air-brakes.

They are weightless until the air-brakes go on, then they feel the G-force increase, this time forcing each of them forward inside the K.E.E.P.S. As the craft slows, using the hover blades, they pitch the nose up and lower the rear-end of the craft until it is sitting at a 45-degree horizontal angle to the forward momentum of the vehicle. They each use the hover blades to control the angle of the craft, each experiencing the extended feeling of their stomachs moving up to their chests, very much like the feeling on a rollercoaster, but way more intense and a lot more fun.

Once they have slowed to just under 200 knots, they each switch on the autopilot and allow it to land them at their destination.

Climbing down from their 'Beast's', which they all unanimously agree is the best name for them, the Namuh take in their surroundings. They have landed in the rear parking lot of a large, low-set building within a small township.

"Proceed to the rear door of this building," comes See Vee's voice over the comm.

"Are we in Somalia?" asks Sophia.

"No, you are in Kenya, close to the Somali border," replies See Vee.

Still being connected by Apollo, Sophia, and Tara, Brahma catches a glimpse of one of the people inside the building waiting for the Namuh to arrive.

'Samuel' Brahma thinks and then says out loud. "What is he doing here?"

"Who do you mean?" responds See Vee.

"Oh, Samuel, the doctor that I worked with on our training day at the healing clinic in New Zealand," Brahma answers.

See Vee informs, "He is brother to Aamiina. Douglas had him flown in almost two weeks ago on a medical mission to provide aid in the area."

As the Namuh enter the building, they are greeted first by Samuel, who introduces them to his sister Aamiina and her husband Burhaan. The meeting is informal, and both Burhaan and Aamiina want to speak openly about their situation.

The interior is rundown: faded orange paint peels from the walls, with patches chipped away where small arms fire left battle scars. Scattered tables and chairs, along with a battered service counter, reveal that this space once served as a restaurant or coffee house.

Through the windows, several armed men in military uniform stand guard outside. Michael gestures to the two guards directly in front of the main window. "Are they with you?"

Burhaan sighs. "Yes, I'm afraid so. Our families won't allow us to travel anywhere without armed escorts. It's something we desperately want to end."

Sophia speaks up immediately. "Aamiina, Burhaan, forgive me for interrupting, but one of the guards, the one to your left, is aware of a planned attack set for your return across the Somali border."

They all turn to look through the window, then back at Sophia.

Aamiina asks cautiously, "Is this one of your... gifts?" She hesitates, then continues, "Samuel told us you all have psychic abilities, but wasn't at liberty to explain them."

"Yes, it is," Sophia confirms. "I can listen in on a person's internal dialogue, the little voice in their head that never stops. That guard is preoccupied with what he must do before your return and how he plans to avoid being caught up in the attack."

As this unfolds, the Namuh silently agree through their psychic connection: they will allow the attack to proceed to gather intelligence on its masterminds.

Together, they enter the minds of everyone inside and outside the building. They confirm Aamiina and Burhaan's unwavering dedica-

tion to liberating the Somali people. Samuel is fascinated by Sophia's abilities and already envisions their medical applications. The group also discovers the likely corruption of only one guard; the others either do not know or have trained their minds to resist psychic intrusion.

Michael addresses Aamiina directly, aware from the psychic link that, despite Somalia's patriarchal norms, she is the dominant force in her relationship with Burhaan and Samuel.

"Aamiina, we can enter minds to listen, see, and feel what's happening, and we can implant information as well. With your permission, I'd like to do that with you, Burhaan, and Samuel."

Aamiina looks to Burhaan, who nods. Then to Samuel, who eagerly replies, "I would very much like to experience this."

"Go ahead, Michael," Aamiina says.

As one, the Namuh psychically share the information gathered from the traitorous guard, explain their abilities, and outline the plan to uncover the mastermind behind the attack.

At the same time, they garner valuable details about the Somali population across the border: roughly 900,000 people, spread across small villages and displaced communities, are ready to assume roles within the Economy Building Communities planned along the Kenyan-Somali border.

The Namuh also learn that the Kenyan government supports Burhaan and Aamiina's efforts to regain governance in Somalia. E.B.C.'s are already being established near the border, alongside manufacturing factories being set up by Toto for the wider roll-out.

Michael turns back to the group. "So, that's the plan for uncovering who's behind the attack. How do you all feel about it?"

Aamiina looks to Burhaan, then meets the team's gaze one by one. Her eyes are steady and resolute. "First, that was an incredible way

to communicate, not just the information, but the commitment and resolve behind it. Let's do this."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Attack on Royalty

The Namuh leave the building the same way they entered, through the back door leading to the rear carpark. Each proceeds to their individual C.A.V.3 and prepares for take-off. Once airborne, they ascend to 500 metres before setting course in the direction from which they had arrived.

Meanwhile, Aamiina and Burhaan's motorcade rolls up to the front of the building. When the head of the security detail gives the all-clear, the two guards posted outside usher the royal couple into the armoured personnel carrier that serves as their transport for the meeting.

The off-road tires of the APC send a constant vibration through the vehicle, accompanied by a low, persistent hum from the sealed road beneath them. After travelling 14 kilometres from the township, the motorcade veers off the sealed road, taking one of the many jungle tracks that facilitate unmonitored crossings from Kenya into Somalia. The shift from asphalt to soft dirt dulls the tire hum, replacing it with the muffled crunch of earth beneath.

Inside the APC's armoured cabin, Burhaan, Samuel, and Aamiina sit quietly, strapped into air-cushioned seats. Normally designed to carry 16 to 20 personnel through conflict zones, the APC has been re-fitted as a royal carriage, luxuriously appointed to protect and provide comfort to the royal couple and their guests across even the roughest terrain. The seats combine magnetic suspension with air cushioning to minimise every jolt and bump.

The head of the security detail rides shotgun next to the driver. He presses his right hand to his earpiece and barks an order over the comm. "Get it fixed and catch up ASAP."

"Omar, what's happening?" Burhaan asks.

In a calm, deep voice, Omar replies, "One of the trailing vehicles has reported a damaged wheel and is pulling over to assess it."

Burhaan glances at Aamiina before continuing, "Is that the vehicle Mahad is in?"

Omar turns to face Burhaan, clearly surprised. "Sir, how do you know that? Is there something I should know?"

Aamiina speaks up, her tone steady and cool. "Omar, we're expecting an attack shortly. Is there anything along this route that could aid an attacker?"

Omar's expression tightens with concern. "There's a small bridge crossing a dry gully about five or six kilometres ahead. Why do you ask?"

The APC and the rest of the five-vehicle motorcade cross the bridge at speed. As the APC clears the bridge and enters a large clearing, a platoon of elite soldiers lying in wait unleash a sudden barrage of anti-tank weapons toward the vehicles.

Major Aleeki, commander of the Somali Danab platoon, an elite force within the Somali Armed Forces, leading the attack on the terrorists travelling in this motorcade, peers through the smoke and

dust generated by the armour penetrating and explosive munitions his platoon just unleashed. He is aware of the small arms fire taking place around him. His platoon is clearing the remaining vehicles of the motorcade.

Aleeki sees the mangled remains of the APC just as he receives the all-clear signal via the comm from his team. Approaching the destroyed vehicle, he immediately determines there are no survivors inside; the entire right side of the APC has been blasted away, and the remains of the occupants are spread across the interior left wall.

Switching to a secondary communication channel, Aleeki says, "Mahad, it is done. I will see you at the extraction location."

The next thing Aleeki is aware of is the sensation of restraints fastening his hands behind his back and a dark hood being pulled over his head.

"This is the one we need," says Sophia as she removes the blackout bag from Aleeki's head.

Blinded by the sudden burst of sunlight flooding his eyes, Aleeki blinks furiously until his vision clears. In front of him stands a very attractive, tall, white woman. He slowly turns his head and sees his platoon lying face down on the ground beside him. The royal motorcade sits undamaged ahead. Four people dressed in unfamiliar mech-suits, the same suits the white woman is wearing, stand before the motorcade, alongside several large, top-of-the-line aviation vehicles parked at the far side of the clearing where the attack has just taken place.

Confused is an understatement. Aleeki strains to make sense of what is happening, a feeling he has never experienced before. He knows for a fact that he and his men carried out the attack, yet the motorcade's vehicles remain intact before him.

It feels like trying to peer through a thick fog inside his mind. Finally, he utters, "What the fuck is going on?"

The plan implanted in the minds of Samuel and the royal couple by the Namuh was simple. As planned, the motorcade's return trip would be to Somalia. The Namuh would then head off in the same direction they had arrived from, activating stealth on their C.A.V.3s before turning to follow the motorcade, scouting ahead for would-be attackers.

Thanks to their psychic link, plus See Vee's satellite and electronic surveillance, they monitored everyone in the motorcade and anyone else nearby. Once Mahad had relayed his excuse to Omar, and Omar had estimated the likely location of the attack, the Namuh zeroed in on the waiting platoon.

Infiltrating the soldiers' minds, the Namuh implanted the sights, sounds, and sensations of the attack in each soldier's consciousness. They needed only to implant the intent of the experience; the soldiers' minds then generated the full illusion themselves. All the while, the soldiers' bodies were in a sleep-like state.

The Namuh landed their C.A.V.3's on the far side of the clearing beyond the small bridge, waved down the motorcade after it had crossed, and with the royal couple's security team's assistance, restrained every member of the would-be attackers.

"Omar, please send a team to retrieve Mahad. He and two others are currently unconscious in the vehicle about 12 kilometres back down the track," Burhaan requests. He has had this information passed directly to his mind via the Namuhs' psychic link.

Approaching Aleeki, Michael taps into the psychic link the Namuh share and delves into Aleeki's perplexing mind. He quickly concludes Aleeki is of limited use for extracting information. He is a career sol-

dier who follows orders without question, loyal to his superiors, and committed to completing every mission assigned.

Michael predicts that Aleeki's commanding officer may provide some answers they require to track the connection back to Assad Abdriahim.

As the next task will require some finesse, Michael withdraws from Aleeki's mind, connects with Sophia, and requests that she implant the information into Aleeki's mind. "Remember, he is only to divulge the information directly to his commanding officers," Michael relays to Sophia. "This isn't my first rodeo, cowboy," Sophia replies out loud with a smile as she inserts her mind into Aleeki's.

Sophia begins by using her normal thought access into Aleeki's mind, but as she does, is astounded by the other forms of access she now has through the psychic link the Namuh share. For most of her life, she has trained herself to listen to others' thoughts, internal dialogue, and manipulate what others hear or even think. Now, being linked to the others, she is not only able to sense Aleeki's audible thoughts but also sees his visual thoughts in her own mind, as well as being attuned to a multitude of emotions he is experiencing at this moment and the emotions connected with his memories.

Using what she knows of the control she has through her clairaudient abilities, Sophia quickly understands that both the visual and emotional abilities operate similarly. This allows her to implant, hide, and set the activation trigger for the information she has passed on to Aleeki.

After removing the memory of Aleeki's interaction with them, Sophia withdraws her mind from his. She senses a download of information from Aleeki's higher-self directly to the psychic link the Namuh are sharing. The information conveyed to them is quickly interpreted as extremely unsettling.

Throughout his military career, Aleeki, via his commanding officer General Bashiir, has been involved in several dealings with Assad Abdriahim, this being one such operation. Each time the instructions have been clear: leave no one alive. Ambushes, village raids, and the outright culling of certain groups roaming the outlying areas of Somalia. Aleeki and his men had raped, brutally murdered, removing body parts from their victims before beheading them, hanging children from trees in front of their parents before killing the parents too. They had committed many inhumane acts.

Aleeki's platoon had a visit from Assad before departing for each mission Assad ordered. It was during these visits that Aleeki's higher-self experienced massive interference in the connection to Aleeki's physical body. His spirit informed the Namuh that it was as if there was no connection point to Aleeki's body; it just disappeared. The spirit also revealed to the Namuh that whenever Assad entered the vicinity, it had never been able to detect Assad's higher-self.

Although not everyone wants to let them leave, the Danab platoon is sent on their way, with the memories of the successful mission they have just completed.

The royal convoy continues back to Burhaan's area of operations.

The Namuh load back into the Beast's to fly back to the Ugandan Air Force Base they had departed from, pushing the limits of the thrilling aircraft again. Because why not? After dropping their C.A.V.3s back at the base, Cameron joins them for the flying taxi ride back to the clinic. They fill him in on what has taken place via their psychic link.

"That was amazing," says Cameron admiringly. "I feel as though I was with you; the experience feels like my own."

Getting over the initial shock of the information transfer, Cameron opens his tablet, connects with See Vee, hits a few keys on the screen,

and says, “There you go, See Vee. You now have access to all of Toto’s assets worldwide: the communications, monitoring systems, and computer systems. Keep me abreast of this ‘Aleeki’ individual, please.”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Assad Abdriahim

Assad Abdriahim sits bolt upright on his bed, sweat running down his face and body, even with the climate control set to a chilly 22 degrees Celsius.

He knows his excessive sweating is not because of the room temperature or the bedcoverings he has been under, but from the internal battle raging within himself.

“What is it that you are attempting to relay to me?” he speaks into the room. “You would think that after thirty years together, we would be able to communicate more efficiently than this.”

Swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, his feet find his slippers. He stands and walks to the door, picking up a dressing robe from the coat rack along the way. Taking advantage of the bathroom before heading to the kitchen inside the apartment he’s using this month, he goes through his morning ritual of making breakfast. As he prepares the coffee pot and toast, he ponders the meaning of the recurring dream he’s been having over the last couple of weeks.

In this dream, Assad is chased off a path by several entities dressed in dark grey ragged cloaks. He feels the extreme ill intent they hold for

him and is certain that if caught, he will be devoured. As he exerts more energy to outrun his pursuers, he sees his body face-planting in the dirt, before waking in his bed, sweating profusely with an excruciating headache and a pounding heart.

As he takes his first sip of coffee for the day, his thoughts drift to memories of a different life, a time long before Assad had returned to Somalia, the birthplace of his parents.

“Kick it over here,” shouts Ebyan, another Somali child now living in the small village of Seka, Ethiopia.

“Assad, your father is home,” calls Assad’s great-aunt Calaso from the modest hut they called home.

Assad kicks the well-worn football to Ebyan and yells, “I will see you tomorrow,” as he runs towards his house.

Bursting through the open front door without slowing, Assad leaps into the air and falls into his father’s strong, waiting arms.

Assad’s memory of this day is always vivid. After Guleed had hugged him ferociously, he recalled being placed back down onto the floor of the house, feeling the weight of his father’s strong, muscular arms atop each of his shoulders.

Guleed had survived the Hargeisa Holocaust that took place in Somalia when he was only five years old.

The forgotten Holocaust, as it had now come to be known, was the systematic, state-sponsored genocide of Isaaq civilians between 1987 and 1989 by the Somali Democratic Republic, under the leadership of dictator Siad Barre.

Assad’s father had been carried from the fighting taking place in his hometown by his mother’s younger sister, Calaso.

Calaso had run through the back door of the house to snatch up Guleed as he witnessed both his mother and father being decapitated

in the street directly outside their front door. He had been standing, staring in shock at the horrifying scene.

She and Guleed had fled with other villagers across the border into Ethiopia. From that time, she had taken on the role of a parent to Guleed.

“Assad, I am sending you to live with an associate of mine from the university,” Guleed started, looking Assad directly in the eye.

Assad held his father’s gaze but could see his great-aunt Calaso nodding her head in agreement in his peripheral vision.

“You are to be schooled alongside his son and trained for a leadership role on your return to Africa. Assad, it is important that you do everything you are instructed to do there. Is that understood?” Guleed delivered the question more as an order.

Assad remembers nodding his head in agreement with the information his father had just imparted, saying, “Yes, Papa. When must I leave?”

That very night, Assad, with the help of Calaso, packed a small backpack with two days’ worth of clothes. A vehicle arrived as the sun dipped over the horizon. In the early evening light, Assad was requested to climb into the back seat of a luxurious car, his father Guleed sliding in after him.

Once underway, Assad plucked up the courage to question his father’s decision. “Papa, why must I go away?” he asked, his timid voice barely above a whisper.

Guleed turned his head to the side, allowing him to take in the tears beginning to form in Assad’s eyes. “Son, you are to be our family’s retribution for the evils inflicted on our loved ones. Do not cry, for you shall return as a great man, no, as the king of all Africa.” Guleed stated this before placing his arms around Assad and embracing him with his signature hug of ferocity.

They alighted from the vehicle when it came to a stop on the private airstrip belonging to Jimma University, where Guleed held tenure.

Neil Walker, Guleed's friend, mentor, and within certain circles, leader, stood in the private jet's doorway at the top of the stairs, motioning a hurry-up gesture with one arm.

"Go now and make us proud, my son," Guleed instructed him.

Assad gripped the strap of the backpack, now slung over one shoulder and, without a second glance at his father, ran up the stairs to the aircraft's entrance.

Assad feels the communicator vibrating inside the pocket of his dressing robe, stirring him from his memories.

"What is it?" he says gruffly once he has removed it from his robe and placed it on the table beside his breakfast, enabling the call security suite before accepting the incoming call.

"Aleeki's mission is a success. They left no survivors, as you requested," comes General Bashiir's low rumbling voice from the communicator.

A slow smile spreads across Assad's ageing face. "A bit of good news for a change, hey Bashiir? We may yet achieve our goals, you and I," Assad says as he ends the call.

Taking another sip of coffee, Assad goes back to recalling his memories.

Growing up in a mansion, wanting for nothing, and being accepted into the top private schools America had to offer had not even been in Assad's wildest imagination of how his life could look, but that is what happens.

Neil Walker takes the time on their flight to America to explain much of what is going on behind the scenes with the decision of Guleed sending him to live with Neil and his family.

It is simple. Both Guleed and Calaso need retribution for the atrocities that befell not only themselves but many of the Isaaq population, and Neil has the means and wherewithal to bring this about.

He would bring Assad under his family umbrella, educate and train him in the ways of politics, finance, and strategy. In return, Assad would be required to give up his soul.

Assad does a double-take when he first hears what Neil says, but Neil's laugh and calm demeanour settle the young Assad down, then he explains.

"Many years ago, my great-grandfather underwent the process of accepting what is called a symbiotic consciousness. Every male member of my family has undergone the same process on their sixteenth birthdays since then. There is no pain involved during the joining. You are provided a sedative, you lie upon a metal table, and then you are guided into a meditation. When you awaken, it is like being reborn," Neil explains to Assad as they sit across from each other inside the small jet.

"What do you mean by reborn?" Assad questions, genuine curiosity driving him.

Neil continues, "The best way to describe it is that you awaken with abilities, and they are always different. For some, they can predict the future — they are granted inner sight. Others have gained the ability to read minds, among many other things."

Assad looks directly at Neil. "What is your ability?" he questions.

"Well, you see, Assad, I have the power of persuasion. I can persuade anyone to do almost anything," Neil says with a smile and a slight tilt of his head to the right. "Assad, your father has told you that you will be returning to Africa a different man. Trust me, son, you will rule that continent." Neil ends, then he reclines his seat and falls asleep.

Neil has lied. Accepting what he refers to as a symbiotic consciousness hurts a lot, not only the joining process, but almost every day since. One thing Neil has not lied about is the abilities. Neil's son Davis, who turns sixteen four months before Assad, becomes able to affect the motor functions of any living being within his line of sight.

Assad gains the ability of premonition. From the first night of accepting his Sym-con, the name that Davis, his family, and other associates use for the symbiotic consciousness, Assad has vivid dreams. At first, the dreams are strange, extremely alien to him. But as he feels the Sym-con settle into his consciousness, Assad starts to understand the information being passed to him.

There are still some dreams he has trouble understanding, like the one he has been having for the last couple of weeks, but many others are on the money, so to speak.

Assad also grows to understand another ability that comes with a Sym-con: the ability to implant his will onto others who are in his line of sight. This effect lasts for seven days and shapes the person's mind to be more in line with his desires.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Travelling, but not.

‘You would think that today would be boring compared to flying the C.A.V.3s yesterday, but I am enjoying this,’ thinks Tara, into Sophia’s mind.

‘Well, you have more control than I did when I first understood that I was able to communicate telepathically,’ Sophia thinks back into Tara’s mind. ‘Easy with those feelings though; you are making my leg numb.’

Sophia and Tara are together in one of the treatment rooms inside the Healing Centre in Hoima City. A young male, eight-year-old Jendyose, is lying on a bed with a broken left leg, after a fall from the roof of a house he had been attempting to scale.

Jendyose is in no pain, as Tara is manipulating the feeling of pain around his broken leg. He is only experiencing a numb feeling, the feeling you get when you have been sitting on your leg for too long and have not realised until you get up to walk.

“That should do it,” says Sophia out loud. ‘Take a look for yourself,’ she thinks into Tara’s mind.

Using Apollo's ability for internal vision, Tara focuses on Jendyose's leg. In her mind, she can see that Sophia has not only fused his leg bone back together, but also strengthened his thigh bone by increasing the bone density around where it had been broken.

"You have noticed that we have all increased our own abilities since the connection," Tara says aloud to Sophia.

"Yes, being able to use the others' abilities with my own seems to have increased my skill at certain tasks," Sophia responds to Tara, then she points out into the hallway as Cameron hurries by. "He has information for us all."

'You contact the others, Tara. I'll direct Cameron into a meeting room,' Sophia implants into Tara's mind.

"You know, when you do that, it makes me jump every time, Sophia," Cameron says to her as he turns to look at her walking quickly behind him, then walks a few more paces to open the door to a meeting room that Sophia has indicated as being unoccupied.

"What's the news?" Michael asks as he enters the room. He is the last of the Namuh to arrive, having been in the basement again.

"Aleeki has made contact with his commanding officer, a General Bashiir, who, in turn, used an encrypted calling device to relay information directly to Assad Abdriahim." See Vee's feminine voice relays emanating through the speaker system within the meeting room.

"If it was encrypted, how do you know who the call was made to?" questions Brahma, with a cheeky smile on his face.

"Encryption is pointless when I'm on the case, Brahma, with the almost limitless access I now have to technologies and carrier waves on the planet," See Vee replies as her avatar comes to life on the screen in the room's front, her mischievous smile radiant.

Cameron, now standing in front of the room, still allowing everyone to view See Vee's avatar on the screen beside him, says, "Douglas

suggested that since you are all still connected, maybe now would be a good time for everyone to experience remote communication, with Apollo as the lead, since he has done this before.”

See Vee jumps into the conversation. “Douglas asked me to assist with this task as well. I believe I can provide pictures, if not video footage, of Assad’s location.”

The Namuh, as Cameron had just stated, are indeed still connected. With no verbal communication, they each take a seat. Internally, they have agreed to conduct the remote communication. They are all excited to confront the mastermind behind not only Afriya’s abduction and subsequent murder, but also many atrocities across the African continent.

Apollo instructs, “See Vee, please show us what you can provide for finding this asshole’s location at present.”

The screen at the front of the room erupts with a multitude of images at first, then settles on three distinct views: one, a picture of an apartment complex, with the address at the bottom of the frame showing it to be in Somalia; the second, a satellite image of the city of Mogadishu, with a red mark circling the apartment complex; and the third, a live camera feed, zoomed in to reveal Assad himself sitting at a table inside the apartment.

‘I will lead you,’ Apollo thinks into each mind seated at the table. ‘Let’s Go Spirit.’

Tara giggles at the seriousness Apollo implies with his thought, but quickly stops herself, realising this is indeed a serious situation.

There is no concerted effort for any of them to ‘Go Spirit’ — they each close their eyes, and the next instant, they have become their spiritual selves. As spirits, their human need for communication evaporates, replaced by acceptance, understanding, and a oneness that is the best description the human mind can comprehend.

The Namuh join as one entity and attempt to locate Assad's higher self, but to no avail. The space where his higher self should be is there, but Assad's spiritual presence is not there.

Apollo's higher self is aware of something but cannot comprehend what it is. This is unheard of within the Divine Cosmos.

The Namuh each open their eyes in the meeting room and stare at one another, the experience slipping from the minds of their human bodies slowly.

"What the actual fuck was that?" Brahma finally exclaims.

"I could see something, but I have no way to explain it," Apollo says.

"We need to keep this information in our current form," Michael adds, standing from his chair and dashing to the front of the meeting room.

Michael grabs an empty glass from a tray in the front left corner of the room. Removing a small bottle from the top pocket of the medical gown he is wearing, he inserts a misting spray nozzle from a side pocket, then places a few squirts inside the glass.

"I need each of you to transfer the main thing you remember from what has just taken place," Michael says to them, his voice almost pleading.

One by one, they each walk to the glass, now standing on the table, and transfer, just as they had done for the membrane, one primary memory they retained from their recent travel into the Divine Cosmos.

Once they are done, Michael speaks directly into the opening of the glass. "Karliqur Kawadi." Michael does not know the language he speaks, nor where these words originate; he simply understands them to mean 'memories retained.'

Placing the glass back down onto the table, Michael reaches for the water jug also on the tray from which he retrieved the glass. Filling it to the brim, he takes a drink.

“Go on, each of you needs to take a drink from this,” says Michael, handing the glass to Sophia.

Cameron, sitting in a chair looking very perplexed, asks, “Does someone want to explain what’s going on?”

“Oh, I think we completely forgot you were here, Cameron,” Tara says, giving him a bright smile.

“We will let you know soon, Cameron. Just give us a minute. It is important,” Michael instructs.

“Ahh, that’s better. It is becoming clearer,” Brahma states to the room.

“Yes, I understand more too, Michael. What did we just do?” Sophia questions.

“Well, y’all know I got access to that there knowledge vault, right?” Michael says with a Southern drawl. “I think you call it putting something together ‘on the fly.’ Anyway, I think we can all agree the information we can retain in our human forms has been enhanced a little, right?” Michael says to everyone with a smile.

“Yeah, in New Zealand, we call that pulling something out of your arse,” Apollo jokes to Michael. “It sure does work, though. My memory of what I saw is becoming a lot clearer.”

Apollo conveys an image into Michael’s mind: Michael talking, with a blue light shining from within his throat.

“I saw your throat chakra light up as you spoke those words into the glass,” Apollo says. “Do you know if that was supposed to happen?”

“I don’t know, Apollo. It’s my first time,” Michael answers, turning his gaze from Apollo to Cameron.

Michael thinks into the Namuh minds, ‘How are we going to explain this to Cameron? What will happen if we transfer the knowledge to him?’

Sophia looks directly at Michael and says aloud, “Do you want to turn his brain into pudding?”

“We could just try explaining with words,” Tara suggests.

“I don’t know if we can explain with words,” sighs Michael, looking at each of them and then back to Cameron again.

Brahma walks over to Cameron and, turning to look at the Namuh, says, “Let me try to explain what took place to Cameron. You guys need to figure out what has happened to Assad’s higher self.”

Brahma takes the closest chair to Cameron and places it beside him. “Now, Cameron, for the information that we need to pass on to make sense, I will need to explain a little about the Divine Cosmos. Are you ready?”

Cameron looks to the others gathered on the opposite side of the table, then back to Brahma. “What did Sophia mean by turning a brain into pudding?” he asks.

“We don’t know for sure that would happen, but you don’t need to worry. That is only possible if we attempted to transfer the information directly into your mind,” Brahma answers with a pleasant grin.

“Will I need to take notes?” Cameron questions.

“I would suggest you relax and focus on what I will be describing. That should be fine for now,” Brahma replies.

Brahma inhales deeply, looks at Cameron, and begins, “When we become Spirit, or our higher selves, we leave our humanity on the Earth plane. By humanity, I mean our physical form and the need for any type of human communication, visual, verbal, or sensory.”

Brahma stops, seeing a confused look spreading across Cameron’s face, then says, “Let’s try this a slightly different way, shall we?”

“Within the Divine Cosmos, there is no travel, as time does not exist there. Time only operates on some of the other planes of existence. You are always anywhere and everywhere. The easiest way for the human mind to comprehend this is to think of yourself as the planet. Then, as the planet, you are anywhere and everywhere at the same time. As Spirit, things are a little larger.” Again, Cameron is wearing a confused look.

Michael looks over at the confused Cameron, and the beginning to become frustrated Brahma, and says, “Hey Brahma, try explaining it as you would to your youngest sister.”

Brahma looks to Michael, lifting his hand slightly, pointing with his index finger in an ‘I get where you’re coming from’ gesture. Turning back to Cameron, he says, “Let’s start this again, shall we?”

Brahma inhales, smiles quickly, and says, “In the Divine Cosmos, each spirit is always visible to each other. By visible, I am incorporating all senses. To connect or contact other spirits, we think of whom we require, and the Divine Cosmos moves the other spirit and us into each other’s space or area of being.” Brahma looks Cameron in the eyes and questions, “Are you with me so far?”

“Yes, Brahma, go on,” he states.

“Well, when we were all presented with Assad’s higher self, it was not there. The area that it occupies was there, so for us that means the spirit should still be there. Without a spiritual presence, the space cannot be.” Brahma again stops explaining and questions Cameron, “Have you understood that so far?”

Cameron slowly nods his head and says, “So, this is a problem?”

“A problem, Cameron? Oh, if we put this into a similar situation for humanity, let’s say that 25 percent of the Earth stopped being, the land, the ocean, animals, plants, and human population, including technology. All disappeared to be replaced with darkness, like the

darkness of nothing.” Brahma speaks firmly, his frustration with not being able to explain the dire situation as sufficiently as the Namuh understand it now beginning to show.

“Brahma, that sounds very perplexing,” See Vee interjects. “You are obviously extremely upset about this situation, and it seems that what you are attempting to explain may not be comprehensible by the human mind, but your last analogy of the situation within the Divine Cosmos, I believe, hit home enough for us to relay sufficient information to Douglas and the team.” See Vee ends.

Michael looks to Brahma from the other side of the table and thinks into Brahma’s mind, ‘I think you did way better at explaining that than any of us could have. Let’s Go Spirit again, right now.’

Cameron leaves the room as the Namuh take seats at the table again. It was time to get some answers.

Chapter Thirty

P.O.M. People's Own Militia

Samuel hastily checked the work that the nurses had carried out on the three remaining casualties within the tent that was acting as a makeshift clinic until the community hub had finished construction.

It had been two days since he had bathed properly. As soon as his sister and her husband had returned from the meeting with the Namuh, they had both insisted that Samuel provide medical assistance to a small border village that was recovering from a recent recruitment drive by one of the many small militia groups within the area.

The recruiting comprised the militia group arriving in the village, armed, gathering the village population together, and taking anyone who was thirteen years old up to eighteen. They had found over the years that anyone under 13 years old was too difficult to train, and if they were older than 18, they would put up too much resistance to the training. In both cases, they ended up shooting too many of the recruits.

In this village, however, when the militia turned up, the villagers were ready to fight back. This village was being established as one of the first Economy Building Communities (EBC) in Somalia. When the militants had arrived, they were met with weapons in the hands of every able villager as well as the additional force of the fifty-armed construction workers from the site, whom Toto had trained in small arms and close-quarters combat.

The fight that ensued was more of a wild spraying of projectiles. The militia started firing backwards as they made a desperate retreat, but some of the people from the village wanted payback for the children that had already been abducted, so they had begun shooting for all they were worth.

The result was that a few villagers caught a round or two, nothing fatal. The militia, which was around twenty strong on arrival, left fourteen dead and two wounded.

This was happening more and more often, the people beginning to stand up to their oppressors. Requests for weapons and military assistance had been flowing in daily to Aamiina and Burhaan for months now. Most of the population near the borders, as well as the displaced, were already beginning to implement an array of solutions to fight back against the local militia, warlords, and even the Somali military.

"I am sure there will be repercussions. If they were my men, I would send in a larger force to teach everyone a lesson," Samuel relays to Aamiina over the communicator.

"I will contact Cameron and see if your friends can offer any help," Aamiina responds, and then she offers, "in the meantime, stay alert, keep the construction leaders apprised of the situation, and I will inform Burhaan, he may have a team close to that area that could assist."

Ending the communication with Aamiina, Samuel understood exactly what she was implying with that last comment.

It had been five years ago that Burhaan had started his infiltration operation; he had placed some of his young people within the border villages. These individuals came from families that wanted the fighting within Somalia to stop; they put their faith in Burhaan's hands and allowed their children to be trained by his team on infiltration, espionage, and mindset manipulation. The trained children then got themselves recruited into the ranks of the militia forces when they came to the villages on recruiting runs.

"This is the beginning of our war on tyranny," Samuel says to himself, as he stands to walk out of the tent he has been calling home for the last two days.

"Aleeki, you have a new destination. Your pilots are being informed via their chain of command," comes General Bashir's voice over the private communication channel.

"Yes sir, what is the situation?" Aleeki replies quietly, covering his mouth so his men do not overhear or read his lips.

In his signature low rumbling voice, Bashir says, "One of the local militia captains has run into a spot of bother with a small village. Somehow they have managed to get their hands on small arms and foiled a recruitment drive."

"This comes from Assad. You will rendezvous with Captain Dahir, then coordinate the retaliation attack on the village. They are to be made examples of, do you understand?"

Bashir's voice reverberates inside Aleeki's earpiece, deep within his ear.

“Yes, sir. Consider it done,” Aleeki responds, immediately ending the transmission with a tap to the rear of his right-side jawbone, just beneath his earlobe.

Captain Dahir looks up from the clearing his men have made on the edge of the jungle, if you could even still call it that, with the dead and vanishing vegetation standing over the dry earth and sand underfoot.

For years now, Dahir has been watching the jungles of his homeland disappear. The days are indeed getting hotter. The ground beneath his boots has been losing its nutrients, drying up. Lately, he has questioned his life decisions: who was he even trying to make a difference for anymore?

When he first joined the militia, he was there to assist his people, to protect them. Now, he was taking children from their families, forcing them to become soldiers. And those who disobeyed, he shot, using their deaths as examples for the others. He used to do this himself, but in recent years, he had lost the stomach for it.

Dahir spots the inbound aircraft in the distance before he can even hear it. It’s an old CV-22 Osprey that comes to a hover directly over the clearing made specifically for Aleeki and his Danab platoon.

Instead of landing, the Osprey hovers in place as four ropes, secured to latching hooks inside the loading bay, drop to the ground. Immediately after, the Danab team rappels down.

Aleeki’s team shows its efficiency and teamwork: no sooner have the boots of the first four members touched the ground than the ropes jerk again as the next four team members leap from the back of the aircraft.

Aleeki steps forward and addresses Dahir, who has come to greet him.

“Captain Dahir, I am Major Aleeki. What is the situation?”

“As you’ve undoubtedly already been informed, one of my recruitment teams was attacked by the village they were meant to recruit from,” Dahir replies in a frustrated tone. Noticing Aleeki’s aggressive bearing, he adds, “The men who returned informed me that there’s a lot of construction taking place, and that there appeared to be more people present than there should have been.”

“Where would a village out here get the funds for the construction of anything?” Aleeki asks, a truly surprised look on his face. He knows all the border villages are populated with subsistence farmers; they sometimes grow enough for themselves to eat, but no one has managed to produce enough crops over the last five years to make any real income.

“We don’t know, sir. It was a surprise for my men as well,” Dahir replies.

“Well, you’d best show me a map of the terrain, bring me the men who survived, a supplies list of what you have here at your encampment, and a place for my men and me to sleep tonight,” Aleeki orders as he walks from the edge of the jungle toward the militia encampment farther inside the disappearing vegetation.

Samuel was awakened by the villagers many times that night. The first time he climbed out of his tent to investigate, he instantly saw the cause of the disturbance.

They had come, Burhaan’s men, and they were setting up camp around Samuel’s tent.

“Where have you come from?” Samuel asks a young man, probably no older than eighteen.

The soldier, dressed in the army green coveralls that most of the militia wear, replies, “Just the next village over. There are more on their way, sir.”

“Have you experienced battle before?” Samuel asks.

The young soldier looks directly into Samuel’s eyes, the sadness showing in his own, and replies, “A lot more than I had hoped for, sir.”

Samuel’s gentle smile spreads across his face as he says, “You and your associates have been through a great deal in your short lives. Let us hope that what we are about to embark upon will put an end to your sacrifices.”

“I hope so, sir. I hope so,” says the soldier, as he continues setting up his camp for the night.

By sunrise, Samuel estimates another thirty soldiers are surrounding the area where his tent is set. Many of them are gathered around a central fire, where they’ve started cooking a wildebeest that one of the groups has brought with them.

“Where did you get that from?” Samuel asks the men around the fire, motioning toward the wildebeest now being rotated on a makeshift wooden spit above the flames.

“My group found it about a kilometre from here,” answers a young female soldier standing at one end of the spit, fastening a short, stout branch to the end to make turning it easier. “It was wounded, so we ended its suffering. We thought it would provide some decent food for a change,” she finishes.

“How long until it’s ready?” asks a young soldier on the opposite side of the fire. “I’m so hungry, I think I could eat the whole beast myself,” he says to the group, flashing a wide smile that shows off his brilliant white teeth.

“You’re always hungry, Reggie,” the group of soldiers says unanimously, all of them smiling, some laughing at Reggie’s expense.

Reggie’s head explodes all over the carcass of the wildebeest as the projectile from a sniper’s rifle exits his forehead.

“From the east!” shouts the female soldier as she spins to grab her rifle, panic now coursing through her. “You should find shelter, sir,” she suggests to Samuel.

Chapter Thirty-One

The Push

“Second sniper, take your shot,” Aleeki orders over his Danab platoon’s communication channel.

Another soldier within the village falls, this one on the opposite side from where the last was killed. Everyone in the village goes to ground, finding refuge behind whatever cover they can.

“I think they have us surrounded,” Samuel says to one of the work supervisors, who has thrown himself to the ground beside him.

“It didn’t take them long to organise a retaliation strike,” the supervisor utters back.

“The men are positioned around the village perimeter, as discussed. The new soldiers are positioning themselves alongside them,” he conveys to Samuel, then adds, “I don’t know how many we’re up against.”

“Are you ready to deliver our gift, Zaire?” Aleeki questions the soldier next to him, who is holding a very old mortar munition above a launch tube.

“Yes, sir, on your order,” Zaire responds with a nod.

“Let it fly,” Aleeki orders.

Everyone in the village hears the deep, hollow thud as the mortar is ejected. Most of the villagers have heard this sound before, but never so close. All they can do now is cover up and hope they are not near where the shell will land, praying they are spared the explosive destruction.

Samuel hears the loud explosion and looks up to see where it has landed. There is no residual smoke or debris within the village. As he turns his head to scan past the village perimeter, he sees a rising cloud of smoke and dust from the edge of the decaying jungle.

“Open fire,” Aleeki commands over his comm channel.

Nothing happens. Not one man under his command fires. Aleeki suddenly finds himself unable to move. The thought of movement is in his mind, but none of his muscles will obey his will.

Five C.A.V.3s become visible high above the village. Two begin their descent into the centre. Samuel stands and walks forward to greet the Namuh.

“I didn’t know if you would make it here in time,” Samuel says to Michael as he climbs down from his CAV3.

“We wouldn’t have missed this for the world, Samuel. You have someone we need,” Michael replies, smiling broadly.

“Who do you need?” Samuel asks, a perplexed look crossing his face.

“The same person who attempted to assassinate your sister and you,” Brahma answers, walking over to embrace Samuel.

“Aleeki is here?” Samuel asks, surprised. “We were expecting local militia, not a Danab platoon. Why haven’t they attacked yet?” He turns, scanning the perimeter.

“That’s the other three upstairs,” Michael says, pointing to the three C.A.V.3s.

“Aleeki is to the west of your position, Michael. He and two of his men are pushing hard, trying to move,” Apollo announces over the suit’s comm channel.

“Well, we’d best go catch the bastard before they figure out how to move,” Michael responds.

Michael grasps the mortar tube with both hands. Using the mechanical strength provided by his K.E.E.P.S. he bends it as if it were rubber and throws it into the dry dirt at the jungle’s edge. He thinks to himself, why have we done this to our planet?

“Hey, Michael,” Sophia yells over the comm, “today, please. We don’t know how long we can hold them like this.”

Through the mental link the Namuh share, Michael senses the urgency Sophia is conveying. Tara, Apollo, and Sophia are using Tara’s emotional net to inhibit body movement in the militia and Danab soldiers. Through Tara’s net, Apollo has located the area of the brain controlling motor functions, and Sophia is channelling a disruptive frequency from the Divine Cosmos to render the soldiers paralysed.

As Michael and Brahma lift Aleeki to his feet, Tara releases him from the net. He can instantly move again. Michael, of course, is ready and drives the thumb of the K.E.E.P.S. into a pressure point on the back of Aleeki’s neck, freezing him again, though this time in great pain.

“Now, now, Aleeki, we only want to talk. You’re going to help us catch a rotten bastard,” Michael murmurs in his ear.

Brahma sends a small arc of electricity from his right index finger directly into Zaire’s chest. Zaire has been lying unmoving next to them this whole time. His body remains still as the arc burns through his skin, exposing the bones of his ribcage and devastating his heart with the constant flow of electricity.

“Just in case you don’t feel like cooperating,” Brahma says to Aleeki, locking eyes with him.

“I guess I can release him from the net,” Tara mumbles over the comm, after sensing Zaire’s life cease.

Michael and Brahma escort a very compliant Aleeki back to where the new village centre is under construction. As they secure him to a small earth-moving machine, See Vee's voice announces to the Namuh, "I have someone who would like to speak with you all."

"Hi, guys, it's so good to get to talk with you. I'm Patricia" comes a sweet, timid female voice through the comm of the K.E.E.P.S.

"Welcome to Earth, Patricia," Brahma replies.

"Hi, Patricia, it's nice to meet you finally. I'm Tara," Tara says.

Michael sends a quick thought to the four Namuh he's connected with: 'Hold on, let's see if we can bring her into our connection.'

"Patricia, this is Michael. How's your training with Douglas going?" he asks.

"Oh, that's completed. The reason I'm speaking with you now is that Douglas believes my particular skill may be useful to the operation you're conducting," Patricia says, still timid and sweet but now with a tone of authority. "Do you mind if I join your connection? Douglas and Steve said we can share knowledge between us quickly with the connection."

Michael is the first to respond. "Sure, Patricia, come on in, do you need—" is all he manages before they all feel Patricia's presence within the connection.

With Patricia now connected, the Namuh feel their connections to one another grow stronger. Each now has access to what is best described as a new memory of a skill or ability specific to each of them.

Tara can now feel the connection anyone within her emotional net has to their higher self, not only feeling it, but sensing the desires, or perhaps the requirements, of that person's higher self.

Sophia understands that by using her imagined mixing board in her mind, she has a sort of map to every sound-wave or form in the Divine Cosmos.

Brahma realises he has an ability similar to Sophia's, but his map is of the multitude of power elements throughout the Divine Cosmos, including comprehension of what they comprise and the effects each type of power has on this plane of existence.

Apollo's internal vision is flooded with new information. Normally, this would overwhelm him, but as he accepts that he fully understands everything he's seeing, his mind produces identification tags, forming an enhanced filing system in his body's mind.

Michael is the most astounded of all. He now has the knowledge, not mere access, but actual memories, of civilisations lost and alien to the Earth plane, and there are billions.

'Patricia, what is your skill set?' Sophia thinks into Patricia's mind.

'Douglas says there's no terminology for my skill set, as you call it. He refers to me as the matchmaker or connector. I can connect solutions to problems, answers to questions, people, and spirits to one another, and our reality to others,' she thinks back, including all the Namuh in this thought.

"I'm keen to try this memory download, Douglas and Steve informed me about. Can we do it now?" Patricia says. "Oh, hang on, I guess we've just done that with our connection."

As Patricia experiences Brahma's memory of killing Zaire just moments ago, she says, "Whoa, that was pretty harsh, Brahma, but I see it was necessary to instil fear in your prisoner. And it did release his spirit."

"We probably need to speed this up and keep See Vee in the loop," Patricia says. "Tara, you should be able to let Brahma know which of the enemy needs to be eliminated and which ones will be rectified by their higher selves. Michael, please provide Apollo with the area of the human brain that stores their ego—or operating system, as Douglas likes to call it."

“Oh, by the way, you guys can call me Pat. I prefer that name,” she adds in a slightly upbeat tone. “Apollo, when you have the information from Michael, please pass it to Brahma, as he needs to pull energy from the Divine Cosmos directly into it, so it shuts down.”

“Tara, make sure we don’t kill that Aleeki fellow. I think we can use him to get to Assad. I’ll be there tomorrow; Douglas has me on a flight soon,” Pat says. Just before she ends the communication, she adds, “See you all tomorrow.”

Michael looks to Brahma, who is standing beside him in front of the bound Aleeki, and says, “She sounds like fun. Bossy, but fun.”

The image of a nondescript part of the human brain appears within Brahma’s mind, along with its exact location. Apollo has placed an X on the image.

“Ha ha, Apollo, hilarious, X marks the spot. Are you ready, Tara?” Brahma speaks into the suit comm.

“Whenever you are, Brahma. Do you think this will hurt them? Should I dampen the pain?” Tara responds.

Michael answers, “There are no pain receptors in that part of the human brain, Tara, so they won’t feel a thing.”

Brahma, through the connection with his higher self, locates the dark red energy source from within the Divine Cosmos, which he understands will dissolve any matter it contacts on this plane. He then directs the energy in short beam form, about the size of a peanut, into the brain of each soldier designated by Tara as being unable to connect with their higher self.

The energy beams appear inside each soldier’s brain, disintegrating that part of each brain. Each body shuts down, each heart stops, each breath catches, very much like shutting down a computer by holding the power button for a few seconds. They are dead.

Of the one hundred and eighty-one men on the outside of the village perimeter, only eight have not been killed.

Sophia implants the thought, 'You should go outside the village perimeter and collect the remaining militia,' into the minds of the soldiers on the ground. She, Tara, and Apollo descend their CAV3s to land beside the other two craft within the village.

Some of the villagers, along with the EBC construction workers, follow the soldiers to gather the rest of the militia, who are now standing with arms raised in the air, in an 'I surrender gesture'. One by one, they are each bound and brought to be placed next to Aleeki. There is no resistance from anyone.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Patricia A.K.A. Pathfinder

Born August 8th, twenty-eight years earlier, Mars.

Privyet, my name is Patricia Petrov. I was born to Margarita Petrov and Paulo Santos Diaz in Old Elon Town, Mars.

My birth was straightforward, with no complications. The only unusual event was an intense dust and lightning storm that occurred directly above the hospital, beneath the newly installed solar capture dome, as I was being delivered. My parents told me the storm stopped the instant I came into the world.

Margarita and Paulo live in New Elon Town, which is located a kilometre and a half beneath Old Elon Town, within one of the many Martian cavern systems. They are both third-generation Martians.

Their great-grandparents, so my great-great-grandparents, made the migration to Mars on one of Elon Musk's starships. That was the first earthly spaceship to make the long journey to Mars, before

SpaceX and Beyond Blue's creation of the much larger, faster, and safer Ergonaught-class transports.

The joint companies also constructed Earth's first Mega Space Station. It housed the manufacturing crews for the construction of the massive spacecraft, which was assembled on zero-gravity platforms. The mega-station quickly became the new base of operations for most of Earth's space-based industries.

The mining of cobalt, platinum, and many other minerals and elements on the moon, as well as easily accessible asteroids, had started moon-based manufacturing industries. With the moon's gravity being six times weaker than Earth's gravity, some processes requiring stronger gravity could not be replicated there. So when the joint companies developed a mega-station that spun on its axis to simulate almost Earth-equivalent gravity along the outer ring, there was no better option.

I grew up on Mars, with only one-third of Earth's gravity. I was encouraged to run whilst wearing weighted clothing to help build stronger bones and muscles. My diet was high in protein and supplemented by a regimen of supplements. The strict medical testing and control mechanisms put in place by the Martian Authority were relentless. MARA, as we all call it, wanted people to develop fully and healthily, which is why they instituted an almost totalitarian governing system.

Life on Mars is like being in the military, I suppose. We are told what to do, where to live, and our physical activity is monitored and checked weekly. Everyone must complete a monthly medical check-up as well as a psychological evaluation every three months.

My schooling was the same as the other children on Mars. We were taught the basics early on, but as we progressed through the system, we

were assessed and then directed to specialise in different areas. MARA required recruits in many fields of operation, both on-planet and off.

I was identified early in my education as above-average intellect, a problem solver, and a curious individual. I remember always looking for new and simplified ways of attaining greater results for whatever problems MARA assigned to me.

Thrust to the forefront of our Martian colony with the invention of my sun-heat generator and some novel interconnecting climate solutions. This is when my aptitude for connecting the dots began to attract the attention of the upper echelon of MARA.

I was provided with a laboratory, unlimited access to whatever equipment and personnel I required, and set loose by MARA on solving the myriad of issues our colony was contending with.

The relationship side of my life was nonexistent. I certainly had close friendships that extended to the more sensual side, but I have never experienced love, or perhaps even liking someone very much. My focus has been exclusively on solving the problems of others. I could even see the connections between my friends and would regularly pair them up, understanding that they needed to be together.

About a year and a half ago, I began to experience a sudden desire to visit Earth. I had never even considered the trip before, but it was there now. As the weeks passed, that desire grew in intensity until it became an obsession. I understood I must get to Earth before my next birthday.

Although MARA was reluctant to let me go, the Martian governing body still considers us as humans and provides the same rights of freedom of choice available on Earth. They booked me on an Earth-bound flight and paid for what was to be an excruciatingly painful Earth climate adaptation on board one of the top Gravitation Rehabilitation Stations orbiting Earth.

On Mars, I had heard mention of spirits, the afterlife, and the like, but there was nobody that I had ever met who had explained a spiritual connection to our bodies, the way Douglas had on the first day I met him. He is an interesting man—rich, powerful, but still questioning his lot in life.

Once Douglas had instructed me on creating my connection with my higher self, I began to see the connections to things a lot clearer than I had in the past, yet there are still areas that appear to be restricted or off limits to me.

The one thing I now understand is that the Earth needs a lot of help. I don't know if anyone knows this, but humanity doesn't have much time left.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The Arrival

Having spent the night in some of the almost completed tiny homes being constructed as a part of the Economy Building Community, the Namuh gather near Samuel's tent, waiting for him to wake.

Sophia, of course, tiring quickly of waiting, implants 'WAKE UP' into Samuel's mind at a high volume. He very quickly exits his tent, looking around wildly for any sign of trouble. He spies the Namuh, who are all attempting not to laugh at his alarmed actions and his complete nakedness. Turning on his heel, Samuel re-enters his tent to get himself dressed.

"You know, you should never wake a person that way, Sophia. It scares the living daylights out of them," Samuel smiles as he says this to Sophia.

"Sorry, Samuel. I am just a very impatient girl," Sophia replies.

"Corporate One is en route to your location. ETA fifteen minutes," See Vee's voice announces via the internal speakers of each K.E.E.P.S.

"Can you determine the best landing spot for us, please, See Vee?" Michael requests.

“No need for that, Michael. Pat is using an upgraded suit that she designed with some of Douglas’s engineers during her training,” See Vee responds.

“What has been upgraded?” asks Tara.

“You will have that answer in a few minutes from now, Tara. I would hate to spoil the surprise,” See Vee says in the tone of an overjoyed schoolgirl.

The Namuh all look to the sky at the same moment, each of them looking in the same direction, feeling the strongest connection to Patricia that they had known until now. They understand that something more amazing than any of them has experienced before is about to take place with this first gathering of all six Namuh in one location.

‘Join me,’ Pat’s thought enters the minds of each Namuh standing on the ground, looking up at a tiny figure that has just emerged from Corporate One, flying at speed overhead.

With a simple thought, each of the five minds on the ground finds their awareness inside Pat’s mind, free-falling through the air.

‘What’s happening?’ thinks Tara, but is brought to an instant understanding as soon as her thought has formed.

Tara can still feel her own body, far below on the ground, but she also feels Pat’s body as if it is her own. The minds of the other five people within Pat’s consciousness are connected in a similar way to when they all connect as spirit, but on a lesser scale.

Instead of each of their higher-selves joining as one single entity within the Divine Cosmos, each Namuh has brought their earthly body’s awareness into Patricia’s consciousness within her body.

With each of them still having individual thoughts, allowing them to be heard would have become extremely noisy. Pat had instructed Sophia to act as the director prior to them all arriving.

‘Welcome to my mind,’ Pat thinks into each of the minds now within her consciousness. ‘I have made a few changes to the K.E.E.P.S, and thought that if this is not the best way to introduce the changes to you, then it would at least be the most fun.’

Pat pulls her arms to her side and tilts her head forward. This puts her into a headfirst dive and increases her airspeed.

With a push of her thumb on a new button situated on the side of her left-hand glove, they can feel, and with Apollo’s vision can see, a row of needles extend down the length of each arm. There is a membrane joining each of the needles to the others. Through Apollo’s vision, they also see a fin now protruding from the centre of the helmet on the back of Pat’s head.

They feel the thrust from the heel of the boots as soon as Pat has pushed the new button on her right-hand glove, now hurtling towards the E.B.C. at more than 450kph, according to Pat’s H.U.D. Pat says, “Watch this.”

She forces her arms out from her body, turning her palms upward. At the same time, Pat spreads her feet about 600 millimetres apart. The membrane down the sides of her arms fill with air as she forces her body to level out. They can all feel the lift from the membrane spread between her legs as Pat’s body now flies as if she is wearing a wingsuit.

Directly above the E.B.C., Pat turns her palms upward again, so that she appears to be standing vertically and activates the thrusters in her boots once again. Landing gently near the Namuh’s bodies and an open-mouthed Samuel, each of them returns the awareness to their own body.

“Pat, when do we get our upgraded suits?” inquires Brahma as he strides over to meet her.

As he approaches her, Patricia’s helmet is retrieved into its containment area at the rear of her neck on her K.E.E.P.S. Brahma offers

his hand to her in a handshake gesture just as his eyes meet hers. Her emerald green eyes instantly remind him of Felicity, his lost love, who perished on a flight he had been destined to be on, before the news of his father's heart attack.

Brahma, stopping dead in his tracks, simply stares into her eyes.

Quickly tapping into Tara's ability to sense emotion, Apollo's to view thoughts, and Sophia's to hear them, Pat understands the emotional rollercoaster Brahma is now riding. She has brought Brahma's long-buried emotions for the loss of the love of his life to the forefront of his mind.

Pat steps forward and embraces Brahma in a hug, saying, "I am not her, Brahma, but I am here for you. I am here for all of you." She ends, looking up at the others.

After a few more sobs, Brahma releases Patricia from the embrace. Using his hand to wipe tears from his eyes, he says, "Why did that just happen? How was it that you triggered this memory?"

Patricia looks at Brahma, then at each of the others before speaking. "I don't know Brahma, and I apologise for that. I do need you all to know that I was permitted to read each of the files that Steve has on you regarding your histories."

Looking at the people before her, Patricia says, "Each of you has experienced the traumatic loss of at least one loved one, or endured an extremely traumatic event. From what I have been able to deduce, each of you was supposed to have been involved in these tragic events, but for some reason, you were spared. I think there is more to these events than we know."

Apollo speaks first. "When my sister and girlfriend died, I was supposed to be in the vehicle with them, but I got held up at work that day. This just got even weirder than I understood it to be. My sister's spirit and other entities from the crash site informed me of a

dark energy they had sensed just before the craft interfered with the freight transporter that ran into the vehicle they had been in.”

“I got sick two days before I was to go on the ski holiday that took my parents from me,” says Sophia in a now suspicious manner.

“The night before I was to board the plane with Felicity, my father experienced a heart attack, which changed my travel arrangements,” Brahma adds with a concerned look on his face.

“I was at the Glastonbury terrorist attack,” Tara says, tears forming in her eyes. She feels her throat constrict slightly with the memory resurfacing in her mind. “The thing that saved me from being in the direct blast zone of one of the toilet blocks was an insane craving I got for some fried chicken.” Tara wipes tears from her face, then casts an enquiring glance at Pat.

“My whole family and my girlfriend’s family were executed in front of our house. My grandpa sent me to pick up supplies so that I wouldn’t know they were planning a birthday party for me.” Michael looks at each of the people around him as if assessing their capacity to handle what he says next. “I hunted down the mercenaries who murdered them. They were hired to kill everyone at our house that night, but I could not establish who hired them for the job or why,” Michael ends.

Samuel, who is still standing amongst the group, has covered his mouth with his hand in an attempt to hold in the sorrow he feels for each of the five people he knows in this group, his eyes glistening with the beginnings of tears.

Pat looks to each member in front of her and states, “It is obvious that a higher power intervened to keep each of you safe during these events, probably the Divine Cosmos itself. Individually, some of these events could be classified as accidents, but when we view them as connected to you as the Namuh, they certainly feel targeted.”

Pat turns and walks to where Aleeki has been bound. "Apollo, please come here," she says, bending down to take a good look at him. Aleeki's face is covered in sweat as the rising sun beams directly at him. It also holds a look of confusion and defeat, two things that Aleeki is not normally partial to.

"As you control your ability more precisely than I can, will you allow me to join with you to investigate this man's mind?" Pat requests of Apollo.

"Sure thing, Pat. What are we looking for?" Apollo questions.

"I have a hunch that we will know it when we find it," Pat responds.

The two of them take a seat on the ground, cross-legged, directly in front of Aleeki. Apollo cannot help himself think about just how flexible the K.E.E.P.S are as he takes his position.

Apollo feels Pat's mind join with his. He feels her think, 'Let's proceed,' then he enters the mind of the man in front of him.

They gloss through Aleeki's stored memories, viewing many of the horrific things that Aleeki has been involved in throughout his military career, stopping when they locate an area that appears to be shielded by darkness.

'Can you push through this shielding?' Pat questions into Apollo's mind.

'Not previously,' replies Apollo, 'but since your first mind connection with us as a group yesterday, I have a far greater understanding of what we are viewing.'

Apollo senses Pat's frustration with not being able to view these hidden memories within Aleeki's mind. With an effort of will, Apollo pushes their combined sight through the shield. There is a familiar feel to the shield, Apollo realises, as they break through to view the hidden memories.

‘Everyone of these contains Assad Abdriahim,’ thinks Apollo to Pat, ‘but there is more here. That darkness where Assad’s aura should be is the same darkness that exists in the Divine Cosmos where his higher self should be.’

Apollo pushes Pat from his mind as a massive paw erupts from the dark shield behind them. Manifesting the first protective item he can think of, an indestructible shield, similar to that of one of the old-time superheroes, Sergeant America, or something, Apollo blocks the blow from the paw. Its claws scrape against it. He witnesses the giant grey meaty paw, with its pitch-black claws extended, tearing through Aleeki’s mind as he extracts himself from it.

“That was too close,” Apollo says as he pushes himself to his feet.

Seeing Aleeki’s head now hanging lifeless atop his restrained body, Apollo mind-links with the Namuh to pass on the information of what has just happened and what they had been able to retrieve from Aleeki’s mind.

Chapter Thirty-Four

You Have Been Judged

Assad has just stepped out of the shower when he realises he is no longer alone in his bathroom, although it is one of the more opulent bathrooms that he has utilised this year, there is not enough room for seven people to be standing in it.

“You may want to wrap that towel around you and move out to your sitting room,” Sophia says to him via her K.E.E.P.S external speaker.

“Who the hell are you people and what do you want?” Assad demands as he reaches to retrieve a towel from the rack just outside the shower cubicle.

The Namuh each feel a cold spiritual push emanate from Assad as he demands his answers. Individually, they may be vulnerable to the push, but together they stand strong; the mind control effect simply breaks apart against the psychic unification the Namuh hold.

‘Let’s see what effect you guys can have on him,’ Michael thinks into Tara’s and Apollo’s minds.

Assad struggles as this group manhandles him out of his bathroom, restraining him to one of the heavy metal dining chairs with metal zip-ties. Assad knows that the chair is from the dining table, as he sees one of the intruders dragging it into the sitting room, the scraping of the chair’s legs on the marble flooring drawing his attention their way.

The Namuh have done nothing, Apollo simply makes Assad see a different reality take place, Tara provides the man-handled sensation, whilst activating his leg muscles to walk to the chair on their own, Sophia provides the sound effects to match the reality Apollo also projects to her, and Tara.

In Assad’s mind, he sits helplessly tied to the chair. He senses his Sym-Con cowering within the depths of his mind. Assad senses panic within the Sym-Con for the first time, from the realisation that the normal effect it has on humans is not affecting these beings addressing Assad now. This is an unfamiliar situation.

Errytel was created eighty-seven Earth years ago. The forming chamber is where it learns to work with the Ethereal Shadow, Errytel trains to shroud a being’s connected spirit in shadow, before removing it from its place of existence and placing it into the perpetual pit, a place of deep darkness within the Shadow Realm, where it no longer holds claim to the being it once connected to.

Assad is only Errytel’s second joining, compared to the other Sym-Cons on this planet; Errytel is the youngest. The joining process is simple, his kind bind with a willing being, they must remove the Light Spirit that holds claim to that being first, without destroying the ethereal connection, then they provide guidance to that being throughout its lifetime, when the being becomes too frail to continue

acting as a Sym-Con host, the Sym-Con is extracted via the ethereal connection, and delivered into another being.

The Namuh enter Assad's mind as one. Errytel begins his retreat via Assad's ethereal tether back to the forming chamber where Errytel was created. Normally the Sym-Con would leave a host via the ethereal tether, enter a holding chamber before entering a new host, but there is no time, the only way out is to force Assad's ethereal connection to connect with the forming chamber, or Errytel will be exposed to the Light Beings now entering Assad's mind.

The Namuh all sense the tail end of Errytel as the Sym-Con slips from Assad's mind, severing the ethereal tether as it does, they feel Assad's mind begin to open to them, the dark cloak that has been shielding his mind previously now beginning to fall.

"Get out NOW!" Michael shouts into everyone's mind. They all feel the cold presence of darkness before a giant paw, brandishing pitch-black claws, extends from a newly forming dark shadow where Assad's ethereal tether had been.

Standing in front of Assad's convulsing body, fresh blood beginning to flow from both his nostrils and ears, they all look at Apollo. 'You weren't exaggerating with what you showed us from the Aleeki attack at all,' Sophia thinks into his mind.

"Are any of you able to track that thing?" asks Pat.

Tara, Michael, and Sophia all shake their heads in a 'no' gesture. Apollo fixes his stare on Assad's now lifeless body. Brahma appears to be taking in the room.

"Apollo, Brahma, can you two make anything out?" questions Michael.

"I can see a shadow, no, it's better explained as nothingness," Apollo states, "It is fading, no again, our world is coming back to fill in the emptiness," he finishes speaking, but his mind begins to connect this

‘nothingness’ to the dark energy the entities explained witnessing the night Annalise and his sister died.

“Brahma, what are you looking at?” Pat questions.

“There is an unfamiliar energy signal, or I think it is better explained as a familiar something embedded within an unknown energy,” Brahma says in an almost mesmerised state, “I thought that I had gained access to all the knowledge of energies within the universe, this is something very new, but there is something familiar about it.” He ends up looking up at the ceiling of the room.

“What the fuck is that thing, and where does it come from?” Michael asks the room.

“I think we will be better served looking at the things we do know about for now,” says Pat.

Michael flashes Pat a slight look of annoyance, although Michael understands she is trying to be helpful with her statement. He knows the next steps that the Namuh need to take.

“I think we should ‘Go Spirit’ to see if anything has happened with the darkness in Assad’s Higher Self’s area of being,” Michael announces. “Will you be able to keep up, Pat?”

“I’ll try, Michael. As you know, this will be my first time joining all of you in spirit,” Pat replies.

Tara steps closer to Pat and says, “Don’t worry, Pat, we have you.” Tara glances at Apollo and Sophia.

“Before you do, may I suggest you exit the apartment first!” See Vee’s voice announces over their comm, “I am detecting several government vehicles on approach to your location, as well as seven suited figures entering the building’s foyer.”

“Are they taking the elevator or stairs?” asks Michael.

“Five look to be waiting for an elevator and the other two are heading for the stairs,” See Vee responds, “I have accessed the elevator

control for the building and will trap the five mid-floors after they have entered, I am sending another elevator car to your floor now, please enter it directly," she ends.

"Now that Assad is dead, what does that mean for us?" Tara questions as they ride the elevator to the rooftop air pad, where a G.A.V., controlled by See Vee, awaits. "Are we needed to depose this country's government? Do we need to hunt down Assad's military collaborators? Do any of you know?"

"I believe that some of the answers will be revealed once we Go Spirit," Michael replies to Tara's questions, addressing the entire group. "That reminds me, Pat, I need to make you a drink before we Go Spirit."

Pat turns her head to look at Michael, thinking that he may be joking with her. "Do you think I need to be intoxicated to Go Spirit?" she questions him.

Michael smiles brightly and replies, "Oh no, not at all Pat, the drink I have in mind is water, just a little more advanced than you may be used to." As he picks up a fresh bottle of water from the cooler as they step aboard the G.A.V.

Michael removes a small spray bottle, the size of a USB storage device, from a storage pocket located on the hip of his K.E.E.P.S., sprays two squirts into the bottle, passes the bottle to each of the other Namuh, telling them to imprint as they had with the water that they themselves had ingested to retain the memories from the Divine Cosmos, and then says "Karliqur Kawadi."

Handing the water bottle to Pat, Michael says, "drink this when we return from the Ethereal Plane," then he stands at the seat behind her.

As Spirit, the Namuh join to form one spiritual being; they are instantly in front of Assad's Higher Self, or at least what is left of it. The last visit to this area of the Divine Cosmos had shown the

Namuh nothingness, an area that was a part of the Cosmos, but only comprising darkness, something unrecognisable.

Now they see the remnants of a spiritual being, the residue of Assad's spiritual essence, all the usual points of light within, now dim and growing dimmer, the area of existence of the spiritual being decreasing before them. Just before the being blinks out of existence, it passes a flash of light directed at the massive being of light in front of it, the joined spirits of the Namuh.

Opening their eyes at the same time, everyone turns to Pat and says or thinks, "Drink it now." Pat does as she is instructed, downing the six hundred millilitre bottle within a matter of seconds.

"Did everyone get Cambodia?" asks Apollo.

Chapter Thirty-Five

On the Move

“This will be your last week at the Ugandan clinic,” Douglas announces to the Namuh as they take their seats in the meeting room on the executive floor of the Hoima Healing Clinic. “Use this week to finalise which of our people we will send to the other three new clinics around Africa. I know Masiko is standing by to submit your recommendations; she is organising the logistics of the move for all involved,” he concludes.

Both Douglas and Steve have their video call screens projected onto the large screen covering the window of the room. See Vee is projecting a 3D image of her head onto the conference table, and Cameron, as usual, is physically present in the room, seated in his normal chair.

“Burhaan and Aamiina have informed us that the capture of the corrupt officials and most of the connected warlords is progressing nicely,” Steve adds. “They send their sincerest thanks to you all for your efforts in assisting them in regaining their royal sovereignty of Somalia.”

"I believe those two will be good for Somalia," Douglas says, his face lighting up with a smile. "They have big plans for the rebuilding and future development of Somalia. Education is the focus for their population, as well as health, women's and men's rights, and improving the population's average income with the assistance of Toto's E.B.C's."

Douglas's expression darkens as he loses his smile. "In the debrief after Assad's demise, I know you told us you needed to go to Cambodia to follow up on information passed to you from the remnants of Assad's higher self. The first Cambodian clinic is ready to open next week, and you will be there for it."

Douglas leans forward slightly. "This time we do not want you involved in the treatment side of the clinic; you are only to provide training for the clinic staff." He rests back in his chair, takes a moment, and looks down.

When Douglas lifts his head again, determination is evident on his face. "There is something sinister driving the darker side of world society, building greed, jealousy, lustful ambition, and more. From the information you have gained, there appears to be far more to this situation than just Assad Abdriahim."

Douglas leans forward once more. "To this end, I need you. No, the world needs you to focus on getting to the bottom of this. I feel that some group, or something, has been manipulating humanity from behind the scenes for a very long time."

"The Namuh will go to Cambodia and anywhere else they need to go to clear this up. All of my resources are available to you." Douglas smiles again. "Cameron, Steve, See Vee, please bring the Namuh up to speed on all of Toto's resources, and See Vee, open access for the Namuh to view my personal holdings, please."

As the Namuh take their seats onboard Toto Corporate One for their flight to Cambodia, Patricia asks, "That water you made me drink after we went Spirit, what was it for?"

Brahma, who had taken the seat next to her, replies, "Oh, that was to help you retain more information in this body. We found that each time we went Spirit, we could not keep much of the information from the Divine Cosmos."

Pat looks at the group settling into their seats for the flight with a sceptical expression. "What do you mean by 'retain more information'?"

Tara kneels on her seat, looks over the back of it to Pat, and says, "Well, like how we didn't understand why we were all born on the same day, exactly one year apart." Using her hand to point to the others, "Now that we keep more knowledge from the Divine Cosmos, we understand."

Tara adjusts her chair so that it now faces Pat. "We were born one year apart, so that each of our Namuh bodies, would contain the same amount of divine cosmic energy, imbued into them from the two celestial beings, one black dragon and one silvery white one, that were the psychic surgeons our spiritual selves used to assist with our creation."

"So, you are all born on the 8th of August as well?" questions Pat, with a confused look on her face. "I didn't even notice that when I was reading Steve's files on you; normally that would be something I would pick up on."

Tara smiles and says, "Yes, we all have the same birthday."

Pat sits in her seat, looking at Tara, smiling. In an instant, her smile fades, and she becomes wide-eyed. "I think I know how to track that thing from Assad's mind."

Pat stares at each of the Namuh, who have either turned their chairs towards Pat's, or are standing in place, looking at her. She says, "Something has been working against us, not just us, but humanity, the planet, maybe even on a larger scale than we can imagine. It can manipulate our reality, on the Earth plane and within the Divine Cosmos."

Pat looks at Michael and says, "Michael, you are good at raising mental barriers around your mind. We all need to do that before I explain anymore."

**END
OF
BOOK 1**

Chapter Thirty-Six

Epilogue

Singapore, six weeks later.

Heat ripples above the tarmac as Toto Corporate One descends onto a solar-baked airstrip lined with mirror-plated towers and giant solar troughs. Patricia steps out first, barefoot by choice, skin humming from contact with the earth. Her senses are alight; energy pulses beneath her feet like a drumbeat from the planet itself.

The others follow more cautiously, watching her with a mix of awe and concern. Since Cambodia, something in Patricia has shifted, deepened. Her voice carries with strange clarity now, and when she speaks, the wind stills to listen.

Inside the newly constructed E.B.C. prototype facility, Patricia runs her hand across the generator's frame. With a breath, she closes her eyes. Metal vibrates beneath her touch. The solar lattice bends, not physically, but energetically; adapting.

"This isn't just clean power," she whispers to Sophia. "It's a conduit."

"To what?" Sophia asks.

Patricia opens her eyes. "To everything."

Behind them, Michael stares at a schematic screen. Something doesn't sit right. An equation buried in the generator's data logs has been altered. And the signature... it is strange.

Later that night, as the Namuh rest in the facility's meditation chamber, Patricia sits alone beneath a wall of glass, watching the stars.

She thinks of Assad. Of the voice behind him. Of the cosmic shadow that recoiled when she touched its edge in the Divine Cosmos.

She isn't afraid. Not anymore.

They're being hunted.

But now...she knows they can hunt back.