

# The Descendant

A novel by Colin W. Phillips

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**“The Nephelim were on earth in those days- and also afterward- when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.” – Genesis 6:4**

*Michael was just a normal teenager growing up in a coastal town, that is until the sightings of strange lights in the sky brought about an adventure that had no equal for Michael and his family and friends. Their quiet peaceful life was suddenly to end as a discovery of his father’s lineage brings about decisions they never dreamt could occur. Was Michael’s father really descended from Nephilim, the greatest warrior race in the universe? Was he really the greatest swordsman that ever lived or was this some elaborate hoax?*

*The search for truth of origin would take them on a journey that crossed the universe to a people whose freedom depended on it being true. This is an epic adventure of swashbuckling swordplay that many of us dream of being real. For some, the dream may be a reality. Are you Nephilim?*

# 1

“Do you idiot! Don't rise to slash! Keep your arm straight and put your body weight behind it!”

The unfortunate soldier lay stunned and bruised in the dirt of the ancient arena whilst his trainer barked abuse over the mishap. The early morning sun covered the dusty ground with a blanket of golden light, illuminating a scene that had been played out repeatedly for centuries.

This was Duandor, the largest city on Gragon, a planet on the edge of a solar system aligned to Earth's. It was in a sense a replica of Earth's own climate and landscape with the obvious exception of an ocean. Massive freshwater lakes, along with vast river systems, provided the abundant life giving water supply that sustained all of Gragon.

The inhabitants of Duandor existed under the regime of a cruel despotic military dictatorship. For the many born in Duandor, this was all that they knew. Those captured and enslaved from other cities and villages on Gragon, survived through submissive obedience to the army of the Warlord. The prowess of Korth, Warlord of Gragon, was legendary throughout the galaxy. None dare oppose him. He ruled through fear and power, knowing that he wielded absolute authority over every creature on the planet. Korth was the greatest swordsman and warrior that Duandor had seen for many centuries.

He was a giant of a man with a body that many aspired to as the human form perfected. Each muscle toned and supple, displayed under smooth tanned skin, stretched tight and glistening with oils and perfumes. His short-cropped black hair was compensated by his long forked beard, carefully groomed and braided by his bevy of beautiful attendants.

These were a primitive people, dwelling in low mud-brick houses and training incessantly in timber fenced dusty arenas. Their style of living and their weaponry had not advanced for thousands of years. Still their warriors fought with steel swords, spears and wooden shields.

There were no schools on Gragon apart from the impartation of learnt skills to apprentices, for there was no interest in knowledge. Very few could write let alone read, as most could see no need to learn from anyone except their immediate trainer. These were a focussed people. They were appointed

one task and purpose in life and lived and trained in order to perfect that skill and advance to a higher recognition within that single function. Practical skills were all that mattered. In Duandor everything revolved around the arenas where the majority of boys and men trained every day, developing their fighting skills. Only tradesmen, the elderly, the very young, the sick and females were exempt from the arenas.

The days in Duandor were filled with dust and noise, the result of thousands of men and boys eager to prove themselves worthy warriors. Their only goal in life was to develop their prowess sufficiently to be chosen to join the elite army of the warlord, there to enjoy the privilege of serving their master.

The fallen trainee, a boy of sixteen years, stood slowly to his feet, dusting himself off in humiliation, carefully avoiding wincing as he brushed over his bruised and aching body. Immediately he retrieved his wooden sword, the weapon of all second level trainees. Opposite him, his opponent waited patiently, a confident smirk adding insult to injury over having bested his friend yet again.

His eyebrows raised in arrogant challenge, expressing boredom over having to train with such an inferior swordsman. The young bruised soldier gripped his mock sword firmly in both hands, braced his body with legs apart and proceeded yet again with the basic manoeuvres. Parry one, parry two, and thrust! His opponent twisted agilely aside at the critical moment, the force of the boy's thrust throwing him to the dirt once more. His confident sparring partner followed through with a painful whack on the boy's backside, further humiliating him.

As the boy hit the ground for the third time that morning, he rolled, strengthened his grip on his weapon with one hand and swung the sword with all his strength, swiping the back of his opponent's legs with such force that the recipient cried out in surprise as he crashed to the ground.

The burly trainer, whose attention had been focussed on other apprentices, swung his head quickly in their direction, grunting approval before continuing his work.

The young boy raised his eyebrows at his fallen friend in mock triumph. His opponent fell back disgustedly into the dust.

The ancient city was alive with activity as usual, with each arena packed with sweating, groaning warriors at varying levels of skill. Every arena was graded according to age and ability. The participants wore no padding, only a simple steel helmet, a leather skirt over fabric underclothing, a

broad leather sash to protect the chest, and solid leather sandals. The hide of the domestically herded marduks provided both meat and leather for all soldiers.

The city itself was arrayed systematically like an octagonal spider web with each concentric level set apart for a specific function.

The outlying areas North of the city were farming and grazing properties managed by landowners and run by slaves. A massive lake bordered the western side of the city providing water to the people via a long and ancient subterranean tunnel.

The outside level of the city's web housed the military barracks and guard towers of the ever-vigilant army of Duandor. An around the clock guard ensured that no one escaped and no one entered the city.

The training arenas were located on the second level of the web, each arena numbered according to status and skill. Storerooms and pavilions that housed the baths, weapons supplies, primitive medical centres and food courts divided the arenas. There was no alcohol in Duandor, and the only liquid consumed was water, of which there was an abundant supply from the water troughs that twisted throughout the city. Duandor had no monetary system as all food and drink was supplied on a needs basis as processed by slaves. Clothing and weapons were supplied as needed. Personal possessions were a commodity unknown by these people as everything was shared equally. No one wanted for anything that was necessary to sustain life. Theft was non-existent, as no one owned anything. If what you were using was taken by another for their use you either took someone else's or requisitioned a replacement. The only crime evident in this city was violence, and that was usually associated with disobedience.

The third level of the web contained the living quarters for slaves and trades people. The fourth level held the supply stores. The elite guard had more comfortable dwellings in the fifth level along with the cells that held captive slaves until they could be assigned appropriate life skills. Those who disobeyed the guard's commands were also held here without necessary supplies, often to the point of death.

At the innermost level was the palace of Korth, along with his selected servants. The palace, although primitive by modern earth standards, was luxurious compared to the basic mud brick dwellings of the other inhabitants of Duandor.

At the very centre of the city, within the eye of the palace, was a well, fed by an underground stream flowing from the lake beyond the city.

Korth was restless. He had been idle too long. It was time for his armies to march again. It had been many years since his last subjugation of a tribal group. Fighting was all he and his people knew, and yet it was no longer a requirement on this planet. Korth and his armies had long since conquered all other warrior tribes on Gragon and so there no longer existed any threat to them. Knowing no other existence they continued to train for battle.

The population however was increasing. He needed more slaves to work the fields, extending the farming areas for additional crops. The only way he knew how to solve this problem was to take workers by force from neighbouring cities.

Korth knew that there would be no resistance, so the campaign would be easy. He lusted for blood, for the thrill of a kill in battle. The fact that it came without opposition was disappointing, though at least his army could assert their authority. Endolith was a prime target. The city had been developing for many years in isolation and peace. They had a police force but no army. This would be too easy. Two days march was but a short stroll for his well-trained forces.

Within a week, when the moons were right, they would march on Endolith. Now was a time of preparation. Korth was desperate for battle. Calling for his bevy of attendants, he insisted on being dressed in his most ornate leathers. His razor sharp double-edged battle sword was strapped tightly around his waist. Gripping his light timber shield in his left hand, Korth set out for the arenas. Today he was not seeking to train. Today he sought a worthy opponent.

With his entourage clearing the path before him through the busy streets, alive with merchants and slaves intent on their allocated tasks, Korth forged a direct route to arena sixteen. This was the final training arena for those warriors skilled enough to try out for acceptance into the elite guard. These men did not train with mock wooden swords, but rather with sharpened thin blades of steel.

The warlord was accustomed to wandering the arenas. It was for him an opportunity to exercise his dominion over his own people. They needed constant reminders of the futility of a commitment to his regime that was anything less than total submission. His displays of aggression and

power served to maintain control through fear. These regular sorties were of vital importance to his continual dictatorship. Korth savoured every moment of his expressed superiority, as well as being able to relieve the frustration of his own boredom resultant of his previous conquests.

Most arenas were open areas, divided only by occasional timber poles that served to mark the boundaries of each separate training field. There was a clear view of the other arenas from within all of the training fields. This gave aspirants an understanding of the degree that their training would step to.

As he approached bay sixteen, Korth paused momentarily at field two. Something had caught his eye as he took in the scene of hundreds of men and boys duelling incessantly. The young soldier who had earlier that day bested his opponent with a backward slice to the legs after repeatedly giving a consistent display of clumsiness, chose that exact moment to again sprawl in the dust.

Korth's attention was now momentarily diverted from arena sixteen as he pushed his way forward through the melee of young boys training furiously with wooden weapons. With a look of disgust he stood towering over the hapless youth, his shield by his side and his right hand resting on the hilt of his sword. His crimson cape wafted slightly in the light breeze that cooled the city.

By now the activity in the arena had ceased. A deathly silence spread ominously throughout the combatants. Weapons falling limply to their sides, the weary soldiers stood mesmerised, watching with fearful expectation, as the young man lay sprawled in the dust at the feet of the mighty warlord. Some felt excitement rising, anticipating a fresh kill, whilst others felt sympathy for the lad though thankful that it was him and not them lying in the dirt.

The youth shook his head and spat out the dust, curious as to the sudden silence around him, yet unaware of the cause. He stood slowly to his feet, brushing off the dust that covered his tunic, gradually slowing in this task as he came to the realisation that all eyes were on him. A flood of horror and nausea swiftly filled him as he knew this could mean only one thing. He had watched this spectacle played out by others many times before, never dreaming that it could happen to him.

He twisted around slowly until his greatest fear was realised. He stepped nervously backward as he stood to face the mighty Korth.

“Pick up your weapon boy!” ordered Korth calmly.

The frightened boy looked around him, seeking support. No one moved. He bent to retrieve his useless weapon, dropping it clumsily again in fear before finally standing in obedience.

“By what name do you go by?”

“Mond,; my lord Korth.”

“You Mond are a weak link in my army. An embarrassing joke of a soldier. You are not fit to wear the harness of a warrior.” With one smooth motion Korth drew his glimmering blade smoothly from its sheath, swiping the razor sharp blade effortlessly across the boy’s chest. His leather sash split in two and fell at his feet. Another rapid swipe removed the leather skirt from around Mond’s waist. He stood before his peers in utter humiliation, clad only in the cotton undergarments of a slave.

Some of the soldiers favoured this indignity, laughing openly and applauding the dishonour, lusting for more. Many others stood silently, their hatred and disgust blended with fear of the oppressive warlord.

“Use your weapon fool or should I call for your mother to fight me - here is your chance! Kill me!”

Mond was confused, uncertain of what he should do. With apparently little choice the hapless youth lunged at the warlord with his blunted stick. Korth was waiting. He moved his own sword in the rapid arc of a high to middle diagonal cut, neatly slicing through the timber blade. As the tip of Mond’s sword spun uselessly through the air, Korth brought the pommel of his blade down firmly onto the outstretched arm of the youth. The snapping of bone was audible across the arena as Mond let out a yelp of pain. Korth stepped forward, lifting the boy from the ground with his massive hand tight about his throat. Korth stared at the terrified Mond momentarily, before tossing him aside like a rag doll, once again to sprawl in the dust, wallowing in pain and humiliation.

Korth turned to leave, barking an order to the trainer. “To the fields with him. Let the fool carry water with the slaves. He is not fit for my army.”

Two guardsmen dragged Mond roughly to his feet, ignoring his cries of protest over his broken arm. They proceeded to drag him unceremoniously from the arena, following the warlord.

“Let him go!”

Korth stopped suddenly, pausing momentarily, before spinning around to find out who it was that would dare to defy his express command.

Mond’s friend and sparring partner could no longer stand idle, simply watching his companion hauled away to slavery, having committed no crime. His emotion of fear and rage exploded in a challenge. He had not meant to defy Korth; indeed he had not had time to consider that this was indeed what his outburst would result in.



“You dare defy my orders? I can see that I need to instil some discipline in this arena captain,” he threatened, turning to the trainer. “Give this fool your weapon!”

The trainer obeyed instantly, handing the young man his own metal blade. The boy took it reluctantly, bewildered and afraid.

“There is no need to fight the boy; he is only a level two. I will fight for him.” The challenge came from a huge dark skinned warrior from the sixteenth arena. This was not an isolated incident. Most of the residents of Duandor hated the warlord and challenges to his position were not uncommon, especially from the higher ranked arenas. These men often became so overconfident in their abilities that they could not imagine any warrior being superior to them, and that included the warlord.

“This is your lucky day boy.” Korth commented, unfastening his cloak and handing it to an attendant.

Both men stood facing each other, appraising the height and strength and possible agility of their opponent. In height they were equally matched, though no one could compare to the strength, beauty and muscular toning of Korth. Their weapons were equal as both carried small wooden shields lined with leather and wielded a short double-edged steel gladius.

Like prowling lions they slowly circled each other, waiting for the precise moment of attack. The black man, hoping to catch Korth off guard by the speed and force of his strike, initiated the lunge. All the onlookers were awestruck at the sheer agility of the warlord as he instantly stepped aside, parried the thrust, fell to one knee and lunged upward with his blade.

The sword pierced his opponent through the shoulder to protrude at his back near the collarbone. The shock of the wound caused the black to drop his weapon, reel backwards and fall to the ground in a pool of blood, staring incredulously at the warlord.

The rest of the soldiers looked on in stunned surprise. This giant black warrior was the best in the arena and he had been felled in a matter of seconds as though he were a rank amateur. This was too easy for Korth. There was no one his equal and all were now reminded of that.

“Captain!” ordered Korth calmly. “I want these three to the fields. Their days in the arena are over. “He took his cloak from an attendant and refastened it around his neck. “Prepare your men well captain. Soon we march on Endolith. I want them ready.” Motioning to one of his servants he simply commanded “my sword!” Korth and his entourage left the arena whilst the attendant ran over to the wounded warrior. He roughly yanked the sword from his body before he raced off to join the

procession, leaving the chaos in the arena to resettle as guardsmen dragged the three contestants away in disgrace to seek medical attention before escorting them to the slave quarters.

**T**his is a matter most urgent Governor Pintach. I beseech you to call a council of war today.”

“Friend Rinid, there has not been a war council formed in Endolith for five hundred years, what possesses you to seek one now?” Governor Pintach stared directly ahead of him, hands firmly clenched behind his back, deep in thought.

Rinid was becoming impatient with the elder statesman. The urgency of his information and its likely outcome was causing him to lose control of the courtly demeanour that he was respected for.

Pintach, the wise Governor of Endolith respected by many as patriarch to the citizens of Endolith, paced anxiously around the solid timber table in the small stateroom that served as his office. Endolith, a near neighbour divided by over a hundred kilometres of desert from Duandor, was by Gragorian standards a modern city. Constructed with predominantly timber and carved stone, the dwellings were more spacious and comfortable than those in Duandor. This was a peaceful city of tradesmen and women who lived for their crafts, art and music. These people were not warriors, as was the case in all cities throughout Gragon. All the fighting men now resided in Duandor, mostly taken as slaves. Only a few joined the arenas voluntarily. There were no wars on Gragon now as Duandor had the only army, yet raids on cities and villages by Korth’s soldiers happened occasionally in order to instil Korth’s dominance and to replenish his slave population.

Endolith, being a near neighbour had been a regular target of raids, and they were powerless to do anything about it. All of Draconia knew that they could not stand against the force of Korth and his armies.

“I have had reliable information governor that Korth is planning another raid on Endolith within weeks. We need to protect our people!” Rinid was almost pleading and his urgency was obvious.

“We are not warriors Rinid. We cannot go to war against the warlord. It would be a death mission, blatant suicide.”

“Governor we must do something. How much longer do our people continue to live in fear of the bullying tactics of this dictator? There must be a way to end this.” Rinid stood panting in frustration, waiting for Pintach to continue the debate.

The governor waited quietly, staring out at his beloved city through the large open window that gave him a panoramic view of Endolith stretched out below him. After many minutes of agonising silence, Pintach finally turned and faced his adviser. “There may possibly be a way. It goes against my judgement, though I must admit that I can see no alternative. Call your war council Rinid. We will meet tonight. We have much to discuss.

Pintach seated himself contemplatively at his table, resting his head in his hands. This decision was taking him into a direction and commitment that he had long avoided. He had been content until now to allow life to continue on its predestined course without his attempts to modify whatever life served him. He lived day to day. If the raids came he would seek to hide and survive, if not he would adjust to life as a slave or die at the hands of an aggressor. At least he would not be held accountable if he did not resist. Rinid though, it seemed, was holding him accountable no matter which direction he chose and so without doubt did the rest of the population of Endolith. This was not fair. It was too great a responsibility and one that he would prefer not to have.

Now he was about to embark upon a course of action for which he would be held responsible if it failed or if lives were lost in the attempt. He knew he was pursuing an almost impossible line and the more he considered it the more he began to realise that he had very little hope to offer a counsel of war. He imagined himself being laughed out of office. Rinid was by now expecting a miraculous scheme of salvation. What he had to offer them was nothing short of a dream, the fantasies of an aging governor. Pintach moaned audibly, regretting that he had spoken.

The huge timber colonnade was packed to capacity. The flickering torches hung high on the walls of the circular pavilion, giving an eerie glow as long shadows danced across the earthen floor. Every bench was crowded with anxious residents, curious and fearful at the talk of war. A war council was an open meeting where all residents were invited to attend. Most of the villagers had come and were freely exchanging opinions and advice as they waited patiently for the proceedings to commence.

A small section of the pavilion was reserved for the Governor and his councillors, amongst whom most of the debate would be centred. Villagers were not permitted to speak unless the floor was

opened, at which time they could come forward and address the council. These people had a firm commitment to and respect for their leaders; hence no one spoke out of turn. They knew the rules and adhered to them dutifully.

The night was cool and still as Governor Pintach stood on the edge of the great lake that serviced his village. His commitment still worried him greatly. Like most of the people of Gragon, he desperately wanted freedom from oppression, freedom to live in peace and to choose his own lifestyle without the constant threat of being dragged away to serve the interests of one man.

Yet the cost of opposing Korth could be high. He knew that many of the lives of his friends could be lost if they resisted. His people were artists and craftsmen, not soldiers. What chance would they have against such a powerful force? Pintach picked up a small pebble and skipped it lightly across the smooth surface of the lake, finding comfort in the resulting effect of the ever-widening ripples.

“The night is a glorious one my husband. Its quietness brings peace. It is a pity that the same cannot be said of you.” Rhonan slipped her hand gently into her husband’s, comforting him as they drank in the beauty of the night.

Pintach finally turned and met Rhonan’s loving gaze. Three hundred years they had been together. How could he risk losing her now by his foolish schemes? “I cannot do this Rhonan. The risks are too high.”

“The risks of slavery are higher if you do not Pintach. If there is any chance at all we must take it. Your people are relying on you for leadership. You must give them some hope, however small.”

Pintach stared at his wife, drew her close to his side, embracing her gently yet firmly. “I love you Rhonan. I know you are right yet.. I am afraid.”

“So am I. But come! The people are waiting. Let it be our secret.”

Pintach sighed once more and nodded his understanding and agreement. “Come! We will keep them waiting no longer.”

The din of conversation and discomfort was becoming intolerable in the council hall. All had arrived except the governor and his wife and Rinid was becoming anxious. Finally the cry of a melodic horn rose ceremoniously above the clamour in the hall, enchantingly drawing the focus of everyone present to the arched entranceway near to the councillor’s benches. The trumpeters announced the

arrival of the governor and the commencement of the proceedings. A respectful hush fell on the hall and in a single movement everyone stood to his or her feet, quiet and appreciative.

Governor Pintach and his wife quickly took their places and motioned everyone to be seated. Pintach waited patiently as people resettled into their seats and silence again filled the hall. He rose and moved slowly to the centre floor, the recognised speaking platform of the council.

“Residents of Endolith; friends.” Pintach carefully considered his words, speaking calmly and rationally. “For four hundred years the citizens of Gragon have lived in fear and oppression from one man and his seemingly unconquerable army. Korth, warlord of Duandor, has conquered every city on this planet and continues to subjugate its citizens under tyrannical oppression and a realised threat of slavery and forced conscription into his armies. So great is the prowess of Korth that none dare oppose him. The result is a life lived in fear, with a constant understanding that any one of us or our families could at any time be dragged away from our lifestyle and forced into slavery in Duandor. Some of you have already lost loved ones to the warlord. All of you have a fear and hatred of his rule.”

“News has recently arrived that should cause us great concern. Ambassador Rinid received the report therefore it would be more appropriate for him to advise you. Ambassador, I give you the floor.”

Rinid smiled and nodded with a sense of importance as he made his way to the centre of the arena with all eyes transfixed on him. Pintach returned to his seat, allowing Rinid to give his brief account.

“Governor; fellow citizens. As you are no doubt aware, the majority of people who now dwell in Duandor do so against their will, held captive there under the ever-watchful eye of the warlord’s elite guard. Due to their astuteness and accountability for slaves, few escape. Those who occasionally manage to avoid detection are mostly apprehended again by the regular sorties carried out by the mounted contingent of the guard, in which case they are killed for their efforts, as a deterrent to other would be escapees. Earlier this week one young man, previously from Endolith, survived the impossible, not only escaping from Duandor and the guard sorties, but also managing to find his way over one hundred kilometres of rough terrain.”

“This young man passed on vital information of a planned invasion by the Duandorian army on Endolith for the purpose of securing more slaves for their fields. We know this attack is pending and likely to be very soon, however the exact amount of time we have before they come is uncertain.”

“This is very serious news to us and the outcome is of grave concern. The council have met to discuss this matter and to consider our options. In the past we have done nothing to retaliate or prepare against future attacks. This time we have advanced warning, hence this council of war.”

“The council in its wisdom has formulated a plan that could end these invasions and give us victory over our oppressors.”

Pintach looked up in alarm as Rinid made this statement. He knew it to be a gross exaggeration of the facts. The council had not even heard Pintach’s proposal. No one had. This was politics at its worst.

“I call governor Pintach,” continued Rinid, “to the floor again to share our proposal on behalf of the body of councillors”

Pintach returned nervously to the speaker’s position. He took his time, looking at the crowd of anxious faces. The news they had received from Rinid was disastrous; therefore he knew that they now looked to him to offer hope and salvation. He did not know if he could give it to them.

“As you know,” he started, clearing his throat, “the Gragarians are an army that cannot be defeated by anyone on our planet. We are a peaceful people, desiring only to continue a peaceful existence. This threat will not leave us however unless we take action to rid ourselves forever of the tyrannical warlord.”

“What I am about to propose will no doubt be challenging to all, as it was to me when I first heard of it many years before. My proposal requires very radical thinking and I am aware that it may not be easily accepted by some of you. However there is no conclusive way of explaining it so I will be very blunt and perhaps shocking in my suggestions, but please hear me out.”

“Since we have no one here that can defeat him, I propose that we look outside our known world. We need someone that can stand up to Korth. I suggest we seek advice from Dracnia.” An instant murmur of surprised comment went up throughout the hall. This was unheard of in an Endolian council meeting. Pintach raised his hand, motioning for silence.

“Dracnia as you are aware, is a neighbouring planet of ours and presumed by most to be uninhabited. This presumption is due merely to our own ignorance and refusal to consider the possibility of life other than what we see around us to exist at all. Let me assure you that there is life on Dracnia as well as many other planets. We are not alone in the universe. I have become aware in fact

that not only do Dracnians exist but that these creatures are universal historians and collectors of data from planets across the universe. They if anyone will know of someone we can turn to.

The clamour of surprise continued to rise throughout the hall as residents and counsellors alike sought each other for affirmation of the foolishness of what had been expressed. Finally one of the female counsellors stood and expressed the opinion of the majority present.

“Governor Pintach, the existence of life on Dracnia is a fantasy told to children. What has this to do with the present threat from Duandor? Is this the council’s idea of a joke?”

“It is no joke counsellor. My research has led me to the undeniable conclusion that life does exist on other planets throughout galaxies apart from our own. The majority of planets within each known galaxy are uninhabitable; however there are some planets within every galaxy that sustain life. Within our own galaxy both Duandor and Dracnia are inhabited. The life forms on each are very different however. The life on Dracnia is unlike ours. The inhabitants there are smaller, their skin is smooth, hairless and white and they have larger heads and eyes. These are a peaceable people of extreme intelligence and advancement. Their purpose in life is to study other life forms, collect and store information and categorise data regarding other planets across the universe. They are capable of travelling through space in ships they have built for this purpose.”

“This is foolishness!” insisted one of the counsellors as many began to stand in protest.

“Hear me out citizens, that is all I ask,” pleaded Pintach, beginning to regret he had spoken at all.

“I for one will not waste any more time tonight,” decided an elder councillor, “if this report of invasion is linked to this insane conversation then it too cannot be trusted and would seem just as ludicrous. Perhaps it is time we selected a new leader. Goodnight!” He angrily pushed his way through the crowd and disappeared into the night. Most in the hall looked around them, confused at the night’s proceedings. Over half of the people and councillors followed suit and walked out.

Governor Pintach stood in humble dejection on the dusty floor. His mind raced frantically as he stood there alone, an object of ridicule now, when only moments ago he was a loved and admired leader. In a matter of minutes that was all undone. He had begun his course of action and was determined now to follow it through.

His wife Rhonan and councillor Rinid were amongst the few officials still remaining in the meeting. A pervasive atmosphere of disappointment hung over the smaller number of residents who



stayed. Some had stayed on because they were totally confused, others because they liked what they heard and were anxious for more.

“Governor, if you please,” Rinid recommenced, “what evidence do you have for the existence of the creatures and how do you know so much about them?”

“Surely you have heard stories, if not seen for yourself strange lights and mysterious craft moving rapidly across the sky. Many have reported seeing sightings of these ships, often seen hovering over certain areas. Some have seen evidence of these craft having landed. Still others have come across mysterious markings on the ground which following extensive investigation has never found an explanation of their purpose or origin.”

“The most conclusive evidence I have is that on rare occasions the Dracnians have made contact with our people and taken them with them for a time for the purpose of research.”

Rinid, although concerned for the mental health of his friend, remained calm. “Yet these are known to be the ravings of insecure minds, people craving attention and with a need to escape into a realm of fantasy surely.”

“I then am one such raving lunatic, because I have spent time on a Dracnian ship.” The speaker so shocked the councillor and indeed the whole audience that a stunned silence now added to the awkwardness of the occasion.

Rhonan stood to her feet, relieved to be able finally to support her husband. She had been sharing his humiliation and was desperate to stand by his side to draw some of the pressure from him. “I know these people exist,” she insisted, “because I have been with them. They are a very gentle race, highly intelligent and advanced just as my husband has told you. I am sure they can help us.”

Rhonan, as the beautiful, kindly and elegant first lady of Endolith, was greatly loved and respected by all the people. Her endorsement of this belief added much credibility to the suggestion, causing those remaining to reconsider the plausibility of the information given.

“Suppose then that what you say is true Pintach, and that this race of creatures does exist,” Rinid queried carefully, “what is the essence of your proposal to defeat Korth?”

Now was the time to quickly drive his point home. Rinid and Pintach were both excellent politicians. Pintach saw the opening that Rinid was giving him and he knew how to respond.

“Crudely stated my recommendation is this; that we approach Dracnia to seek their help to enlist the services of a warrior. One who can rid this planet of the enslaver Korth. We have no one on

Gragon able to achieve this. Our only hope is to look for salvation elsewhere in this universe. The Dracnians travel the galaxies constantly and know the history, customs and abilities of all races. They if anyone will know if help is to be found. “

“You seem to know much about these Dracnians governor. Have you also spent time with them?” Rinid asked curiously.

“That I have not. My information comes wholly from my wife’s experience.”

Once again that evening a hushed silence was evidence that this thinking was so foreign to these people that it took time to process the imagery of the concept.

“May I ask governor,” one of the remaining councillors stood tentatively to her feet, appearing a little shell shocked over all that had been said. “How are you able to make contact with these aliens?” There appeared no hint of aggression or sarcasm in the question, simply curiosity.

It was Rhonan who responded. “I have a device!” she replied succinctly and left it at that.

“I see, yes, thank you,” concluded the counsellor nodding in confusion and taking her seat again. Details would have been more than these people could cope with in one night.

For the villagers it had been a night of perplexity. Their emotions had been taken on a roller coaster ride of extreme proportions within the space of an hour. The first calling of a war council in five hundred years; the news of impending invasion and slavery; the hope of salvation; the declaration of life existing on planets other than their own; the hope of immediate rescue from attack shattered; the breaking of council protocol for the first time ever known; the apparent division and anger within the community; the vote of no confidence in their beloved leader and finally the proposal of travelling the universe in search of a saviour.

Pintach had foreseen the outcome of his speech and shown great reluctance in giving it, yet he also understood that he knew of no other form of protection for his people. In the past they had tried envoys to reason with and form an alliance with Korth, who saw no need for arrangements as he simply took what he wanted. They had tried hiding, running, fighting, and alliances with other cities. All had been in vain. Nothing could stand up to the control of this one man and his powerful army. This then was their only hope apart from submission to fate.

Pintach returned to his seat next to Rhonan. His wife took his hand comfortingly as she gave him a reassuring glance. Pintach’s heart was broken for his people, yet he knew he must be strong.

Rinid took the floor. "Citizens of Endolith. This has been a difficult night as we face an uncertain future. The majority of councillors and villagers leaving the assembly have already cast their vote on the course of action proposed by governor Pintach. Therefore it is ruled that no official action will be taken on the council proposal. Further investigation will be carried out in regard to the rumour of threatened invasion. Until such time as evidence is at hand, a threat to the inhabitants of Endolith is not assumed and no cautionary measures are deemed necessary. I pronounced the meeting closed. Thank you citizens, you may return to your homes.

Pintach buried his head in his hands, taking little comfort in Rhonan's hand resting on his knee. She sat silently at her husband's side as the great hall slowly emptied. Finally it was quiet. The only sound audible was the gentle crackling of the many torches that illuminated the building. Pintach and Rhonan remained. Even Rinid had apparently turned against them.

The silence was a great source of relief to Pintach. It shrouded him like a trusted friend. "'Can you truly do this?'" The question rose from the darkness behind them like a stone shattering glass.

Rhonon turned in the direction of the voice. Pintach raised his head in recognition yet continued to stare blankly ahead. "Yes Rinid, we believe we can."

"Then try you must. You should leave immediately; unofficially of course. We have nothing to lose by your attempt and we have no other solutions to offer. I wish you well my friends. I will cover for your absence. Goodnight!"

### 3

A light rain was falling from a cloud-darkened sky, creating a bleak atmosphere over an already gloomy people. Rhonan busily packed a satchel with sufficient provisions and clothing to last for a few days. The journey ahead of them was not a long one but they were anxious to depart quietly. Following the commotion caused by last night's meeting they thought it best not to intimidate anyone by leaving on their mission publicly.

The sun had not quite risen as Pintach returned from the stables leading his two baruchs in preparation for a swift departure. These creatures served the same function as horses on earth, yet were taller, thinner and with longer legs. Pintach's mounts were the finest in the village, bred for speed and stamina. Baruchs could run at forty kilometres an hour all day without tiring. Very few people owned baruchs, and on this occasion Pintach was grateful for the privilege his position offered him.

Neither of them spoke as they deftly strapped their packs and sleeping rolls onto the baruchs. When the last strap was tightened Pintach leant against the saddle, his hair already dripping and clinging to his face from the rain. "Ready?" he enquired of his wife.

Rhonan nodded before striding forcefully to the front door of their cottage, locking it and hiding the key. They both mounted and headed south through the sparsely populated area of the village. No one was yet awake as they walked their mounts quietly to the perimeter of the town they loved. It had been a long time since they had left their home. They had no reason to, as their lifestyle was idyllic and busy. They had no desire to be anywhere else.

They pulled their cloaks firmly around them to insulate from the gentle yet consistent rain. Peering out through their hoods there was little to see in the dim light. The baruchs walked slowly and quietly to the very edge of town. A vast expanse of soft tufted grasslands lay before them as far as they could see. Pintach gave Rhonan a reassuring nod as they stirred the beasts into a faster and more comfortable pace as they headed out across the plain. They would make good time over this terrain and expected to reach the mountain ridge beyond the plain by mid afternoon.

The ride was uneventful yet far from tedious for the couple. They were both silent, lost in their own meditations of the events of the previous night and their consequent sudden plunge into an uncertain future. The tall golden grass swished incessantly as the baruch's strong and graceful legs

pushed steadily through. The momentum of his swaying mount and the constant rhythmic sound of the swishing grass mesmerised Pintach. He sat sullenly watching the changes in colour of the terrain as the sun rose higher and the rain ceased. Doubt began to erode his already unstable plan. A barrage of “what if’s” spun his mind into a confused whirlpool. Could he really trust the statements of his wife? Had she really made contact with alien life? Would they come? Could they or would they help? This was such a ludicrous idea that as he replayed the scene in the council only hours before, he flushed with embarrassment that he had actually spoken out such childish notions to the people he was meant to rule. If he failed, and he expected that he would, then he knew that he could never return to Endolith.

“Pintach! Look!” Rhonan had stopped abruptly and lifted herself high in her saddle, staring back toward Endolith from where they had just come.

Pintach snapped out of his trance instantly and turned to follow his wife’s gaze. “What is it? Where?”

“I don’t know for sure. I have been watching a dark mass that I am sure is moving toward Endolith. I cannot make out what it is but it is definitely closer to the village. It could be only one thing.” Rhonan’s eyes were locked onto Pintach’s.

“Then we must go back!”

“No!” She exclaimed fervently. “No Pintach, we can’t. If it is the warlord’s army then there is nothing we can do in the village. If they have raided so quickly then even any other plan that we may have devised last night would not have had time to be carried out. There is only one way of helping all of our people. We must continue now with greater urgency.”

Pintach drew a deep breath. He believed she was right although an additional feeling of guilt in abandoning Endolith at a time of crisis was almost more than he could stand. “Lead on then.” He said a little abruptly. “Let us move more quickly though.” Taking a tighter grip on the reigns they stirred the barruchs into a loping run. There was no time to waste.

The Baruch slowed again as they carefully picked their way over the now rocky outcrop at the foot of the dividing range. They were both hungry yet dared not stop for food now that they had almost reached their destination.

“Are you certain you can relocate this cavern of yours? This mountainside is rather irregular; I think that it would be difficult for anyone to differentiate crevices here.” Pintach was trying to give an opening for his wife if now she needed to admit her stories were inaccurate.

“You just make sure that you keep close to me. I don’t want to lose you in this country. Don’t worry Pintach, it is not that hard to find. No one comes here so I chose the easiest and largest cave to identify. I already have it in sight in fact. Come on!” Rhonan moved confidently forward through the rocky outcropping toward the mouth of a large cave that now came into view. Pintach kept his concerns to himself and followed dutifully.

As they approached the cave entrance Rhonan guided her Baruch to a shaded area and dismounted. The slim beast folded his long legs beneath its body and lay down in the shade of the mountain. Pintach urged his own mount to do the same and anxiously followed his wife inside.

The cave did not recede into the mountain very far at all and its high entrance gave sufficient light to see clearly within. Pintach watched with growing curiosity as Rhonan hurried to the side of the cave wall and clamoured up onto a rock ledge. A small boulder appeared to block the way preventing anyone from walking further along the narrow pathway. Rhonan did not attempt to bypass the boulder; instead she crouched down and seemingly thrust her arm up to her shoulder into the rock wall. Peering closer, Pintach now saw the small crack at the base of the boulder and the alcove into which Rhonan had put her hand. It had not been noticeable from a distance and he agreed that it appeared to be a perfect hiding place.

Rhonan sat seemingly motionless for a moment as her arm felt around inside the hiding place whilst she attempted to locate the object of her search. “Here!” she exclaimed as her hand came to rest on the flat metallic object that she had placed there herself so many years ago. Withdrawing the rectangular case from its darkened tomb, Rhonan caressed it contemplatively before blowing away the thick layer of dust.

“Now what do we do?” Pintach asked curiously of his wife as she climbed down from the ledge with care.

“We signal them and we wait. They gave me this device to use if I needed to make contact should I ever be willing to go back voluntarily in order that they might study our race further. The Dracnians are a gentle and kind people who do not wish to interfere with or disturb other races. They are only interested in recording information. I have never used the beacon and I never thought that I

would need to. I do not know if it even works. I guess we shall soon find out.” Rhonan moved out to the cavern entrance and from this vantage point they could look down upon the great grass plains of Endolith over which they had just travelled.

The midday sun warmed them comfortably as they both sat down at their private lookout. Rhonan gently released the catch on the lid of the small case, flicking it deftly back to reveal the solar panel and array of blue buttons within. Rhonan thought for a moment then without further hesitation pushed a memorised sequence of buttons. Soft electronic beeps announced the receptiveness of each button pressed. Satisfied she closed the lid and placed the curious device on the rock beside her.

“Well?” quizzed Pintach in amazement. “Did it work?”

“I have no way of knowing. Let’s eat whilst we wait.” Rhonan appeared calm as she methodically unpacked the saddlebag and began to prepare a simple meal. Pintach on the other hand was displaying extreme anxiety. “Sit down and rest Pintach, there is nothing you can do. We should eat whilst we wait, you will need your strength.”

“How can you be so calm? Doesn’t this frighten you knowing that the fate of our people could be in our hands and that we are on the verge of possibly making contact with creatures from another world for the first time? How can I relax?”

“You are forgetting my husband that this is not the first contact. I have been with the Dracnians before.”

“Well I have not. This is very hard for me. What if they don’t come? Have you thought of that Rhonan? What do we do then? We cannot return to Endolith. We have risked everything on this scheme of yours. I am sorry Rhonan but I am worried.”

“You saw the signal beacon, doesn’t that reassure you?”

“It is a curious artefact I know, but it didn’t do anything, and now you are telling me to simply sit down and relax and have lunch.” Pintach sighed, took the flask and meal offered to him and obediently sat down on the nearest rock ledge. “I am sorry! It has not been a good day for me.”

Rhonan sat next to her husband as they ate together in silence, soothed by the afternoon sun. It was pleasant enough seated on the ledge with the view distracting them. Had it not been for the nightmare of the previous night ever haunting them they could have savoured the moment.

Pintach was stirred gently from his sleep in the sun by a gentle droning noise that at first he thought was the buzzing of insects. The seemingly familiar sound almost lulled him back to sleep until Rhonan's hand squeezed his arm firmly. He grumbled in protest and was about to reprimand her when he instinctively knew that something was different

The light around him had turned to a blue haze as in a smoke filled room and that persistent buzz, he realised, was not a familiar insect. He lifted his head and as his eyes surveyed the scene before him, his mouth hung open in amazement and wonder. A huge silver disc was suspended in the air directly in front of him, hovering close to the cliff face. Various lights flashed continuously from the domed top as well as from the circumference of the disc. Beneath the massive craft a portal appeared, revealing a radiant blue light emanating from within. Suddenly an intense and narrow spot light shot out from the portal, illuminating the couple as they sat awestruck, staring intently toward the craft.

Within an instant, Pintach and Rhonan were surveying a different scene altogether. The room they were now in was clinically white and clean and the metallic structure of the interior reflected hundreds of small flashing lights that identified a vast array of circuitry. Pintach and Rhonan were completely bewildered by their sudden transportation to such a foreign environment. Rhonan recovered quickly, leaving Pintach in a confused and dreamlike trance as he tried to come to terms with a new reality.

Rhonan bowed slightly before the unusual figures standing before her. "My thanks to the Dracnians for responding so promptly to my call; it is good to see you again noble Dewbah."

Dewbah and his two colleagues were obviously comfortable in such clinical surrounds, which was so foreign to their visitors. Pintach could not help but stare at the large egg shaped heads of his hosts along with their two bulbous eyes and white smooth hairless skin, reptilian in appearance, stretched over their thin elongated frames. The head shape presumed a large brain cavity, whilst their long arms with equally long fingers almost touched the ground due to the disproportionate length of the creature's legs. For a long while both groups stood silently appraising the other, both inquisitive as to the odd body shapes before them.

"We are anxious to know why you summonsed us Rhonan of Gragon," Dewbah eventually stated. "But first allow us to care for your needs. We insist that you are comfortable and relaxed. Your



mate is anxious and unsure of us. We have a room prepared for visitors of your species that I am sure you will find adequate. When you are both rested we will continue. Please allow me to guide you.”

Dewbah led the way down a short corridor. As he approached the allocated room, the door slid silently open. Pintach and Rhonan were again overawed by the purity and comfort of their surroundings. The room was simply fitted out with a wide couch, a steaming pool for bathing, a toilet, fresh clothing laid out on the couch and a table laden with food and drink. For Pintach this was an ultimate luxury that he had never imagined would be available to him. He surveyed the room longingly, still not having uttered a word since his arrival. The door slid closed, leaving the two travellers alone together.

“I am either dreaming, dead, or this is actually happening. I have not worked out which is the truth as yet, though I think that I prefer the first option.”

“It is real enough Pintach, just as I told you. These are a kind and gentle people. We are safe here. All we need to do now is to convince them to help us.”

Pintach continued to move about the room as they conversed, lifting some fruit and a glass of ale from the table, he placed them at the side of the pool. After hastily removing his clothing he stepped excitedly into the steaming water before picking up his refreshments again, making the most of his host’s generosity.

“How good wife, are we going to ask these creatures for help? We do not wish to offend them.”

“You are forgetting that I have been on a Dracnian ship before, I know how to talk to them.”

Pintach took another large gulp of his ale and relaxed back in the tub. “Perhaps there is no need to hurry this! We should take our time and get to know these people. Are you sure they can be trusted?”

“Are you sure you can be?” She added cheekily.

“Now you shall satisfy our curiosity. Why did you send for us? What is the information that you would share?” Dewbah was seated at the long table with his attendants positioned dutifully behind him as he addressed Pintach and Rhonan. They sat comfortably at the table with him, having rested from their journey, robed in fresh gowns and satisfied from the meal that they had recently shared.

“We both thank you for your kindness and hospitality towards us,” Pintach began nervously, feeling decidedly uncomfortable in the presence of these strange creatures. “We called for you for a reason other than to provide you with information, which Rhonan informs me, was the purpose of the transmitter you left with her. I hope that you will forgive us, but our people and our planet are in desperate need of help. Contacting you was the only solution that we could come to. We have come to plead with you to help us.”

“This is a most unusual request. We are a race merely of librarians and gatherers of information. We are not in the habit of rescuing other worlds. It is in fact against our laws to interfere with foreign histories. You have, though, greatly aroused my curiosity. Perhaps you have important historical information for our archives after all. Please tell me, what disaster confronts your world?”

Pintach brushed his fingers through his hair anxiously. This was definitely not a good start to a diplomatic request. They had come this far he reasoned, so it is worth trying to remain patient and give the information requested. Who knows where this may go?

“Surely you are aware of Korth, warlord of Duandor. He is a cruel tyrant against whom no one on Gragon can match. His prowess as a warrior is beyond anyone, even those whom he has personally trained. During his long reign, Korth has subjugated the entire planet to his bidding. We can live no longer live under the constant fear of this one man. On behalf of the inhabitants of Gragon, I request of you merely information as to a redeemer, one with the ability to rid my people of this warlord’s anarchy. Is there anyone who can help us? As historians and archivists, you of all creatures would know to whom we can turn. Can you help us?” Pintach was becoming passionate in his pleading. He had invested everything in this request and this was now the pivotal point. Had he wasted his time or would this insane proposal actually work?

The Dracnian captain paused momentarily, remaining expressionless and unmoved. “I am surprised to learn that you do not know about Korth. This is an intriguing scenario. Korth is not a native of Duandor.”

“Go on!” Pintach urged, annoyed at Dewbah’s unnecessary pause.

“He is Nephilim! In fact one of the few remaining. The Nephilim are an ancient warrior race of humanoids. They are, or were, interplanetary explorers. Their species has all but died out through a severe lack of females. They began to explore other worlds in order to mate and continue their line. They are a primitive race without any spacecraft of their own. They relied on our technology and

willingness to transport them. It was their aggression toward us that stranded them in foreign worlds. Korth decided to remain behind on Duandor when we visited there in search of a suitable planet for his race to dwell. The remainder were taken elsewhere to be isolated from other species so that they could do no further harm. Korth refused to leave.

“He was young and fit, the greatest amongst the remaining Nephilim. He remained on Duandor to rule and to breed.”

“Where are the rest? Would they help us?” quizzed Rhonan anxiously.

“We are talking twenty only surviving males, all of whom were elderly. The Nephilim are an almost extinct race. Their equal in battle skills cannot be found. They are natural warriors. The remaining ancients are no match for Korth, nor would they help even if they could. Korth was their only hope for the re-emergence of the species.”

“Pintach and Rhonan, stunned by the information just shared with them, both sat back at the same time as an appreciation of this news was digested. “Then there is no hope for us!” Pintach seemed resigned in this half statement, half question.

“I am not aware of any!” admitted Dewbah. “But allow me to consult our records before we reach any conclusions.” Dewbah slid quietly over to a nearby console and swiped his hand over what appeared to be the controls. Audibly voicing his request for information, a detailed analysis of data came instantly to the screen in front of him. Pintach and Rhonan turned to each other and shrugged.

“We appear to have insufficient data to complete our analysis of this species. It is possible that you may be able to assist us to update our records. Has Korth had any offspring?”

“I have never heard a report of any!” Pintach replied.

“If that is true, then the search line is narrowed considerably. The Nephilim, despite their prowess as warriors, are largely infertile, especially when interbreeding with other races. The dominant genes of the Nephilim themselves, in order to keep this race distinctive, did not regenerate when interbred. After a few generations the offspring ceased to be Nephilim in the majority of cases, to the degree that, according to our records, there is only one remaining pure line where the dominant gene remained Nephilim. We have monitored this closely and we are therefore aware that this race will die out completely within a few centuries once Korth dies. The other Nephilim are no longer warriors and are too old to breed.”

Dewbah paused momentarily in his relating of events, seemingly for effect as he thoroughly scanned his records. “The only exception to this fate is that one genetic line of interbred humans still carries the dominant Nephilim gene.”

“I am confused Dewbah,” Rhonan admitted, trying desperately to follow the alien’s line of reasoning. “What are you telling us? Does this mean that there is a warrior out there that still has this Nephilim skill? If so where do we find him? Will he help us do you think?”

“There is something I see that you do not yet understand. Although the Nephilim skills appear to have passed on in purity through one line, only we know this knowledge. The skills are unknown by the ancestors. They remain human, totally unaware of their heritage.”

“Where is this person?” Pintach asked curiously. He had been listening in amazement as his universal view had suddenly expanded in these last few moments to such a greater perspective that he knew it would take time to assimilate this new knowledge and the consequences that it created. Never again would his attitudes and reactions be a response to his limited Duandorian worldview. He was intrinsically aware that he was now a different man as a result of this knowledge.

“Centuries ago the Nephilim visited a planet called earth, peopled by humans such as yourselves. They remained on this planet for only a few hundred years before they were forced to leave by beings already ruling this planet that are even greater than the Nephilim.”

“Then could we not approach these creatures to help us?” suggested Pintach innocently.

“No! You do not know what you suggest. The Nephilim were not intrinsically evil, they were simply a dominant race. The rulers of earth were evil personified. This is a fallen planet, not yet restored. The Supreme one has great plans for the people of this world, yet most are unaware. Your only search result is confined to one human male, who is ignorant of his past, his present and his future. Apart from the Supreme one and his host, this one human is the only one who may be capable of assisting you.”

“We have come far for this information and we have much at stake. I must pursue this possibility. It is all we have it would seem. Will you take us to this earth and to this warrior?” Pintach was becoming even more determined and bold as his awareness increased. Rhonan watched him admiringly.

“You do not know what you are asking. We are simply historians, gatherers of data and compilers of records. Although we have been to earth many times and have a complete archive on its

history, we cannot interfere with the natural course of events on any world. We can supply you with information but we cannot assist you further. I am sorry.”

“But you must help us!” insisted Rhonan, suddenly becoming agitated by this unexpected refusal. “We do not possess the technology for travelling through space. Only you can help us.”

“I am sorry, we cannot. My assistant will escort you to your room. Please refresh yourselves there whilst we return to your planet. Your information and questioning has been most rewarding. Now if you will excuse me, I need to update our data files.”

The conversation had concluded. Dewbah withdrew and the two other Dracnians stepped forward, gesturing for the couple to follow them. There was nothing else for them to do except to submit to their host’s request. Frustrated to the point of desiring to scream, Pintach simply clenched his fists tightly, relaxing them slightly only after feeling the pressure of his wife’s hand on his shoulder in a gesture of caution.

“Dewbah requests your attendance in the control cabin. Would you please accompany me?” These were the first words that they had heard from either of Dewbah’s attendants and Pintach and Rhonan were only too happy to oblige. They had spent the last few hours since their dismissal, deep in thought and debate as to their future options. Nothing presented itself clearly. The more they pondered on the information they had been given the more confused they had become.

Dewbah was standing at the control panel. A large screen in front of him displayed a landscape that was very familiar to Pintach and Rhonan. “Duandor!” confirmed Dewbah. “To what precise location would you like to be returned?”

“There is no home left to us now where we would be welcomed, and yet Endolith would naturally be our choice.” Pintach admitted; the hopelessness obvious in his voice.

Instantly the screen before them displayed the distant view of their home, Endolith. Slowly the image magnified as though they were rapidly drawing closer. Soon, individual dwellings were obvious, and then streets and houses and lanes as fine details became clearer.

“Rhonan! Look at this!” exclaimed Pintach excitedly.

“It is Endolith, I know.” Rhonan stated, becoming enthralled with the images before her.

“There is something terribly wrong with this. Where are the people? The streets are deserted.”

“Perhaps it is too early.” Rhonan suggested.

“It is daylight. There are always people about! Something is wrong!”

Dewbah, who had been standing to one side, became curious over the obvious growing agitation of his visitors. He stepped forward to the console and passed his hand over the sensor. Instantly the image darkened as the cameras scanned over a broader area of the city attempting to detect signs of life. Reddish images of body shapes finally displayed themselves within the assembly hall. The images were of prone bodies, lying immobile within the building. There was no other sign of life within the city.

“What is this?” demanded Pintach. “What has happened?”

“The scene would lead me to believe that there is no longer anyone alive within this town. All within the hall are dead. I do not know how to explain this.”

Pintach stood staring at the screen, the horror of what he now knew to be true penetrated deep within his heart. Rhonan wept unashamedly as she withdrew her eyes from the scene.

“Korth!” Uttered Pintach in rage and disgust. “Will you still not help us?”

“We cannot alter destinies!” Dewbah stated firmly.

“Dewbah, you have already altered many destinies. Was it not your race that transported the Nephilim to other planets?” Rhonan sobbed out her despair and grief, no longer caring not to offend these creatures. “Did you not bring Korth to our planet in the first place thus altering the destiny of our entire existence? It was your race that created the dilemma in Duandor. You must take responsibility for fixing it!”

“We only provided the transport.” Dewbah insisted.

“Yet in doing so you changed our entire history.”

“If we had chosen not to assist, that decision also would have had an effect on destinies. We are not responsible for the choices of others, whether good or bad.”

“Nether less,” stressed Pintach, keen to press his point, as any skilled diplomat would do, “Your so-called assistance has now ultimately resulted in the enslavement and loss of life for many of my people. All I ask Dewbah is that you now do for me what you once did for Korth. Transport me to earth.”

There was a long period of silence as Dewbah considered all that had been said. He was not used to his actions being challenged and found it an uncomfortable position to be in. With his superior

intellect he had always been right, or at least always considered himself to be. The possibility of another and opposing viewpoint was new to him and prompted his analytical mind to pause and process actions.

“I will do what you have asked. I will fly you to earth and return you to your planet, but no other involvement can I have apart from information and transport. I have not been to earth for some time and I am keen to update my files. It is a regular destination for my people and our ships go there often to gather information. Earth is of great interest to us because of the Supreme one’s activity there. I will do what you ask.”

“Thank you for your kindness.” added Rhonan, greatly relieved at this final change of heart. “But one other request I must make of you. Without guidance to this descendant you spoke of, our visit to earth would be a waste of time. On our own we could never find this warrior. If you take us to earth you must also locate this Nephilim descendant. You are the only one who can!”

“It is true. We do have the skills to do that, but it is a most extraordinary action for us to take. We rarely communicate with or reveal our existence to other creatures.”

“I am certain you could learn much from this human and we do not require you to communicate with him as we will do that. All that you need to do is to locate him for us.”

“Very well! We will leave immediately. In the meantime, make yourselves comfortable in your quarters. I will make available to you the historical files on the Nephilim and also on this descendant. Study them well. You will need this knowledge to convince him to return with you.”

**B**ob lounged contentedly in his usual location for a winter's afternoon, reclining in what he claimed as his chair. This fact was of course disputed by his son who himself preferred the novelty and luxury of a reclining lounge as his own favourite reading spot. It was an afternoon that began, as had most other Sunday afternoons in Bob's life ever since he was a boy. It had become a tradition in his life that after the hot roast lunch on Sunday, he would compulsively rest and critique the Sunday newspapers. He usually held contempt for most people and places that made headline news and delighted in pointing out to his wife Anne the stupidity and senselessness of the action that had created such publicity.

"Did you see this?" he called to Anne as she hurried into the lounge room to reduce the volume of the television that was continuing to scream out, abandoned in the background, "more U.F.O. sightings right here in our own back yard. 'Mysterious lights appeared for the third consecutive night in the sky above Coffs Harbour.' It's probably just the air force doing night runs and the media hype it up to be the invasion of the little green men from Mars. Our town never gets into the city newspapers except for some crazy stunt like this. They must think we are all on drugs up here."

"You know, Rachael was here yesterday saying that her father reckons he saw those lights. He was convinced they were UFO's. He couldn't see any other possible explanation. I wonder if there is such a thing?" Anne leaned pensively against the wall, staring blankly as she pondered her own question.

"Could be I guess, but it's more than likely just a more adventurous label to put on something that you can't immediately identify. Anyway, where is Michael? He was going to come fishing with me."

"He went out a while ago. I think he said he was going down to McCauley's Headland with his friends. Why don't you meet him down there? He's probably forgotten all about it."

"Probably searching for flying saucers! Yep! If I can gather enough energy to get out of this chair I might do that. Are you coming?"



Anne declined. She was not normally the adventurous type and a simple fishing trip requiring a short five minute walk to the beach from the house on a winter's afternoon appeared about as appealing to her as watching the afternoon sport, which she also hated. "You go! I am going to have a lie down for a while. I am quite happy to leave the fishing to you boys."

Michael sat in the wind-flattened grass atop the headland, gazing contemplatively out to sea. He was a quiet, serious boy of fourteen with ruggedly handsome features. His clear blue eyes complemented his thick blonde hair and sun-tanned skin. He had a fairly quiet nature and possibly as a result of this had had few friends, preferring his own company on most occasions. He was a dreamer, spending hours on the headland, fantasizing about heroic deeds that he could perform as a medieval knight, slaying mystical dragons that swooped from the skies or rose from the ocean depths. Or else he would become a pirate on the high seas, smuggling treasures into hidden caves and battling the thieving buccaneers who would attempt to steal from him. Always in his fantasies he would be the hero, picturing himself proficient in battle, always undefeated.

"Have you seen anything?" Rachael asked expectantly, throwing herself down on the grass next to Michael and surveying the horizon. Rachael's long dark hair tickled her cheek as the gentle afternoon sea breeze caused it to partly obscure her vision. She raised her hand casually, collecting the annoying strands and twisting them into a makeshift ponytail. "It was at night when Dad saw them. I don't think you would see anything in the daytime."

"I wasn't looking for UFO's!" insisted Michael, withdrawing rapidly from his daydreaming into reality with a slight feeling of annoyance. This quickly changed as he turned to the smiling face of his friend. Rachael at fourteen was aware of her attraction toward Michael that she did not fully understand. It was more than being drawn to his good looks, it was not sexual, it was more a depth of the friendship and security she found when with Michael that caused her to spend time with him. They were simply young kids who loved having innocent fun together.

Michael's only other close friend was Drew. Drew was a classmate from school, as was Rachael. It was probably his shyness that limited his relationships with the more outgoing kids in the school and caused him to connect with those less popular. Drew was a small red-headed boy full of life and fun, but due to his more advanced scholastic abilities and his passion for and skills with computers,

he had become somewhat of an outcast. Rachael only tolerated him and his embarrassing dress sense and pathetic humour because of her friendship with Michael. Any friend of Michael must at least be given the benefit of the doubt.

“What are we doing here if not to look for the mysterious lights?” Rachael asked, unashamedly excited by the hint of mystery that the sightings had brought to Coffs Harbour.

“I just thought it would be a good place to meet for a change. There’s nothing else to do. Drew was coming too.”

“Oh great!” Rachael added sarcastically. “Then what?”

“I don’t know! Let’s wait until Drew gets here then work something out.”

Rachael shrugged and turned her attention back to the ocean.”

Michael looked over to check the narrow meandering pathway that wound its way up the hillside from the beach below to the top of the headland on which they sat. In the distance near the car park he could make out a lone figure heading across the sand toward the base of the hill. He paid no attention to this and quickly turned his attention to the group of older teenagers who at that moment rounded the corner of the trail and came into view only metres away.

Instantly Michael felt alarmed and very vulnerable in such an isolated setting.

“We have company!” he said quietly to Rachael, trying not to let his anxiety show. “Maybe we should go.”

“I think you are right,” Rachael agreed, recognising the three older boys as local troublemakers whom she had come across on other occasions.

They both stood, purposely avoiding eye contact with the intruders. They began to walk toward the pathway that led back to the beach, but to reach the path they had to go past the boys who now stood and blocked their way.

“A surfy boy!” exclaimed one of the boys tauntingly. “We love surfy boys, don’t we guys? Come on! Give us a kiss!”

“Get a load of his chickee!” added another intelligently. “Show us what you have been up to up here. We love to watch!”

“For a while!” commented the third, wanting to be included in the taunting.

Rachael panicked and moved to push past the boys. The nearest to her grabbed her arm and held it in a tightening squeeze. She screamed.

Michael felt a mixture of emotions within him such as he had never before experienced. He recognised the fear. That was familiar, yet this other feeling from somewhere deeper within was unknown to him. Part of him wanted to run; yet surprisingly to him, he felt drawn to stay. He became confused. The anger rose, yet was capped like a volcano threatening to erupt, drawn down by fear and uncertainty.

“Let her go!” he insisted nervously. “Come on Rachael! Let’s get out of here.” He took Rachael’s other arm and attempted to lead her past the boys, yet the one holding Rachael would not release her.

“Oohh! You’re scaring us! What if we don’t want to let her go? What are you going to do tough boy?” One of the boys shoved Michael in the chest, pushing him backward. Michael felt the emotion within about to explode.

Suddenly a strong hand grabbed the shoulder of the boy who held Rachael. “You heard him son. Let her go! Now!”

Bob, Michael’s father moved from behind the boys to stand in front of them, putting himself between Rachael and her tormentors. Bob was a tall solidly built man, and although looking slightly foolish dressed in his fishing gear and green floppy hat, still posed a challenging figure to the boys. His demeanour was one of authority, which was honed from years as a company director, giving management to the many staff under him. “Keep moving and I might overlook this,” he offered.

The boys hesitated for a moment, looked Bob over, and then finally decided to back off. They moved along the pathway to a safe yet cowardly distance before turning, to yell obscenities and threats at their intended victims.

“Are you ok?” Bob asked in obvious concern for Rachael and his son.

“Yeah! Sure! Thanks!” Rachael mumbled, still shaken and trembling slightly.

“Come on!” said Bob, eager to get the children as far away from these thugs as possible so they could feel safe again. He led them down the track towards his car. No one spoke until they reached the safety of Bob’s big Ford. “Why don’t I drive you two back home? You look like you could use a warm drink.”

“We’ll be ok Dad. I’m just glad you turned up when you did. How did you do that anyway?”

“We were supposed to go fishing together, remember?”

Michael slapped the back of his head with his hand. “Oops! Sorry! I forgot.”

“Yeah! Well it’s just as well your mother knew where you had gone. It looks like I timed it well. Rachael, are you sure you are ok? Do you want to go straight home?”

“No, I’ll be fine, thanks, just a bit shaken.”

“Dad, Drew was supposed to meet us here; can you just hang around for a bit until he shows? I wouldn’t want him to meet these guys on his own. He shouldn’t be long.”

“Yeah! I guess so. What time was he getting here?”

“Here he is now. Drew!” Michael yelled out across the car park as he came in view from the road that led into the area. The boy heard his name and responded, waving his hand in the air and altering his course toward them.

“Hey guys, what’s up? Hi Mr Mason. Did you catch anything?”

“Hello Drew,” responded Bob. “I haven’t had the opportunity to go fishing yet. Do any of you want to join me? If not I think I will give it a miss now.”

“No thanks Dad, I think I might go home.”

“Why don’t you both come around to my place?” Drew offered. “I have this really cool new computer game that we could get into.”

“Yeah! Why not? Rachael do you want to?”

“Yeah! Sure, whatever!” Rachael answered, eager to go anywhere if it meant getting away from the beach whilst she knew the three teenagers were still about.

“Do you need a lift?” Bob asked.

“No its ok, we’ll walk. It’s not far. Thanks dad.” Michael expressed sincerely.

Bob put his arm around his boy briefly and squeezed his shoulder. “Have a good time you guys. I’ll see you later.”

Bob took his time in returning home. He sat in his car for a long time contemplating what could have happened to his son if he had not come along when he did. He dozed on and off, dreaming a dozen scenarios of possible outcomes to the incident. He dreamt of all the heroic actions he could have, and probably should have taken. He, like his son, had fanaticised many times of being the ultimate

warrior and being victorious in many battles. His life seemed dull at times and he longed for a fulfilment to something within him that he could not explain.

Bob sighed in the knowledge that his dreams were just that; dreams, that could never be a reality. His life as he had it now was real. He should be content with that.

When he arrived home he returned to his lounge and flicked on the television. Anne poked her head around the corner of the door.

“Drew’s mother just rang. Michael’s sleeping over there tonight. She told me what happened. Shouldn’t you report it to the police?”

“There is nothing they could do; these were just kids so they wouldn’t be appropriately punished. I don’t think there is really much point in reporting it.”

“Well it’s a good thing you turned up when you did, that’s all I can say. Oh! I almost forgot. Someone called in to see you while you were out. They wouldn’t leave a name but said they would come back later. Nice couple.”

“I wonder who?” began Bob before deciding that he had had enough excitement for one day and therefore couldn’t be bothered trying to theorize on who would be calling on him at home on a Sunday afternoon. “ I guess I will find out later,” he concluded, settling back in his lounge, trying to get interested in the motor racing on the screen.

## 5

**B**ob woke from his afternoon nap to the annoying sound of the front door bell. This was his one day off and really did not enjoy being disturbed. He heard Anne's voice politely greeting the visitors and inviting them into the lounge room. They had better not be trying to sell him something or convert him to their religion. Anne really should ask more questions before she invites strangers in.

Anne walked into the room slightly ahead of an older, distinguished looking man and a woman of the same age, also elegant in appearance. They smiled politely and both held out a hand of greeting at the same time.

"Bob Mason?" asked the man, grasping Bob's extended hand and shaking it vigorously. "My name is Pintach, and this is my wife Rhonan. I wonder if we may have a word with you over a very serious matter?"

"Very serious matter," thought Bob. At least they had roused his curiosity. "I'll bet its insurance."

"Well yes! I guess so Mr Pintach. I don't have a lot of time but I could give you a couple of minutes.

"I am afraid that it will take longer than that to explain."

"What's all this about?" said Bob firmly, becoming a little irritated towards the presumption of the man and that he was wasting his time on his valued day off.

"Please!" said Anne politely. "Take a seat!"

Bob frowned.

"We will come straight to the point Bob Mason," Pintach affirmed, taking a very diplomatic tone. "What we are about to tell you I am sure you will find difficult to believe, but please bare with me, this is very important."

"Look, don't bother!" snapped Bob, agitated at having his afternoon disturbed. "I have heard it all before and I am sorry, but I am just not interested in listening to a sales pitch. I am not going to buy anything so you are just wasting your time and mine." He stood, preparing to usher the couple out of the house.

“It appears,” interrupted Rhonan quickly, “that you have misinterpreted us already. We are not merchants. We come to seek your help.”

“No insurance?” asked Bob, a little confused.

“I don’t know what that is, but it is certainly not our reason for coming. Will you hear us out? We have come a very long way to find you.”

Bob looked at Anne who simply shrugged and smiled awkwardly.

“Ok! Speak, but don’t take too long,” Bob insisted as he settled himself back in his armchair.

“There is no easy way to explain this,” Pintach began, “so I will be blunt.”

“You already said that! Please get to the point!” Bob was becoming more agitated and finding it difficult to be polite and patient. Following a stern glance from Anne that simply said, “Don’t be rude!” he finally agreed to remain silent and listen.”

“We are not from your planet. We travelled here from Gragon just to find you.”

Bob buried his head in his hands in despair, whilst Anne bit her lower lip politely so as not to laugh out loud.

“The inhabitants of our planet, who are humanoid like yourself, are enslaved by a cruel tyrannical warlord. The superhuman abilities of this creature in battle make it impossible for anyone from our world to stop him.”

“So you have come all the way across the galaxy to ask Bob to fight this giant for you?” Anne could not help herself; this was the funniest thing she had ever heard.

“Yes!” stated Rhonan sternly.

Bob and Anne both exploded into hysterical laughter, completely unable to control themselves despite the look of surprise and dismay on the faces of their guests. Finally they managed to control themselves sufficiently for Bob to ask, in the midst of the effort of wiping the tears from his eyes and still catching his breath, “so who are you guys really? Who sent you?”

“I appreciate that this is difficult for you, but please, what we have told you is true. Let me explain further,” Pintach pleaded, exhibiting enormous patience considering the circumstances.

“Centuries ago on your planet there dwelt a race of warriors whose prowess in battle could only be surpassed by a few other creatures in the universe. Their time on this planet was short as they were forced to flee by the demon masters who ruled here. During their time on earth they chose to mate with the women of this planet. The skills of these warriors were passed on to succeeding generations,

and as time went on, the dominant gene of this race weakened, with only a few remaining strong. Finally all but one pure and dominant strain remained. The Dracnians, who brought us here, are universal record keepers. They have traced these pure lines and have recorded the genealogies and purity of each generation.”

Anne and Bob sat quietly now, no longer laughing, but curiously fascinated by the story unfolding before them. Like a scene reminiscent of a series from “This is Your Life,” Pintach finally delivered the punch line.

“Bob Mason, you are the only remaining human in whom the skills of the Nephilim remain pure and dominant. You have within you the skills of the greatest warrior race in the universe. Only you can match Korth and free our planet from its enslavement.”

Bob, stunned into silence, looked at his wife once again for support. Anne snickered and hid a smile behind her hand. She shrugged in uncertainty.

“Mr and Mrs Pintach, I’m sorry” Bob apologised, but I am very confused. I cannot work out who you are or where you are from and why the story. Is this one of those paid greetings like a gorilla gram? Who sent you?”

“If we take you to the ship we came on will you then believe?” suggested Rhonan.

“Oh I get it now!” giggled Bob boyishly, proud of his new revelation. He winked at Anne. “What time?”

“It will need to be late so as not to attract attention. We will return at midnight.”

“Midnight! That is late! But it’s your party. We will be ready!”

“Boy was that weird or what?” sighed Anne as the door closed behind the departing guests. “Bob Mason, what on earth is going on? You seemed to have cottoned on, so will you please bring me in on the secret!”

“Don’t you get it? The boys at work must have set this up. It was one of those special novelty telegram deliveries in order to invite us to the party on some cruise ship they have organised for tonight; very clever too, especially in view of the UFO sightings in town this week. I guess that must have inspired the joke.”



“They probably set those up too,” suggested Anne, satisfied with the explanation and embarrassed slightly that she didn’t figure it out herself.

“It wouldn’t surprise me. They certainly had an elaborate story. You know I am disappointed in some ways. I have always wanted to be a warrior hero like Sir Lancelot or something,” Bob laughed.

“Yes I know you have dear, but you will always be my hero! My knight in shining armour.”

“If only! What will we wear?”

“Are you alright?” Michael asked of Rachael, concerned that his friend had become unusually quiet.

“Yeah! Thanks! I’m fine now. What are we going to do?”

“Come and play on my new computer game,” Drew suggested eagerly.

“Ah, well, no thanks Drew, I’m not real good at computer games,” Rachael confessed, keen to distract the boys from simply sitting in front of a computer for hours whilst she watched in absolute boredom. “Why don’t we ask my Dad to take us down to Mutton Bird Island tonight to watch for UFO’s. That’s where he saw it last night when he was down there fishing.”

“Yeah! Sounds cool! Do you really think we might see one?” Drew was excited by this thought. He was a young boy with a very active mind who loved to have his imagination stretched continually. Computer games were his common source of satisfaction, but even the interactive fantasy world adventures that they provided were no match for a possible real life adventure. “Do you want to ring your Dad now and ask if he will? We can go out late because there is no school tomorrow due to the holidays. My folks won’t mind.”

“Do you want to?” Rachael asked of Michael, anxious not to be suggesting anything that did not meet with his approval.

“Sure! Why not? There’s not much else to do.”

“Do you want a game of Battle Chess while we wait for Rachael?” Drew suggested. He had played this game a hundred times with his friend and never once had he been able to win.”

“You sure are a glutton for punishment. One day you will surprise everyone and actually win.”

“I do win! Against everyone except you that is. How come you are so good at it? You never even practice.”

“Just natural ability I guess,” boasted Michael teasingly, flexing his muscles in jest as he did so.

“Hey guys! Guess what?” Rachael yelled excitedly as she rushed in to the room. Dad has borrowed a boat from a friend to go fishing tonight and he said we could come, as long as your parents approve.”

“Cool!” the boys exclaimed together. “Let’s go and ask!”

It was 11.45pm and Bob and Anne stood anxiously waiting for their escort in the lounge room of their home. Bob regularly peered through the curtains searching for any approaching headlights of the car that he expected to pull into their driveway at any moment. They had dressed in their best and most formal clothes, appropriate they thought, for a surprise party on board a yacht late at night.

“I have forgotten those folk’s names already,” Bob admitted, anxious to get going. His stomach was rumbling with both hunger and nervous anxiety at being the centre of attention at a party in his honour.

“What does it matter?” Anne reassured him. “They were only hired to deliver the invitation. It will probably be someone else who collects us.”

Bob jumped as the doorbell rang. “That’s odd,” he stated, “I didn’t see a car pull up.”

Anne gathered up her handbag and the pair rushed to the door and quickly opened it. Rhonan and Pintach stood there, surprised to see the couple appearing so anxious and startled. “You are ready I see. Good! We will go immediately.”

“But,” interrupted Bob, “where is your car?”

“We do not have any transport here, we have walked. It is not far.” Rhonan reassured them.

“It is very late and not safe to walk the streets this time of night, why not take my car?”

“We would feel safe with you with us, but we will take your transport if you wish.” Pintach was keen to get going and so ignored Bob’s attempt to interrupt his last statement. He took Rhonan by the arm and moved aside to allow Bob and Anne to lead them to the car.”

Following a series of simple directions they arrived at a short isthmus that served as a quarry for the breakwater that formed the still, quiet harbour. The isthmus was adjacent to Mutton Bird Island, a steeply rising island, anchored to marine jetty via a long breakwater, a popular spot for tourists and local fishermen. They parked the car in the area indicated by Pintach, and dutifully climbed out. The cool night air instantly wrapped around them as they stood overlooking the long stretch of deserted beach. The moonlight sparkled romantically off the waves as they pounded the coastline incessantly, adding to the feeling of isolation. The night was cold and still with a half moon shedding the only light into the darkness of the night. A multitude of stars lit up the night sky in an array of mystery and beauty. Anne and Bob took in the beauty of the night for a few brief moments before Anne became afraid and Bob suspicious.

There was no waiting yacht; no bevy of warm smiling faces waiting to yell ‘surprise!’ There was nothing but an eerie desolation and the roar of the sea. Anne gripped Bob’s arm to alert him of her fear. The thought ran through both of their minds simultaneously. How could they have been so stupid and gullible? These people have brought us here to this lonely place for only two possible reasons. They are going to rob us or murder us or perhaps even both. Bob immediately became defensive and aggravated. He had had enough of this game.

“Ok what’s going on? Who are you and why have you brought us here?” Bob insisted, no longer trying to hide the anger and aggression he now felt.

“We have already told you. Yet you still do not believe. Please! We mean you no harm. It is here we will meet our craft. Watch the skies and you will soon understand that what we have told you, as strange as it may seem, is true.”

There was something in the tone of Pintach’s voice that served to reassure the pair. For the first time the thought that the fantastic story they had been told may not have been told as a joke. Were this strange couple serious?

Bob took his wife’s hand and squeezed it reassuringly. Whatever happened in the next few moments was going to be very interesting regardless of the event. Bob stared curiously at Pintach and Rhonan, wondering if these were indeed people from a different planet. Could it be true? Impossible surely! His mind raced excitedly, allowing himself to entertain the thought that all that Pintach had told him was true. But what had he told him? Bob strained to remember.

Could he really be this great warrior Pintach had spoken of? Bob had never fought anyone yet he had often wondered how he would go if he had. He had always been fascinated with history, especially things medieval or military, but so were many other people and they were not super warriors. No! That part could not be true. But he wished it were.

“Bob! Look!” Anne screamed anxiously. Bob instantly came back to reality and drew his eyes to where his wife was pointing.

At first all that he could see were stars, millions of them, until he noticed one particularly bright star that was larger than the rest. As he continued to stare into the sky, he quickly realized what Anne had already seen. This star was moving and growing larger as it did so.

They watched in silent fascination as this ball of light rapidly increased in size. Within moments Anne and Bob stood directly in front of an alien spacecraft as it hovered only metres from the ground. The lights pulsated and a soft drone mesmerized the couple as they stared in open-mouthed wonder.

## 6

**I**t was late Monday afternoon before Michael arrived home. He walked into the house eagerly searching for his parents. The news he had for them could not wait. If he did not share it with them immediately he felt that he would simply explode with excitement. After rushing into every room in the house he finally located them sitting together in the courtyard deeply engrossed in conversation with each other.

“Mum! Dad!” Michael yelled excitedly, not worried in the least that he had interrupted their discussion. “You will never guess what happened to us last night!”

Bob and Anne smiled at each other then turned to focus on their son. “What is it Michael? What did you get up to?”

“Well...” he started, pulling up a chair to join them. “Last night Rachael’s Dad took us out in a boat to do some late night fishing as you know.”

“Yes we know,” interrupted Anne, “how did it go?”

“It was great! We loved it. We fished just out past Mutton Bird Island for a couple of hours and we caught heaps of fish. But then, around midnight, we saw a UFO!”

Anne looked at Bob with some concern.

“I know you won’t believe me but it’s true. It wasn’t in the distance either. It came right down near us, somewhere on Boambee Beach we think. It was a real close encounter of the scariest kind. It was a huge saucer shaped object with lots of flashing lights. Rachael’s Dad rang the newspapers today to report it. They really do exist. I never would have believed it before, but we actually saw one.”

“Did you see anything else... any people or creatures?” Bob asked curiously.

“No unfortunately. It went out of sight behind the hill once it landed. We tried to move the boat around to see it but by the time we got there it had gone. I wonder what they looked like? You should have seen it. It was awesome.”

“We did!” they said together.

“You did? But how? Were you out too?” Michael asked incredulously. His parents never went out at night.

“Michael!” Bob leaned close to his son and put his hand on Michael’s leg. He spoke in a serious tone that was usually reserved for discipline. “Your mother and I have something to tell you that will seem hard to believe at first. We are still trying to come to terms with it ourselves. Come on inside, this may take a while.”

Michael’s excitement was so intense over the saga that his father had relayed to him that he could not possibly contain it. It was all he could think about, constantly searching his mind and imagination for a possible scenario of future events. His mother, more for his own protection than for any other reason, had sworn him to secrecy as no one was going to believe them anyway. This promise made it a torment for Michael. He longed to share the story with his friends but could not. Surely Rachael and Drew would believe him.

The chiming of the doorbell made him jump nervously. Within a moment his parents were ushering into the lounge room Pintach and Rhonan, who smiled politely but then ignored Michael and turned their attention on his father.

“We must make plans now as to your journey to Gragon as we are anxious to return. I am sure you will understand our keenness to complete the task.”

“I believe your story Pintach,” responded Bob, “but I am still uncertain of my role. You say I have all these super warrior skills, yet I do not even know how to fight. I couldn’t beat anyone. I am a businessman not a soldier. I am sure you must have that part wrong.”

“The Dracnians assure us of the accuracy of their records. You are the warrior.”

“But how?” Bob began, totally unable to comprehend this possibility.

“We have considered this and have devised a plan. You will receive your training from Korth himself. This training should release the dormant skills that you have within you. If we take you with us to Gragon we must allow you to be captured and taken to Duandor. There you will be placed in the training arenas. When your skills are developed you will be able to face Korth from within his own city. When you have defeated him we will return you to earth.”

“Well that sounds simple. Except maybe the part about me defeating Korth. I don’t share your confidence.”

“You are the only hope that we have. I have complete confidence in the research abilities of the Dracnians. They believe that you are his match; therefore I am assured that you alone can lead an uprising against Korth. An insurrection can begin if the people are confident of a competent challenger. They will no longer be afraid of the warlord and they will turn against him and his army. They are imprisoned more by fear than by reality. Together they could most likely overthrow him, but they are afraid. They need leadership and they need a hero who can protect them from the might of the warlord. You are that one. You are the only one.”

Bob considered Pintach’s argument delivered like a true politician, before turning to Anne. “What do you think?”

“I know you Bob! I know that this is what you have dreamt of doing all your life. Now I know why you have been so fanatical about swords and medieval history. You were born for this. For myself I wish it were someone else, but apparently it is not. It is my husband! If you want to do this I will not stand in your way. I will support you.”

Bob appreciated the sacrifice that Anne was making in consenting to this mission and he loved her for it. Tears formed in his eyes as he hugged his beloved wife to him.

“Michael!” Bob turned his attention to his only son once his long embrace with Anne had satisfied him. “This is a family decision. What they are asking of me is dangerous. There is always the risk of injury or death. I will only go if all consent.”

“It sounds as if you are driving to the city Dad. We face those possibilities every day on the roads; and anyway, we will all be together. We are coming too right?”

Bob had not considered the prospect of endangering his family. He looked at Pintach to discover a reason why not.

Rhonan answered in his place. “The boy would risk capture for the arenas, but we could hide him in Endolith with his mother. I see no reason for your family not to come. This would lessen the negative impact of being so far from them. It would be to your advantage in fact.”

“I don’t know if I like the sound of that,” Bob responded. “It is difficult enough that I risk my own life, let alone my whole family.”

“Dad, you are not going without me!” Michael insisted.

“Anne?” Bob looked to his wife for help.

“Well to be honest the idea of travelling through space does not appeal to me in the least. I am quite content to stay on my own planet; however if it means keeping the family together, than I guess I’m in!”

“How soon can you be ready to leave?” Pintach questioned eagerly.

Michael was deep in thought as he cycled slowly along the beach road towards Rachael’s house. The excitement of the adventure before them had removed him from the reality of leaving behind the places and people that were so precious to him. His friendship with Rachael was especially difficult to leave behind. He did not know how long they would be away or whether they would return at all, so what could he tell his friends? The pain of grief that he felt in leaving Rachael surprised him. She was his best friend and the thought that his leaving would hurt her tore at his heart. He pushed his bike down the driveway and stood in deep contemplation on the doorstep as he waited for her to respond to the chimes.

“Michael! Hi! I was just trying to ring you. Your mum said that you were coming around. Do you want to go down to the beach?” Rachael’s delight at seeing him and her vibrant suggestion relaxed Michael instantly. She had an uncanny ability to do that. “I’ll just get my bike. I won’t be a sec.”

The young friends cycled together without conversation, the two kilometres to the beach. It was a mild winter’s day without a hint of breeze. After locking their bikes together against the wire fence, they ran eagerly to a secluded spot on the soft white sand. The beach was deserted apart from a man in the distance walking his dog.

They collapsed together, Rachael playfully pushing Michael aside. Their relationship was never more than a strong bond of friendship; however both of them felt a secret attraction toward the other that they would not dare expose.

“There’s a concert on at the stadium with some really cool bands in two weeks. Do you want to come?” Rachael asked eagerly, always seeking an opportunity to spend more time with and be seen in public with her handsome blonde friend.

“Rachael, I can’t! We won’t be here. That is what I was coming to talk to you about. Something has come up and Mum and Dad and I will be going away for a while.”



“Going away?” Rachael did not even try to hide the panic she was feeling all of a sudden.  
“Where to? How long will you be gone?”

“I don’t know how long, but it could be quite a while and that’s the hard part. I can’t tell anyone where we are going.”

“Why? Is your Dad a spy or something? Why so mysterious? Did he murder someone?”

“Of course not! I really want to tell you, but even if I did you wouldn’t believe me.”

Try me!” Rachael implored.

“I can’t. It is too weird.”

I won’t tell anyone, you know that.”

“Well, I guess it would help if someone knew something. I can’t reveal everything but do you remember that flying saucer we saw the other night?”

Rachael nodded.

“Well it’s to do with that thing. It was real and my parents actually went in it. They want my Dad’s help in a problem they have so we agreed to go with them.”

Rachael just sat and stared at Michael. Suddenly she pushed him aside. “Get out of it!” she laughed. “Come on. Are you really going away?”

“See I told you that you wouldn’t believe me, but it’s the truth.”

“Yeah sure! Michael if you can’t tell me where you are going its all right, but let’s leave it at that rather than trying to make up really bad stories.”

“Aaaah!” Michael yelled in frustration. “I knew I shouldn’t have mentioned anything. Its just that in a few days time you won’t see me anymore for a while and I didn’t want to leave you without saying something. Do you want to come back to my place for a while? Dad’s packing to go so maybe that will convince you that I am not lying.

“I believe you are going somewhere, but on a flying saucer? Get real!” Rachael did not know what to make of that conversation. She felt hurt and rejected by Michael’s lack of willingness to tell her what was really going on. She took Michael’s hand that he held out to her as he pulled her to her feet. They returned quickly to their bikes and headed for Michael’s house.

It had not gone well for Michael. He had hoped Rachael would have responded well, never thinking that she would not even believe him. The more he thought about it the more he began to realize just how ludicrous his story must have sounded. Of course no one would believe a story like that. He

wasn't even sure if he really believed it himself if he allowed himself to think too deeply on it. He didn't know what he was going to do now. Maybe after he had left she would realise that he had told her the truth.

As they rounded the corner into Michael's street both children stopped immediately, staring in disbelief at the scene before them. Michael's house was clearly visible and in the driveway was parked an ambulance with lights flashing and the back raised. Two police cars were parked out the front and a great crowd of people stood around watching. Michael suddenly felt sick with fear. Both of them raced to the scene, discarded their bikes carelessly and pushed through the crowd.

Someone was being wheeled toward the ambulance on a stretcher as policemen with notebooks jotted details. Michael attempted to shove forward but was held back firmly by a tall police officer. "Stay back please!" he ordered.

"I live here, let me through! What has happened?" He pushed past the policeman who released his hold.

"Michael!" His name was called in a tone that indicated great anguish and pain. His mother left the people who were comforting her and rushed to embrace her son. The two took comfort in each other as Anne wept openly. Michael asked no questions at this point, he knew he simply needed to support his mother.

Anne grew gradually stronger, drawing from her son. "Come inside! Let's get away from these crowds."

Before he followed her, Michael looked around and scanned the crowd. Spotting Rachael standing helpless with tears flowing down her cheeks, he signalled her to join him. Without hesitating she ran to his side and they followed Anne into the house together.

Michael could contain himself no longer; he had to know. "Mum, what happened?" Even before he knew the details, he was overcome with grief, barely holding back the tears.

"It's your Dad!" Anne exclaimed. She was an emotionally strong lady, but this was too painful, too shocking. Her words were expressed with heaving sobs as she did her best to relate the horror to her son.

"He's been stabbed. We were getting into the car to go to the shops when two men rushed at him. They stabbed him in the back before he even knew that they were there."

"Is he going to be ok? Why aren't we with him?"

“I was waiting for you to come home. The police were just about to go out and find you. They said they would drive us to the hospital. We need to go now!”

“I’ll come with you!” insisted Rachael. She didn’t want to leave Michael now when he may need support. “If that’s ok?”

Michael looked at his mum. “Thanks dear! Ring your mum first though whilst I go and talk to the police.”

Michael was not quite prepared for the scene that they walked in to in the hospital ward. His father lay motionless, the colour drained from his features, tubes, wires and monitors surrounded and extruded from his prone body.

Already seated in the room, heads buried in their hands were Pintach and Rhonan. They lifted their heads as they heard the family approaching and politely stepped aside, allowing Anne to be near to her husband.

“How is he?” Michael asked bluntly of Rhonan.

“Not good!” came the equally curt reply. “The blade entered close to his heart. Your physicians seem capable. We must wait and hope.”

Rhonan placed her hand comfortingly on Michael’s shoulder. She and Pintach had ignored the boy up to now, hardly noticing him. Their mission was to secure the help of Bob. He was their only hope, the hope of a whole planet, now that plan had been wiped out before it could begin by some petty thieves who could never know the implications of their sinister deed.

Pintach motioned Rhonan and the couple made their apologies to Anne before leaving. They needed time to think and the family needed time alone with Bob. “We will call in later!” they assured her.

Anne simply nodded her head slightly in order to politely acknowledge that they had spoken. What they had said she neither knew nor cared. She sat next to her husband and held his hand lovingly, caressing and kissing it, her tears dripping on to the still, smooth skin of the back of his hand. This was the hand of her warrior. The fact that he had never fought made no difference. He was a good man and she loved him deeply. She wiped away the moisture from his hand with her cheek as she sobbed his name in her grief and despair. “Stay with me Bob! Don’t leave me!”

Michael stood at the foot of the bed in total bewilderment, helplessly staring at his father. He needed his dad's reassurance that everything was going to be all right, but he just lay there, gasping for air through a tube thrust down his throat.

"I'm sorry Mrs Mason but I will have to ask you and your family to wait outside for a while." The activity in the room suddenly intensified as the place burst into life with nurses and doctors rushing in to take charge. Their confident movements and the tasks they performed gave a certain reassurance to Anne and Michael as they stepped obediently aside.

"What is happening doctor? Will he be alright?" asked Anne, desperately seeking some essence of hope.

"We need to prepare him for an immediate operation. The wound is serious, but he seems strong. He has stabilised quickly. This may take some time so perhaps you should go home. We will call you when we know more."

Anne moved to her husband's side again. She caressed his forehead and kissed his cheek; Anne knew that she might never see him again, so she made a hurried farewell. Michael followed his mother's example and held his father's hand briefly. "I love you Dad! Hang in there!"

Nurses ushered them from the room and they walked slowly down the long corridor. Anne put her arms comfortingly around the shoulders of the two children. "Let's go home!" she said.

"Dewbah! How could this happen? Pintach paced the deck of the Dracnian spacecraft, desperately seeking answers. His face flushed with anger and disappointment. "He was supposed to be this great warrior who could save us from captivity and he couldn't even defend himself from a drunken thief. Our plan is ended."

"That was no thief!" Dewbah insisted in his usual calm manner. His static 'know-it-all' stance was at that moment a cause of irritation to the normally placid Pintach.

"Even a creature of your limited intellect Pintach should surely see that this event on the eve of our departure is too great a coincidence to be haphazard." Dewbah stated.

Pintach and Rhonan listened with renewed interest. "But how? No one knows of this and we are light years from Gragon. This must be merely coincidence."

“The warrior is not that easy to kill, even untrained. No human could have done this. Think Pintach. Who else did you tell of your plan?”

“Only all of Endolith,” said Rhonan with a slight edge of sarcasm in her voice as though she were starting to pick up the line of reasoning.

“If you were so clever as to tell everyone of your plan, then why do you wonder that Korth would try to sabotage it?” reasoned Dewbah. “Surely Korth would have spies within your village that would have returned to him with this news.”

“But all I suggested at the public meeting was that we contact the Dracnians to seek your help in finding a redeemer. I did not even know of the existence of earth,” Pintach added in defence of his actions. This was becoming uncomfortably personal as though to expose his stupidity in this whole idea.

“As you know, it is our life’s purpose to be informed of events everywhere. We already know that Korth sent two of his elite guard to follow you.”

“But how could they?” Rhonan interrupted. “Only I have a signal transmitter to contact you.”

“So does Korth!” Dewbah admitted. “We became aware that one of our resource ships had come into earth’s orbit. Only yesterday we received a distress signal from them. This could only have meant that they were here under duress. We later learnt that three of Korth’s elite guard had hijacked the craft and were forcing the captain of that ship to track us.”

“Then it was a Gragorian warrior who attacked,” reasoned Pintach. “That would explain the sudden and cowardly thrust to the back. Bob could not have even seen them coming, let alone defend himself. We certainly were not on guard for such opposition as this. Where are they now?”

“They have already returned to Gragon. They would have known just where to strike to ensure death, therefore they would be confident enough that their mission is complete,” said Dewbah.

“They may be right!” Pintach sighed. He turned and sat down at the nearest seat. “It would appear my dear,” he admitted to Rhonan, “that our grand venture to secure some hope of freedom for our people has failed. We had best return home.”

Rhonan paced the floor of the craft in obvious agitation. She finally stood at the porthole and stared out at the stars. “You talk as though the warrior was already dead. I cannot give up that easily. There is still hope that he may survive. We must at least wait until we know for certain as to his death or the possibility of his recovery.”

“We must return to our own galaxy. We have ongoing research that must be maintained. I am sorry, but I can delay three more days only, then we must go.” Dewbah’s tone was insistent to the degree that Pintach knew that there was no point pushing him for more time. He had already been more than generous in waiting this long.

“We thank you Dewbah!” he said. “We will know by then if there is any hope.”

Michael sat quietly with his mother in the waiting room of the hospital, contemplating the events of the last few days. It was such a rapid and unusual compilation of information and resulting activity that Michael could not help wondering if it had all been a dream.

Anne shared his thoughts as they waited. The environment they now found themselves in was foreign to them. They had all enjoyed such good health that they had never been to a hospital before. The clinical rattling of passing trolleys along with hospital staff in their crisp sanitised uniforms created an atmosphere of extreme discomfort for Michael. The sights, sounds and smell of this place produced a negative impact whereby he did not respond to it as a place of healing, but rather as a place of pain, suffering and death.

“Anne! Has there been any word?” Rhonan’s comforting voice stirred them from their immediate despair.

Anne and Michael both looked up as Rhonan and Pintach strode into the room. Their concern was obvious and Anne responded to it as she reached out her hand to receive Rhonan’s. Anne had only known this mysterious couple for a few days, yet she felt strangely drawn to them. They sat together, Rhonan clutching Anne’s hand in mutual support.

“We are waiting for Bob to come from the recovery room,” Anne informed them. “The hospital rang us a short while ago and we rushed back down here. He’s going to make it!”

Rhonan gasped in joyful surprise. “Will he fully recover?” she asked.

“I don’t know. We are still waiting for the surgeon to talk to us.”

Pintach stood and began to pace the floor, deep in thought. He opened his mouth to speak but immediately closed it again as a doctor entered the room.

“Mrs Mason?”

Anne nodded. "How is my husband doctor?" she asked anxiously.

"The operation was successful in that your husband will survive. However the puncture unfortunately severed the nerves that affect his left arm and side. We were unable to repair all of the damaged nerves. Only time will tell as to how much movement he will have in his left arm, but there will be a degree of paralysis."

"May we see him doctor?" Anne asked, relieved that her husband was at least still alive.


"He is still a little groggy from the operation, but he has asked to see you. He needs to rest, so please make it a brief meeting this time."

"Yes, of course, thank you." Anne was keen to be by her husband's side to the point of ignoring the concerns of Rhonan and Pintach. "Michael? Are you coming?"

Michael had not said a word up to now and had sat in bewilderment. He was very anxious to see his father, especially now that the fear of losing him had been lifted. He rushed to follow his mother.

Rhonan assessed the situation quickly and placed her hand lightly on her husband's arm in restraint. "We will wait here!" she said.

# 7

entle rays of sunlight filtered through the tall window, adding to the purity of the sanitised room. Bob lay as he had before, motionless, with tubes and wires strapping him to the bed. The persistent beep of the monitor announced life and with it hope.

Anne moved reverently to the side of the bed and lovingly stroked her husband's arm. The gentle movement stirred life into Bob's motionless form. He opened his eyes and managed a feint smile. Tears of relief and joy trickled down Anne's cheeks. She reached up to wipe them away, sniffing impolitely as she did so.

"Welcome back, mighty warrior," she said sarcastically.

"Glad to be here," he replied weakly. "Great warrior I turned out to be. Where's Michael?"

"Here dad!" he said as he moved close to the bed and in view of his father. "You are going to be ok!"

"It looks like I will survive, but I guess it puts an end to our grand adventure. The doctors tell me I won't have full use of my left arm anymore, so I don't think I will be swinging any swords around with any great affect."

"At least we still have you, that is far more important to us." Anne shook his arm firmly as she often did when she wanted to either encourage or affirm a serious point.

"Disappointed son?" Bob asked.

"Are you?" he returned.

"Not really. You know I'm really kind of relieved. I'm getting too old for that kind of adventure. I'm a businessman, not an intergalactic space warrior. I should leave that to the younger ones."

"But you are the last. You are the only one," Michael reminded him, hugely disappointed at his father's change of attitude.

"I'm not so sure about that," answered Bob mysteriously.

"What do you mean?"

"We will talk about that later. I need to rest for a while. Hey! I love you son. You are a very special kid!"



“Thanks Dad. Love you too.”

“Come on!” insisted Anne. Enough of the mushy stuff, let’s go home and let your father rest. We need to have another talk with our visitors.”

“Pintach, are you trying to tell me that this warlord’s minions from another planet came to earth just to murder my husband?” Anne held her fork with its morsel of veal attached, poised in front of her, as the surprise claim of Pintach took precedence over the continuation of her meal.

“That dear lady,” replied Pintach, laying down his implements and wiping his mouth from his last bite of food, “is exactly what I am saying. It was certainly no coincidence that your husband was stabbed from behind on the eve of our departure. This was well executed. Korth has reached across the universe and defended himself by aggression once again. Such is the power of the Nephilim.”

“And unfortunately they have succeeded.” Rhonan added dejectedly. “We will be leaving you tomorrow and returning to our world.”

“Giving up already?” Michael asked, almost in disgust. “My Dad almost lost his life for your scheme and now you simply pack up and go home.”

“Michael!” Anne cautioned, surprised and embarrassed by her son’s sudden statement.

“It’s alright,” Rhonan reassured her, pushing back from the table and picking up her wine glass. “The boy is right. Our request of you has been unfair. We had no right to expect you to risk your life for a world that is not your own. Our cause was a mistake. There is now no hope for us. Your husband’s disability is sufficient to place his life further at risk if this is continued. Korth has succeeded. He can not be defeated except by a Nephilim in his prime.”

“There was a pause in the conversation as everyone considered the consequences.

“Michael would you clear the dishes please, I need to talk with Pintach for a moment.” Anne’s firm request was sufficient for her son to obey. He knew better than to argue with his mother when he heard that tone. He excused himself, gathered the plates politely and disappeared into the kitchen.”

“Why don’t we go into the lounge room?” Anne suggested. “I’ll get the coffee.”

Once they had settled themselves and relaxed with steaming coffee that Anne presented before them on the coffee table, Anne asked the question that had been brewing in her mind all afternoon.

“Something Bob said this afternoon has set me thinking,” she began. “If this purity of the genetic gene from the Nephilim has been passed on through succeeding generations and, as you explained, seems to be only effective in the male line, then would not my son Michael also have the same abilities as Bob and the generations before him?”

Up until this point Pintach and Rhonan had been largely ignoring Michael, acknowledging him only when politeness necessitated it, as the offspring of the one they had come for. Dewbah had not mentioned him, so in turn they had not considered him.

“We do not know,” Pintach advised. “Besides, he is too young to be of service to us.”

“And Bob is too old!” stated Anne. “You anticipated a few years of training for Bob would be needed to develop his gifting before he could be of use to you. Would not four years of training develop the same skills as Bob would have only better? Michael at eighteen would be in his prime.”

“Four years is a long time to wait,” said Pintach.

“We were going to wait two years with his father before he could be of use.” Rhonan reminded him, suddenly becoming re-enthused at the prospect.

“But we could not take him back to Duandor for training. Korth knows our plan. It would be too dangerous,” said Pintach.

“Pintach, you said the other day that there are many other Nephilim descendants upon earth but only one pure line. Would any of those other descendants have the skills sufficient to train Michael?”

“I do not know, but it is an interesting thought. I need to speak with Dewbah in order to get information regarding your questions. We will meet tonight at the hospital to discuss this revised plan further.”



Michael and Anne sat by Bob’s bedside whilst Pintach and Rhonan stood beside them. Bob lay propped up on his bed, still weak and unable to eat, yet decidedly stronger than he had been. It felt good to him to be back in touch with this great venture. Both he and Anne were totally committed to the reality of the need and the part that they could play in attempting to help others, even if they were of a different planet. They were still human after all, and if they could help in any way they were willing to do so.

“Dewbah’s research was incomplete,” Pintach began. “The boy does carry the pure gene of a Nephilim.”

Michael’s eyes opened wide in disbelief. He had not even considered this prior to his conversation with his father earlier in the day. Even then he doubted it could be true. The idea was frightening. Descended from an alien race? He too a mighty warrior? Could this be true?

“Michael,” said his father, reaching out to take his hand. “I know this is unusual to you, as it is to me and I will not let anyone pressure you to do anything you do not wish to do. You know what was asked of me and my willingness to try. Now I am unable. The lot falls to you son. Your mother and I will release you to pursue this path if you desire. If not it is ok. How do you feel about it?”

“You should already know that Dad. It is a surprise, but if it is true then I must do this at all costs. We must do it together!”

“We know our son Pintach,” said Bob, turning proudly to the couple. “Anne and I both were aware that once he knew of his heritage nothing would stop him. It is a calling that he chooses to accept and if you will do all in your power to protect him, then you have your future warrior.”

Rhonan and Pintach smiled at each other in joy, their hope renewed.

“Now, what of his training?” Bob asked.

“Other descendants certainly exist, though most are unaware of their limited abilities. Some however are fully aware of their giftedness if not its origin, and have developed it.”

“The best of these could train and develop the gift within your son. He only needs to develop skills with sword and staff. That is sufficient. These are the weapons of Gragon.”

Michael listened to this conversation in awe. The idea that he could develop skills with any weapon both excited him and yet filled him with fear. He was not confident in himself, yet he had had so many dreams of victorious combat that this new turn of events did not somehow surprise him.

“According to Dewbah’s records, the most competent training school is to be found in a country you call England, by a skilled descendant who has studied many of the arts of warfare, but has focussed on medieval swordsmanship. I can provide you with a name but you will have to make contact via your own resources.”

“Pintach, if Michael were to go to England to train for four years that would delay your plans considerably.” Anne replied.

Rhonan answered, "Our people have been enslaved for hundreds of years, and another four in order to obtain a chance for freedom would be worth waiting for."

"Then what would you do during this time?" Bob enquired, curious as to the immediate future of his visitors.

"I do not know!" Pintach sighed. "I do not think we would be welcome back as governor of my village. I guess we will have to find someone who will accept us."

"Why can't you stay here?" asked Michael innocently. "If I am going to England for a while there will be room at our place."

"Oh, no! Thank you but we..." began Rhonan.

"Why not?" asked Anne, suddenly liking the idea. "I could use some help looking after this guy." She motioned to Bob. "What do you think honey? Can we put up with some aliens living with us for a while?"

"It sounds a great idea!" added Bob enthusiastically.

"Well! It's settled then!" said Anne decidedly. "You will become earthlings for a while!"

Rhonan and Pintach smiled. "Sure! Why not? Thank you!"

"Its all been arranged!" Michael scratched his head uncomfortably, finding it very difficult to explain to Rachael that he was still leaving town, though not to another planet, yet. "Mum tracked down the training school that we were told about. It's in Surrey. I'll be boarding there while I learn. I will be finishing school there as well."

"Four years is a long time Michael," Rachael expressed, no longer trying to hide her feelings. "I will miss you!" Rachael held the young boy's hand.

"Yeah! Me too!" he said, blushing slightly with embarrassment. "I mean, I'll miss you too. But we can write. I'll email you. I will be coming home sometimes for a break. It will go fast."

They paused their conversation and simply sat for a while together, enjoying each other's company.

"Michael?" Rachael finally asked. "Do you really think you have these great abilities they told you about?"

“I don’t know! I guess I’ll soon find out. I have always dreamt that I could fight and Dad’s always been interested in knights and swords and stuff and so have I. Maybe there is something in it. My grandfather was in the army. I don’t know Rachael, but it kind of makes sense to me. If you knew what goes through my mind this may help to explain it. All I know is that I have to find out. I could not live without knowing.”

“Well, whether it is true or not, you will always be my hero!”

Michael chuckled to himself.

Rachael cringed. “I can’t believe I said that. How corny can you get?”

“I don’t know. I kind of liked it.”

Rachael shoved Michael away playfully as they laughed together.

If Rachael doesn’t hurry she will miss the arrival.” Anne paced back and forth in the airport lounge. The massive international terminal was crowded with people, all waiting anxiously for travellers to rejoin them. None appeared as anxious as did Anne. She had only seen her son on three occasions over the last four years. Twice when he had returned home for the Christmas holidays and one four-week tour she had taken with Bob and Rachael as they joined him in England to explore the country together. It was eleven months since they had last met and even then there was no noticeable change in Michael apart from the fact that he was now a man and spoke with a slight British accent.

Anne had been expecting to see some sort of abnormal behaviour or freakish appearance. However her son had not lost his stunning good looks nor his quiet, polite manner. Each of these qualities had indeed been enhanced. To her relief he had not become a psychopathic killing machine. He was a refined, well spoken, intelligent eighteen year old with smooth tanned skin and long blonde hair. At their last meeting she could not help noticing how well his body was developing. He looked fit and muscular. Anne could not escape the pride that she felt in her son.

The rattle of the board, announcing the arrival of yet another flight caused Anne to re-read the order of flight arrivals for about the tenth time.

“Relax honey! There is still plenty of time. Come and sit down and wait.” Bob sat patiently in the lounge area, his crippled left arm hanging loosely by his side. He had recovered well with the exception of his arm in which he had very little strength.

Pintach and Rhonan stood arm in arm at the glass panoramic windows staring out at the chaotic movement of the planes on the tarmac. They too were anxious. They had waited a long time for this moment. For them the four years had gone slowly. Rhonan had been able to earn a living selling and teaching crafts, whilst Pintach had found employment in Bob’s company. It had been difficult for them in a foreign world, yet they had adapted well, enjoying the life of peace. For themselves they could easily stay on earth, yet their conscience would not let them forget the plight of their people. For the most part they did not now wish to return, but to return they must. The nature of their quest, although having waned somewhat, had never left them.

“Flight QF1 from London has now landed!” The announcement over the speakers prompted immediate action from the greeting party.

“That’s it!” yelled Anne with excitement. “Pintach! Rhonan! He’s here! We need to move down to the gate. Where is that girl?”

“Come on then,” Bob responded, ushering his excited wife through the crowds as Pintach and Rhonan joined them.”

“Anne!” came the call from somewhere within the crowd. Anne turned to see Rachael pushing her way toward them.

“Sorry I am late. The traffic was a nightmare. Looks like I just made it. Anne, you know Drew don’t you?”

Drew was now a tall, thin bespectacled boy with a noticeable problem with acne. He was not overly glamorous to look at, but he was polite and he had retained his sense of humour and lightheartedness. Drew was the type of boy who was a loyal companion and just fun to be with. He had been a friend of Michael and Rachael for many years.

“Yes! Of course! I’ve known Drew for a long time. Hello Drew!” Anne added cordially before turning quickly back to the matter at hand. “Come on Rachael, he will be through the gates any time now. Bob and the others are already there.”

“I should think we would have loads of time if his plane has only just landed,” said Drew. “It takes hours to get through customs sometimes.”

Anne ignored him and hurried on to a suitable vantage point in the crowd next to Bob, Pintach and Rhonan. There was an atmosphere of high expectancy and excitement in the crowd as hundreds of people kept a vigilant watch on the doors that led from the customs bay. All eagerly awaiting the moment to release their greeting and to embrace and welcome the one they waited for. Occasionally the door opened and the people pressed forward, hoping to be rewarded by the object of their affection, only to settle down again as staff members, hostesses and stewards strolled casually through with trolleys loaded with luggage, ignoring the welcoming committee, chatting playfully with each other.

Rachael and Drew sat behind the crowd, patiently waiting. “Want a Coke?” asked Drew calmly. “This could take a while.”

“Yeah! I suppose. But I don’t want to miss him.”

“He’ll be ages. Trust me. Look, you stay here and I’ll go and buy us a drink. Save me a seat.”

Drew rushed off through the crowd to find the shops. Rachael watched and waited. Over all these years she had waited for Michael so she was well used to this, though even in his absence, they had somehow drawn closer. Through their consistent correspondence, they had shared everything with each other. This communication had forged a relationship that they would probably never have had if they had been together. They felt they knew each other intimately now and for the first time they were willing to call it love.

Rachael had developed into a voluptuous and beautiful girl, strong willed and confident. Her natural beauty had drawn the attention of many would be suitors, but although being flattered, she had no interests in anyone apart from her blonde warrior. He had captivated her heart to the point that she would sacrifice anything to be with him. The list of private emails confirmed to Rachael that he felt the same way about her. At last the day had come when they could finally embrace, accepting and affirming their love and perhaps, even kiss. Though this level of intimacy may have to be reserved for a more appropriate and private meet.

“Here!” Drew gave a sly “I told you so” expression as he handed Rachael a bottle of Coke.

“Thanks” she said appreciatively. “They sure take their time in customs. No one is through yet.”

The attitude of the waiting crowd was growing restless with impatience as people grew tired of standing, but not game to leave their posts for fear of missing their friends. Suddenly a scream of delight rang out as a name was called and a joyous reunion ensued. The crowd instantly became alert,

straining to identify the arrivals as they slowly filed through the gate, pushing luggage-laden trolleys before them. Most looked weary and unsuitably overdressed for the warm summer day that it was in Sydney compared to the cold London winter they had only hours before left behind.

One by one they came through the exit gate and found their waiting friends. The waiting crowd began to grow smaller and smaller, until only Pintach, Rhonan, Bob, Anne, Rachael and Drew remained, pressed against the restraining rail, worried and disappointed.

“He couldn’t have been on that plane. Are you sure you got the flight time right?” Anne asked of Bob.

“Yes of course! He must have somehow missed the flight.”

“Can we check with someone to see if he was on the flight?”

“Good idea! Lets go to the desk.”

The welcoming party turned to leave at the precise moment that the doors reopened and Michael walked through. He was an impressive sight in his long black trench coat, blue jeans and black boots. His long blonde hair half covered his face as he pushed a trolley with various shaped boxes and suitcases loaded onto it. As soon as he caught site of his family and friends he stopped, flicked the hair from his face and grinned broadly.

For a number of minutes there were hugs and kisses all around as the welcome they had long waited to share was finally given an opportunity to be realised.

Anne held her son at arm’s length and looked him over. “You have grown, and certainly filled out; they must have fed you well.”

“Too well at times. It’s great to be home. Sorry I kept you waiting but these customs officials are very strict when it comes to bringing weapons into the country. It took forever to convince them that it was a collector’s artefact and not a terrorist weapon. Finally managed to convince them though; less untidy than slaughtering them all.”

“Yeah right!” said Drew playfully. “As if! Did you bring me a gift?”

“Did you bring me one?” Michael asked in return, slapping his friend on the back. “Man you haven’t changed.”

“Come on you lot. We can talk later.” Anne hurried them along. “Michael must be tired and we have a long drive ahead of us tomorrow. Let’s go back to the motel and I will fix us some coffee.”



“Sounds good! Lets go!” Michael followed his group of welcomers towards the car park. Pintach pushed the luggage trolley whilst Michael walked behind, his arm around Rachael.

“So tell me! Is it true what Pintach told us? Do you have extraordinary skills?” Bob asked the question he had waited four years to have answered. Finally now he would have the truth. They sat comfortably in the lounge of the motel suite, sipping their coffee slowly so as to make it last. Everyone had wanted to ask this question and they were relieved that someone finally had.

Michael pushed his hair from his face and sat back. “Do I look like a warrior?” he asked, teasing them as he hesitated answering directly.

“I think you do!” answered Rachael, blushing slightly.

“Was your training successful?” asked Pintach impatiently. “Do you have the qualities of the Nephilim?”

Michael looked up and stared directly into his eyes. “Yes!” he responded simply.

“How do you know?” everyone asked at once, suddenly excited.

“I can’t explain it apart from the explanation Pintach has given,” said Michael, returning his now empty cup to the table. “It just came naturally to me. I was taught various moves and skills and as soon as I was given instruction I was able to do them. With further practice I became proficient and finally much more accomplished than my trainer. They were amazed and a little jealous I think. They even asked me to stay on as a teacher.”

“On my last day, at graduation, I was presented with a sword for being the most exceptional student to ever pass through the school. I will have to show it to you. The finest sword craftsman on earth made it. It is strong, perfectly balanced, light and razor sharp. It has a hardened edge so that it will not blunt or chip. It is an awesome weapon.”

“Man I have to see this,” commented Drew excitedly. “Can I try it?”

“Sure Drew, it’s on the bed in the other room. Go and have a look, but be careful, it’s very sharp.”

“Do you feel up to the task ahead of you Michael?” Rhonan asked, keen now to continue the job for which she had come here four years prior.

“Ready and keen. I mean, what is the point of all that training if I can never use it. I am ready to put it to the test.”

“Good!” Pintach stated firmly. He like Rhonan, now that the training was complete and they had finally secured the hope they had come for, was now eager to return and set his people free. “I will signal the Dracnian ship. We should be able to leave within three weeks.”

“Excuse me for being ignorant here,” interrupted Drew, returning from the bedroom after a satisfying study of Michael’s new sword. “But why is it that we can’t all go in with guns and explosives. A few basic earth weapons and we would take the bad guy out from a distance. Why this sword thing? A bit primitive isn’t it? I mean, even I could get rid of him for you with a rifle and a good sight.”

“We did consider that Drew,” answered Bob, trying not to sound too abrupt. “But as Pintach explained to us, the Dracnians would never consider transporting us if we were to introduce destructive weapons into another culture. They are pretty big on not interfering with a planet’s natural evolution. They are only doing this one because of a previous mistake of theirs. Swords they know, guns they wouldn’t want.”

“Fair enough! Just thought I would ask. You’re on your for this one Michael my man. I can shoot, but I would not like to get too close with just a big knife. I think I will leave that one to the real heroes.”

## 8

“You guys ready yet? It will be over before we get there!” Drew yelled through the open door of Bob and Anne’s house. The sound of teacups clicking together and cutlery rattling indicated readiness was a state not yet achieved.

“Coming!” Michael yelled, striding out into the entranceway, picnic baskets in one hand, and jacket in the other. “I’ll go with you to pick up Rachael. Dad will bring the others and meet us there. Do you know where to go?”

“All organised. I’ve studied the map. It’s not that far. This is the first medieval fair I have ever been to. I hope there are some fair damsels who need rescuing.

“It should be interesting to say the least. Rachael knows the organiser and has lined up a little surprise for us.”

“What kind of surprise?” Drew asked as they walked down to his car together and loaded the basket into the back.

“I have no idea. She wouldn’t tell me, but knowing Rachael it won’t be boring.”

The two cars arrived almost simultaneously at the country property and after paying their entry fee, drove down the meandering tree lined track to the newly mown paddock set aside for parking. There were less people at the fair than expected, although British medieval pageantry and history was not a hugely popular pastime in a country town in Eastern Australia.

The setting and the climate were idyllic for such a pageant as the cooling breeze gently wafted over the clear blue waters of the small lake. The reeds and water lilies set an endearing stage for the assortment of ducks and swans that had made their home here. A white gazebo stood at the edge of the lake, adding a touch of class and romance to the small timber boat ramp and pontoon, to which was secured a small but solid row boat.

A long stone building stood castle-like at the top of a slight incline, hedged in by lines of trees and shrubs giving both shade and a mystical forest atmosphere to the scene.

A large number of striped canvas pavilions encircled the flat-grassed area in front of the building from which suitably attired hawkers promoted a variety of crafts and wares that one would have expected to be available during the period of history that they were attempting to duplicate. The crowd wandering through the fair were all dressed in period costume and entertained by the occasional minstrel, folk singing trio and court jesters. Celtic music issued from ancient instruments, lulling the guests deeper into the fantasy.

Michael and Rachael stood hand in hand, breathing in the atmosphere, deeply affected by the romance of the setting. Drew continued to labour and mutter beside them as he struggled with the basket and fold-up chairs. Bob and Anne, though intrigued by the display, were more curious about the reaction of Pintach and Rhonan.

Rhonan stood motionless beside her husband, her mouth agape, tears trickling down her cheeks. Pintach's face was stern as he stared into the scene.

"You ok?" Anne enquired of Rhonan, genuinely concerned for her friend.

"This is so much like our home village," she replied, wiping the tears from her face. "I had almost forgotten how much I miss the simplicity of the life there compared to your world."

"This is how our world used to be," Bob advised, "before technology sped things up. If your world is like this then no wonder you have to travel the universe in an attempt to restore it."

"Come on, let's go look at the crafts," said Anne, taking Rhonan's arm and leading her off to the pavilions.

"Does this place come with an ale house?" Pintach asked of Bob, winking playfully. When Bob did not respond he rephrased his question. "A pub?"

"Oh! I don't know. Let's go find out shall we?"

"It's almost time for the battle re-enactments. Shall we go and watch?" Rachael suggested to Michael.

"Sounds good! Coming Drew? Hey, do you need a hand with all that gear? Rachael will help you!" Following the strangest expression from Rachael he quickly added, "just kidding! Here! Let me carry the car keys."

"Thanks a lot!" said Drew sarcastically, handing him the picnic basket.

The three friends strolled casually toward the area of lawn clearly marked out with ropes and bunting as the re-enactment area. Bales of hay lined the outer circle as seating for spectators. Three

throne-like high backed chairs stood at the top of the arena, reserved for the appointed royalty for the day. Three large red tents at the side housed the day's combatants. Three separate re-enactment societies had gathered for the day, all of whom were totally committed to the performance and lived this day lost in their dreams. For them, today was real, as though they had been transported back in time to medieval England.

All were adorned in homemade armour as they bustled around in last minute preparations for their mock battle, polishing swords and shields, yelling instructions in a style of language presumed to have been used by their heroes.

Michael, Rachael and Drew settled on a bale of hay as the trumpet blast effectively announced the commencement of the day's proceedings. The herald, clutching his long trumpet, loudly announced the entry of their royal majesties. Two poorly attired and very unconvincing portrayers of royalty offered flamboyant waves and took their places on the thrones provided.

"Let the tournament begin!" announced the trumpeter, which was the signal for these knights, very oddly attired in their own individual versions of period costume, to take their positions in the arena.

The mock battle slowly commenced with the customary yells and threats designed to unnerve the opponent and add spectacle to the performance. For fifteen minutes the crowd was kept entertained by the crashing of metal swords and the well placed hammering upon shields. The odd fortunate body blow was met with an appropriate groan and a very theatrical death scene, much to the amusement of the crowd.

Michael, Rachael and Drew joined in with the audience in their enthusiastic applause and laughter. This would have been a great comedy if it were not for the fact that the re-enactment group took it so seriously. In their own minds they were knights and despite the padding, chain mail and blunted swords, they were in it to win in battle and to become the valiant knight of the day.

Once again the trumpet sounded and the herald announced a new challenge. The champion of four tournaments, as yet undefeated, would take on any challengers. At that call a few brave and confident soldiers from the re-enactment group stepped forward for their chance to dethrone the champion and usurp his position.

The champion was a tall and heavily built man who probably succeeded due to the strength he could put behind his blows rather than his sword skills. "Who first?" he challenged boldly. "Come on

you dogs, only three of you? You mock me surely. Come sir knights. Is there not a worthy opponent amongst you? I will then take on all three at one time.”

A murmur of approval arose from the audience along with an appreciative laughter.

The champion took a ready stance, raising his shield, legs apart and sword balanced. The three opponents stood in an arc in front of him, firming their grips on sword and shield. Suddenly one young knight raised his sword above his head to reign down a blow upon the champion. The big man was ready for him and lunged forward with surprising speed. His shield came up to deflect the falling blade of his opponent whilst his sword cut into the unprotected padded side of the challenger. Dutifully the young knight fell to the ground according to the rules of play.

The remaining two contenders pushed forward hoping for an advantage, but the bulky knight simply raised his shield in front of him and charged, pushing the two men off balance and away from him. He then swung his sword from side to side in a huge arc, effectively keeping his foes at a distance. As one stepped forward to meet the attack by warding off the arcing sword swipe with his shield, he, like his predecessor, raised his sword to get weight behind the blow. The champion knight saw the move and reacted to take advantage of this common mistake. The sword thrust to the belly would have killed any real opponent. It was fortunate that this was a mock battle and a blunted sword met with padding rather than flesh.

Now there was only one to deal with and the applause from the onlookers spurred him on to finish the event. The third man was now more cautious and managed to exchange a series of blows as their swords sent out a rhythmic clanging as they clashed. Once again it was the sheer bulk of the man that won him the tournament. Growing weary from swinging their heavy swords, the champion suddenly lunged forward with his shield in front of him, falling on his opponent and knocking him to the ground. He laid his sword across the fallen man’s protected throat and growled menacingly.

“I yield!” came the despondent cry of defeat. As the champion took his bow and praise from an appreciative audience, the herald moved in to join him. “For the prize of a fine roast dinner for two, we challenge any spectator to come against our champion for a period of two minutes. If after this short time you are still armed and standing and you still have your head, then the prize is yours. Do we have any takers? You sir! And you!” He quickly moved through the crowd coaxing two timid contestants to the arena. As he moved towards them, still yelling encouragement, he quickly grabbed Drew’s hand and hoisted him up. “You too sir, you look fit enough. Come and do battle!”

Rachael and Michael laughed and urged Drew on with appropriate taunts. Once in the arena the contestants were quickly padded up with thick padded coats, donned with a metal helmet and fitted out with a heavy shield and blunted sword.

The first novice contestant moved in to position and raised his sword as he had seen others do. Suddenly the big knight burst into action with a flurry of sword and shield blows. The timid opponent, being caught off guard was simply knocked off balance and fell to the ground.

A sympathetic “Ohh!” issued from the crowd as the embarrassed but unharmed contestant returned to his seat.

The second man faced an identical fate, with his opportunity lasting only seconds.

It was now Drew’s turn. “Come on Drew!” Rachael yelled in encouragement, enjoying the spectacle. Drew concentrated hard and stood his ground. The knight charged quickly at him as he had done to the others, but Drew took advantage of being last to learn from the move and quickly stepped aside as the knight lunged past him. An agile move, but being now encumbered by the weight of his equipment, Drew did not turn quickly enough and the surprised knight, recovering from his mistake, began to rain blows down on Drew’s shoulder and back. He had not expected to be embarrassed by an audience member and was humiliated with having missed Drew on his first attack. He now took vengeance upon the hapless Drew. Drew fell to the ground under the blows. His padded coat offering protection from permanent injury, but against this ferocious attack he could not stand.

The herald rushed forward to stop the attack and managed to persuade the knight to cease. Finally he stood back panting, towering over the fallen Drew.

Drew lay on the ground, motionless. The crowd grew silent. This was unexpected. Michael and Rachael stood up, suddenly concerned. They rushed forward to Drew’s side, as did other officials, and helped remove the padded coat. After removing his helmet, finally Drew moved a little, let out a groan and raised his hand to rub his aching head.

“He’s ok ladies and gentlemen. A brave attempt against our champion,” cried out the herald as they helped Drew to his feet and back to his seat. Michael remained standing, angered by the unnecessary attack on his friend. This was meant to be fun, but this knight was taking things a bit too seriously.

“Any final challengers before we end this bout?” the herald asked.

Rachael looked up at Michael and saw the seriousness of his expression. She put her hand on his arm. Without commenting Michael stepped forward into the arena.

“Here’s a fine looking contestant ready to try his skill against our champion!” shouted the herald, sizing Michael up and deciding he would make a suitable spectacle for pleasing the crowd. The more athletic and capable the contestant appeared, the better skilled it made his champion appear.

“Better suit up first boy, they’re the rules; we don’t want you getting hurt now.”

Michael’s eyes did not turn for an instant from the big man before him. The would-be knight stared back, grinning in anticipation of another easy victory that would further boost his ego. Two attendants assisted Michael into the bulky padding and home-made helmet. The armour was heavy and uncomfortable, severely restricting his movements, a clear intentional disadvantage against his lightly suited opponent. Michael grasped the blunted sword they handed him in his two hands, refusing the shield they offered.

“He’s a keen one this one, and confident. Let’s see how long he can last against our supreme champion. Good luck son! Keep your eye on him, you might learn something.”

The knight laughed and grunted out his usual challenge. Michael was not impressed with his assault on Drew and the attitude of the man annoyed him. He lifted his sword into position in front of him and stood waiting and watching.

At the back of the crowd Pintach’s attention was drawn to the excited commotion of the crowd watching the tournament. He looked toward the arena more out of curiosity than genuine interest, until he noticed Michael standing with sword in hand facing a much larger man. Now Pintach was more than just interested. He grabbed Bob’s arm excitedly, pointing to the scene in front of them.

“Look!” He gasped.

As soon as Bob saw what Pintach was referring to he knew immediately the implications. He would not miss this for anything. “Where are the ladies?” He asked, looking around.

“Here!” said Pintach, already starting to move forward. “They are coming now!”



Both men ran to meet their wives who were strolling contentedly toward them, arms laden with newly purchased crafts. They were surprised to see the two men running frantically, calling their names and motioning them to hurry. They hastened across the short distance and met their panting husbands.

“Michael’s about to fight,” gasped Pintach excitedly, pointing towards the arena.

The two women looked up to the arena anxiously, before all four hurried over to watch. Finding a gap in the crowd, they pushed forward and seated themselves on a hay bale, their hearts pounding from both exertion and expectation. This was it! Now they would know!

The knight was not about to be humiliated in front of the crowd again. He would end this challenge quickly to restore his injured pride. He would hammer this opponent into the ground with one quick onslaught. He raised his shield before him and began swinging his huge broadsword in a long reaching arc in front of him, lunging forward to devastate his opponent.

As soon as the wildly swing pendulum of the knight’s sword came within reach, Michael moved with blinding speed. He lifted his sword to intercept the other blade, then twisted and flicked suddenly downward. The knight’s sword flew from his grasp and embedded point first into the ground at Michael’s feet. Following through in a continuous fluid motion, Michael spun around, dropped to one knee and with the flat of his blade, lifted the legs of the man from under him, sending the startled knight sprawling face first into the dirt of the arena. Michael picked up the sword in his left hand, placed his foot on the back of the winded knight and his own sword, blunted point first, at the back of the man’s neck.

The fight was over in less than five seconds, so quickly did Michael move. The crowd of onlookers as well as the rest of the re-enactment group were awed into silence for a moment, not believing what they had just seen. Then slowly they began to applaud.

Michael withdrew both his sword and his foot, embedded both swords into the ground and stripped off the heavy padding.

Slightly bewildered and not knowing how he should respond, the herald finally stepped forward. “Give the young man another round of applause ladies and gentlemen, it’s his lucky day. When your opponent slips, take advantage of it, that’s what I always say. This lucky boy gets the prize. A free dinner for two at our medieval banquet, and to present it to him... our fair princess.”

To present the prize, a lovely, well-endowed young lady stepped forward from beside the dais. She was suitably attired in period costume such as she imagined a princess would wear, designed of course with plunging neckline so as to display her assets admirably. She handed Michael the dinner pass, kissed him dutifully on the cheek and returned to her seat amidst polite applause.

The crowd began to disperse as Michael walked back to where his friends and family eagerly awaited him.

“Man that was awesome. That guy really deserved it. Thanks man!” Drew responded, having recovered physically if not emotionally.

Rachael proudly slipped her arm into Michael’s.

“I guess you really did learn something!” Bob added.

“You are ready!” determined an overanxious Pintach. “We will leave very soon!”

Michael, a little overwhelmed and slightly embarrassed by all the attention, said nothing. Anne, watching him closely and knowing his moods well, acted quickly to take the pressure of expectation off her son.

“Well Rhonan, shall we continue our tour? Perhaps our husbands may like to join us before we have lunch?”

As they walked away, Michael finally settled. “What was this great surprise you had planned?” he asked Rachael.

“It seems we won’t need it now. The tickets for the banquet tonight were all sold, but since I knew the owners of the property, they promised to find some places for us. But now that you have won two seats we won’t have to bother them.”

“Except for Drew. I only won two seats. Perhaps your friend could find one extra place.”

Drew opened his mouth to speak in support of Michael’s suggestion, but swallowed his words when he saw the expression on Rachael’s face. He recognised the look immediately and took the hint.

“Yeah, thanks, but I really need to get home. I have some stuff to do tonight. Why don’t you guys stay on? I’ll catch a lift with your dad and you can use my car.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind if you stay.” Michael added, not noticing Rachael’s frustrated frown.

“No! It’s ok. You guys enjoy yourselves.”

As they walked on Rachael placed her hand on Drew's back and whispered to him. "Thanks Drew."

Drew winked back. "Hey, what are friends for?"

## 9

Mystical shadows formed a dark canopy over the long stone banquet hall as fingers of light from the smoking torches tried vainly to expose the darkened timber ceiling.

The slate floor echoed ideally the scraping of boots and timber benches to add to the atmosphere of the medieval banquet that was well in progress.

Michael and Rachael sat suitably attired in borrowed costumes, enjoying the lavish feast of roasted meats and steaming vegetables. Wine was served in pewter goblets and shanks of meat were clutched with now greasy hands and devoured ravenously. The diners were continuously entertained with speeches and stories, minstrels and jesters, magicians and acrobats. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to make this as authentic as possible.

Michael was delighted with this environment. This was an era that he had often dreamt of living in. To now re-enact it was for him a wish come true. Although the hall contained many splendid young ladies, none were so fine in his eyes as his Rachael. She was beautiful yet humble. Fun, yet mature. Rachael was becoming increasingly precious to him.

Rachael rarely took her eyes off her knight. A frame of long blonde hair that fell like a shawl over the chain maille shirt and surcoate he now wore highlighting his handsome ruddy face. The light from the torches accentuated his muscular frame as he sat breathing in the atmosphere surrounding him. His posture and demeanour, as always, was regal and strong. He alone amongst the costumed guests had the appearance of a truly noble and gallant knight, a Galahad, reflecting purity and strength.

Rachael knew now that in Michael this was not in appearance only. He was possibly the greatest warrior in the entire universe, a title almost beyond comprehension, and yet this gentle, unpretentious young man showed no sign of flaunting or using his power for any reason other than to protect the interests of others. This knight was hers and she loved him dearly.

As the young couple revelled in the atmosphere and festivities, a dim brooding figure stared across the darkened room, his narrowing eyes fixed upon Michael. Demon inspired thoughts swirling through his wine besotted mind. The tournament champion had not forgotten the humiliation of defeat and the need to vindicate his pride, as all around him laughed and participated in the merriment of the occasion, the big man simply sat, slouched over his wine goblet, staring fixedly.

As the meal was completed and the entertainment continued into the night, Michael turned to Rachael. “We had best be going. I think most of this lot are staying the night. You ready?”

“Yes I think so. I could do with some fresh air anyway.”

They manoeuvred their way out of the wooden bench, relieved to be free from the hard seats and strolled hand in hand into the moonlit night. As they walked toward the lake and the pavilion, beside which Drew’s car was parked, their arms slipped around each other’s waist.

“Shouldn’t we get changed first? They will want their costumes back.” Michael suggested.

“It’s ok! I said I would send them back during the week. Michael, are you really going back with Pintach and Rhonan tomorrow?”

By now they had come to the gazebo by the side of the lake. The nearly full moon reflected an image of itself in the centre of the water with long streaks of light reaching out towards them across the water like spotlights on a stage. A gentle whispering breeze refreshed the couple as Michael stopped, turned toward his friend and took her into his arms.

“Rachael this is something I must do. It is what I was trained for. It is an adventure that I have dreamt of, and yet I do not want to leave you. I love you Rachael!”

Tears formed in her eyes as she melted into his arms. Her face lifted to his as she closed her eyes. Michael leant forward and the couple embraced and kissed passionately.

“I do not expect to be gone long. A few weeks perhaps, then I will come back to you.”

Rachael knew that he must go. “I will be waiting!” She replied. They continued to embrace but were interrupted by a deep gruff voice, slurred slightly by too much wine.

“Now it’s your turn to be humiliated, your turn to fall in the dirt. I am the champion here, not some rank amateur visitor.”

Rachael jumped back in alarm at the sudden intrusion. Michael simply looked up, instantly alert. A dark form stood at the entrance to the gazebo, one hand leaning on the upright pole at the entrance for support. It was the re-enactment team champion whom Michael had bested earlier in the day. Still dressed in padded armour but now minus his shield, he held a long bladed sword in his right hand, trailing its point in the dirt.

“I don’t like to be beaten by amateurs. I need to teach you a lesson so you won’t think your lucky moves were the result of any skill. If I hadn’t tripped over today you would be still lying in the dirt even now from my blows.”

“I am sure you are right. How could I ever hope to beat such a champion?” Michael said sarcastically. “If you want to be champion you may need to learn a bit of chivalry, and it might help if you knew how to use your sword. You may do better with a club.”

“What would you know about fighting? I think I need to give you a lesson now, one you will never forget.” The man stepped into the gazebo and lifted his sword.

“I don’t want to fight you. If you want to be champion, I don’t care. You are drunk! Just go and sleep it off.”

“I knew it!” stammered the man, “I knew it all along. You’re a coward. Without a crowd you are too gutless to face me! I’m too good for you and you’re scared of me!”

Rachael stepped cautiously out of the gazebo on the other side, away from the man, giving Michael room to move. He still had a sword strapped to his side as part of the costume he wore.

“You got it man! I’m trembling with fear! Are you happy now? Can you please go away and leave us in peace?”

“Why you snivelling little coward. I’ll leave you in pieces all right.” The drunken man lunged forward in an attempt to swipe at Michael with his blunted sword. Michael stepped deftly aside.

The drunkard staggered slowly around, almost falling as he did so, ready for another lunge at Michael.

“I think that I have had enough of this! I chose to spend this time with my friend not with you! Now go away!” With that Michael drew his sword from his belt. It was a poorly made replica, useful only for decoration and of little value as a weapon, but it was effective enough in this situation. Michael raised it and playfully exchanged parries with his attacker. After sufficient exercise, he twisted his sword around his opponent’s and jerked it from his grasp. The sword flew into the air and plummeted into the lake.

“Now unless you want to follow it, back off!”

The surprised assailant drew breath, undecided how to respond. Finally he flopped to his knees in surrender, still playing the part. “I yield!” he said.

“I accept! Now why don’t you go and sleep it off?”

“I bow to a true champion.”

“Yeah! Sure! Whatever!” said Michael, helping the man to his feet. “A word of advice, this re-enactment thing is a lot of fun. Don’t spoil it by taking it too seriously.”

“I’m sorry!” replied the drunk, pawing at Michael and trying to hold on to him.

“Just go! It’s ok! Just go!” he urged the reluctant would be champion as he finally staggered back toward the hall.

“Well done!” reassured Rachael, grinning in amusement.

“Sorry about that. Where were we before such a rude interruption?”

“I have signalled the Dracnian ship, therefore we must now be ready to depart as soon as they arrive.” Pintach was excited now, anxious to return home, as was Rhonan. They had made their farewells and thank you speeches to their hosts for the past four years. For all of them the relationship had developed into more than companionship, they had become family. To say goodbye was now distressing to all.

“I have given your father the signal unit in case he should ever need it.” Rhonan advised Michael as they walked together late that afternoon toward the long beach that would be their rendezvous point with the spacecraft.

Michael felt prepared and anxious to go and to get this task over with. He had no comprehension of what lay before him yet he was feeling confident. He expected to fly into another world, quickly defeat the despot and return home a hero. To him it was simple and exciting. What other human in history had had this opportunity? Who else knew that this was even possible let alone a growing reality?

He too had said his farewells to his family as well as to Rachael. It had been difficult but the excitement of this adventure consumed his energy and emotions. He was focussed and ready as he placed himself entirely in the hands of Pintach and Rhonan. He was now their servant.

They sat together on the headland overlooking the beach. The setting sun cast a golden shadow over the sand as the incessant waves washed the shore, generating a sense of peace and rest. The cool evening breeze caused them to pull their jackets closely around them as they waited impatiently for their transport to arrive.

“I presume you have some sort of a plan of action for us?” Michael enquired belatedly, pulling a packet of mints from his pocket and offering them around.

“We have had four years to think of a strategy,” said Pintach, holding up his hand to decline the offer of mints.

“Our plan is to get you in to Endolith secretly. The warlord knew of our plans and believes he has thwarted them by killing your father. As far as we know he has no knowledge of you. That will work to our advantage. Rhonan and I will return to our village and from there, attempt to gain support for an insurrection against the warlord’s army.”

“You will need to be captured and taken as a trainee into Endolith. From there you will need to find a way to reach the warlord and defeat him. Once he is out of the way, the people will no longer be afraid. They will turn against the elite guard and fight for freedom. We will make sure there are leaders ready to lead that rebellion. The guard will be confused and demoralised once Korth is destroyed.”

“That’s it? That is your four years in the making plan? It doesn’t sound all that simple to me. I am glad you are confident of success. It is the people’s reaction that I worry about. I cannot fight a whole army on my own. Can you do this? Can you lead a rebellion?”

“I do not know!” Rhonan answered. “We have been away for some time. We have many contacts though and I am confident that when they find out that we were successful in finding and bringing you back to assist us, they will gain boldness.”

“I hope so!”

The moon had now risen above the horizon and the first faint stars began to appear in the darkening sky. Michael remained contemplative as he waited quietly with Rhonan and Pintach. All three searched the sky for signs of movement. He was getting hungry and began to wonder just how long they would have to wait in the cold. He was about to suggest that one of them might return to the shopping village for some food, when Rhonan grabbed their attention.

“There!” she cried, standing up quickly and pointing toward the horizon. “They are coming!”

The two men looked to where she had pointed and as their eyes slowly adjusted they could make out a small speck of light like a tiny star moving rapidly across the sky. Within moments it had grown larger and closer until a large disk shaped craft hovered over the deserted beach only a kilometre away.

Michael was in awe of his first encounter. His heart began to pound with excitement mixed with apprehension. It reminded him of his first flight to London and the initial emotion felt when he first boarded the plane. This feeling was similar but more extreme. That time he knew his destination. He



had seen photographs and he knew that his family could be contacted immediately if he needed them. This time he had no concept of his destination and he knew that he could contact no one.

A blinding beam of blue light shot out from the hull of the craft directly onto the trio. Michael felt nothing except a blur within his mind and the feeling of being blinded by a mist for a few seconds. As his sight returned he was no longer standing in the cold on a coastal hillside. Now he was bathed in warm soft light in the interior of a foreign craft.

His first reaction in seeing his new hosts was one of mild shock, despite having been given a detailed description of the Dracnians. The strange white creatures stood quietly surveying them. They appeared gentle and harmless, yet their superior technology concerned Michael. They were everything he had imagined aliens to look like; in fact they were exactly the form as depicted in many movies and drawings that had recently appeared. Come to think of it he had seen some early rock paintings that bore a strange resemblance to these creatures.

“Welcome Pintach and Rhonan of Gragon. It is good to see you again my friends.”

“Likewise Dewbah. We thank you for responding to our call.”

“It is my pleasure. I have been watching the reports on your activities sent by scout ships in this vicinity. When the request was relayed from your transmitter I decided to respond myself. I am anxious to hear first hand of your progress. This is the boy?” Dewbah raised a long bony finger toward Michael.

“He is the one! The descendant of the Nephilim.” Pintach proudly introduced Michael who bowed slightly, uncertain of the appropriate greeting.

“I will set our course immediately for Endolith. We should arrive in forty-nine hours. Please make yourselves comfortable. When you have rested we will talk. I believe you know the way to the guest quarters. All is in readiness.”

“Thank you noble Dewbah! I look forward to dialoguing with you.”

Pintach and Rhonan both bowed to their hosts with Michael quickly following their lead as he bowed politely again.

“Come Michael I will show you to your room!” Rhonan motioned Michael to follow her and escorted him to a large comfortable room containing a bed and a table laden with a variety of food and drink.

“There should be some Gragorian clothing here for you as well,” said Rhonan. “The Dracnians think of everything. It is something that they pride themselves in. They are excellent hosts. Eat well and sleep. You will need your strength. We will talk later. Oh, and Michael, I have not taken the time to say this as yet, but, thank you. I know the sacrifices you are making simply on the trust in our words. Your coming to our people means more than you can know. We ask only that you try. If the situation gets beyond what you feel you can attempt, then do not risk your life. I promised your mother you would return in one piece. Only do what you can. The fact that you came at all is more than I could have previously wished for. Do not tell Pintach that I have said this. He is more expectant than perhaps is fair.”

“Thanks Rhonan. I feel a little afraid and overawed by this adventure. That I am actually at this moment travelling through space in a flying saucer bound for some foreign planet is overwhelming for me. At times I wonder if this is all a dream. I am still not sure. Despite my misgivings I am confident in my mission. I do not fear any opponent. You can be assured Rhonan that I will do all that I can to help you.”

“I know you will! Just...” Rhonan paused as though reconsidering her words. “Just be careful that’s all. Sleep well Michael.”



Michael woke to a low droning hum. At first he could not make out where he was, his surroundings were so unfamiliar. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee brought a sense of familiarity and comfort. He sat up and looked around. The room was dimly lit and somewhat clinical with a predominance of a metallic substance used for the floors, walls and arched ceiling. As Michael slowly accepted the fact that he had awoken on an alien spacecraft, the memory of his mission returned.

He slid off the bed and followed the aroma to its source of brewed coffee set conveniently on the table in his room. Various pastries and unusual fruits were also displayed. “Where did they get this lot?” Michael pondered.

Unable to resist the enticement of a prepared meal, Michael sat down and enjoyed his fill of the strange new taste sensations. He found the shower, washed quickly and dressed himself in the simple Gragorian clothing that had been laid out for him. Finding the correct mechanism that opened his door, he went through into the main bridge area to find Pintach and Rhonan already in conversation with Dewbah.

“Welcome Michael! I trust you are refreshed and satisfied with the meal.” Pintach inquired politely.

“Yes! Thank you! Where did they get the coffee though? Is that a universal drink or something?”

“You are forgetting that the Dracnian’s only purpose in life is to record and analyse information about other species and of interplanetary history. They have done much research of earth, particularly Dewbah. Their technology allows them to collect samples and to duplicate. They knew it was a common drink on Earth.

“Tell me again Pintach!” quizzed Michael changing the topic to something a little more pressing than coffee. “How do I get near to Korth?”

“It will not be difficult to be captured. There are Duandorian scouts out constantly patrolling near to the city. You just need to make it look like you don’t want to be captured. You will be taken to the training arenas. Korth frequents the arenas regularly to show off his skills. You will need to find an opportunity to get him to challenge you. Do not seek to challenge him yourself or you will have to fight all the guards as well. If you are successful in defeating him it will give an opportunity for the people to fight against those loyal to Korth.”

“Without the oppression of the warlord the captives will hopefully revolt, especially if we can organise some leadership within. It is a long shot, but it is at least a hope. Everything depends on the removal of Korth. Without him, his army will be in confusion. You will have the advantage in that he will not be expecting anyone capable of matching him.”

“What if I do not succeed?” Michael asked, walking toward what appeared to be a porthole, hoping to get a view of the outside.

“Then we are no worse off and we will have at least made an attempt.” Rhonan interjected quickly.

“We have arranged a certain safety measure as well.” Pintach added. “Dewbah has kindly offered to continue transporting you as long as and wherever required. It seems our Dracnian friends have developed a fascination for this venture and are keen to follow it through to its conclusion. Apparently they see it as a good case study for their records. Dewbah will give you a transmitter by which you can signal him at any time. His ship will remain in this sector so as to monitor your progress. He has told us he can transport you to his ship instantly whenever you transmit the signal.”

“I do not expect to need it, but I must admit that it is a comforting thought.” Michael added, making another vain attempt to peer through the porthole. “How do you see out of this thing?”

Michael woke to the sound of excited voices calling him. As he identified Pintach and Rhonan leaning over him, he rubbed his eyes and sat up. “What’s up?” he asked curiously.

“We have arrived over Endolith. Our venture begins!” explained Pintach with obvious delight.

“I thought it already had,” added Michael sarcastically.

“Come as soon as you are ready.” Rhonan added, leading her husband from the room.

Michael quickly dressed after returning from the bathroom, poured himself a coffee and sat down to a light meal. “Well!” he thought to himself. “Here goes the wildest adventure that I think anyone has ever had. Let’s go and get it over with.”

Pintach and Rhonan were waiting with Dewbah before the large viewing screen.

This is Endolith!” Pintach advised, drawing Michael’s attention to the scene pictured before them on the screen. “Welcome to our world!”

“It looks deserted,” commented Michael, taking in the unfamiliar landscape and oddly shaped mud brick dwellings.

“The sun has only just risen on this world,” said Dewbah. “These humanoids do not rise early. Our race does not sleep. This is a feature of all humans that I have studied extensively, though I have not yet determined why. I need to study this phenomenon more closely.”

“Can we land beyond the city?” Rhonan asked. “I do not want to startle the people by our sudden reappearance. It will be hard enough to explain our long absence as it is.”

“I can return you anywhere you choose. We do not need to land the craft to do so. If you are ready to go then simply step onto this platform and I will transport you there instantly.” Dewbah motioned to a small stage like area, delighted to share the capabilities that his technologies created for him.

“We are ready friend Dewbah and thank you. We will always be grateful.” Pintach bowed politely to Dewbah who returned the gesture.

Dewbah turned to Michael. “You are Nephilim, yet you are different. I honour you!” He bowed again before Michael. “Take this transmitter.” Dewbah handed Michael a solid ring. “It is contained within this ring. Simply twist the top surface should you need to leave the planet’s surface quickly. It is connected to our transporters and it will return you to our ship instantly so long as we remain within orbit.”

“Thank you Dewbah. Your assistance means more to me than you could imagine. I hope to finish this quickly and return to earth. You are my only ticket out of here and it is comforting to know you are on our side.” Turning to Pintach and Rhonan he said, “Well! Let’s go and get this over with.”

They stepped up onto the glass like platform and stood huddled together as Dewbah had advised them. Dewbah passed his hand over the control pad and instantly the ship’s interior disappeared to be replaced by long wavy grass. A gentle breeze refreshed their faces as the warming rays of sunlight caressed their bodies. Before them, about one kilometre away, lay the quiet village of Endolith. Pintach and Rhonan stood for a moment breathing deeply.

“We are home, husband!” Rhonan commented, staring toward the village.

“Yes!” agreed Pintach. “But to what have we returned?”

## 10

The three travellers walked slowly toward the quiet village, alert to any movement around them that would indicate occupancy of the many small homes on the outskirts.

All seemed quiet and deserted. The slow but continuous pace of life in the Endolith that Pintach and Rhonan had left was not apparent. As they came to the first of the stone cottages their suspicions were confirmed. The door was broken and hung at an obscene angle on one hinge. The interior of the hut contained only pieces of smashed pottery and broken furniture.

They moved quickly to other dwellings only to find them in the same condition. "I fear we are too late," said Pintach, his shoulders drooping in despair.

"We could not have prevented this, but hopefully we can restore it." Rhonan was confident in her attitude and determined to continue with their plan. "Let us go to what may be left of our home. We need to look for anyone who may be still living here."

They wandered carefully, deeper into the heart of Endolith, ever vigilant for signs of life. The village, like Duandor, was built in concentric circles with the council hall at its centre. Pintach and Rhonan's home was located next to the hall in a circle of huts owned by councillors and village elders. As they moved further in, a great sadness overcame them.

The village had once been alive and bustling with activity, a centre of craft and small industry. The people who lived here had been their friends and this village had been their life.

Now it seemed that the event that they had lived in constant fear of had finally happened. Raids to procure slaves were a regular occurrence but never total annihilation of a village. Now the streets were deserted and the splendid crafts that were so highly valued, lay smashed and littering the dusty streets. Endolith was now a ghost town.

As they neared the centre of town, Rhonan halted abruptly. Claspng her hand over her mouth she muffled a cry of anguish. Rhonan collapsed to her knees in the dust, gasping for breath as she emitted deep sobs. Pintach rushed to her side and stood motionless, arms by his side, staring at the horror of the scene before him.

Where once stood their comfortable cottage was now only a pile of rubble and charred timber. Their home had been razed to the ground. Yet an even greater horror awaited them at the Hall of

Meeting. The entranceway to this familiar community centre was adorned with human skeletons. Four skeletons hung from the cross beam to the entrance like party decorations.

Michael strode forward to investigate further, only to discover the interior of the hall was filled with dangling bodies of various sizes, many of which were obviously children. What ghastly crime had been carried out here? He returned to offer whatever comfort he could to his friends and spare them the lingering nightmare of the scene he had just visited.

As they huddled together in the deserted street in an attempt to regain control of their emotions, a sudden movement caught Michael's attention. He looked up, certain that he had caught a glimpse of something darting behind a building. As he surveyed the area it appeared quiet and deserted; yet he was convinced something was watching them.

"Come on!" he whispered to Pintach, gently encouraging Rhonan to her feet without taking his eyes off the surroundings. "We have to get out of here! We need to move!"

Still stunned and in shock, Pintach and Rhonan dutifully obeyed, following Michael in a trance-like state. He had no idea where he was leading them; he just knew that they had to move away from the town centre.

At the end of a row of huts they came to a laneway that led them away from the inner circle of the Hall of Meeting and further towards the outer perimeters of the village. They walked slowly down the dark alleyway, Pintach and Rhonan hardly noticing and not caring where they were going.

As they rounded the corner of the last hut into the open space of the outer circle of the village, Michael jumped back in alarm. He stood face to face with a leering helmeted soldier. A long steel tipped spear was thrust up under Michael's chin before he could warn the others.

In an instant three other guardsmen with drawn short swords surrounded them. In the middle of the street two men were manacled in heavy chains. A fifth guard stood next to them, also with a sword in his hand. Pintach and Rhonan pressed back against the wall, uncertain as to whether surrender calmly or to attempt to run. Too overcome with shock to attempt any form of escape from five armed guardsmen, they stood staring defiantly at their captors. What happened next surprised them utterly.

With lightning reflexes Michael reached up and grabbed the head of the spear with his right hand and pushed it into the face of the soldier directly in front of him. With his left hand he grabbed the base of the spear. Throwing his whole weight behind his move he spun the man around as he twisted to the side, forcing the guard between himself and the other startled soldiers.

With a further quick twist he wrested the spear from the man's grasp, spun it around and drove the point deep into his opponent's chest. Without hesitating he snapped off the protruding spear end and rammed it into the face of one of the soldiers. The man let out a scream and dropped his sword as he raised both hands to his wounded face. This was just what Michael was waiting for. He grabbed the sword before it even hit the ground and in a backward swing he disposed of the attacker.

The other two guardsmen stepped back slightly and poised for battle, but now they were outmatched. This Nephilim had a sword and he was unstoppable. Michael stepped forward to attack; swinging the short blade into a series of cuts and thrusts. The speed and fury of his movements threw his attackers off guard. So intense was his attack that his opponents gave way to panic and they began to withdraw from the onslaught.

Michael widened his swing to bring more force to his machete-like blows. The blade cut deeply into his opponents and they dropped to the ground in a pool of blood.

The fifth guard had seen enough. He dropped the chain that secured his captives to him and decided to run. He only succeeded to move about five paces before the blade of the expertly thrown sword penetrated his back, bringing the last of the guardsmen crashing to the ground.

"Are you ok?" Michael enquired anxiously of Pintach and Rhonan. He was tense and shaking. This had been his first kill. Many times he had fought mock battles, but never had he actually had to kill another man. He did not like the feeling of nausea that came over him despite the belief that he had had no choice considering his circumstances. This is what he had been trained for and this is what he had come to Gragon to do. Delivering a race of people from the bondage of oppression would not be achieved with a cost of human lives. He hoped that it would not cost him his own life.

"We are fine thanks to you!" Rhonan answered, running her fingers through her hair and trying to come to terms with what they had just witnessed. "Are you alright?" she asked falteringly.

"I'll get over it! Now let's move in case there is another patrol."

"Pintach? Rhonan? Is it you?" The two chained captives lost no time in freeing themselves and were coming over to thank their rescuer.

Pintach looked at them. "Rinid! My old friend and advisor. We meet again, but under sorrier circumstances I feel."

"Pintach, where have you been all these years? We thought you dead or captured."

"I told you where I was going before I left. Do you not remember?"



“And no one believed you!”

“What has happened here Rinid? Where are the people?” Rhonan interjected, anxious for answers to the mystery of their fallen city.

“When you announced what you were intending to do the majority of people disowned you as crazy. Yet some must have believed. Someone at the meeting that night reported your intention and the news reached Korth. He came within days looking for you. When he couldn’t find you he became angry and destroyed your home. He then herded all the women and children he could find into the tent of meeting and ordered them slaughtered. Many managed to escape to the hills. Most of the men he took away in chains to Duandor.”

“Before he left, his guardsmen destroyed the village. This he did as a warning to any others who would consider plotting against him. I managed to be amongst those who escaped that day. We have lived in the caves beyond the plains ever since, coming back down here occasionally only to forage for supplies and useful items. Today we were unlucky and ran into a scouting party. This other with me is Mond. He is one of the few escaped captives who have joined our group.”

Mond nodded politely and the others returned his greeting.

“And tell me Pintach, who is this young warrior you have with you?”

“This counsellor Rinid,” said Rhonan stepping forward in anger, ignoring the fact that Rinid never publicly spoke to women, “is our answer to those who rejected us as crazy. This is he whom we went to the end of the universe to locate and bring here. He is Nephilim. This is our friend. He is Michael.”

“Nephilim? Are you certain?”

“You have seen with your own eyes!” Pintach reminded him. “You are now free again. Is that not enough proof for you?”

“Yes! I believe it is. Who would have believed it? I feel that I owe you an apology my friend.”

“Save it Rinid, we have too much to do. How many people are with you?”

“There are many. Too many in fact to provide for sufficiently.”

“Do you have any contact with those in Duandor?”

“Yes we do, but what good will it do?”

“I will tell you later friend, but for now you must take us to the survivors.” The drama of the rescue and reunion with Rinid had jolted Pintach and Rhonan back into action. For a brief time the

realization of the horror that their decisions had brought upon the very people they sought to free, made them remorseful and ridden with guilt.

Slowly the resolve to see their plan through to the end was returning. Korth had up to now shown himself to be a harsh dictator, inflicting oppression upon the inhabitants of this planet. Through his ordering of the decimation of Endolith and the cruel slaughter of its inhabitants, he had revealed an even more sinister side of his character. To go to such extremes, Korth must feel threatened. Perhaps Rhonan was right after all in finding a suitable opponent. Perhaps now Korth may not have it all his own way.

“It is a long walk to the caves, and now without provisions!” Rinid declared, still in a mild state of confusion. “We rode here on baruchs, but when the guardsmen caught us they drove off our mounts. Our saddlebags with all our food and water were still on them”

“Great!” muttered Pintach sarcastically. He was anxious to move quickly. This would be a tedious delay.

“The guards had baruchs!” said Mond, speaking for the first time. They had them tethered at the edge of the city, one for each of us as it works out.”

“Of course!” answered Rinid. “I’m glad one of us is still thinking. Well done young Mond!”

It did not take long to locate the agile yet docile beasts, waiting calmly at the tethering poles on the outskirts of the city. Each saddlebag hung on the beasts was stocked with food and water.

“We will leave quickly for the remnant!” stated Pintach, relieved that his plans would not be delayed. “Michael, you should leave us and make your own way north. Take no weapons. Head toward Duandor, but ride as if you were going around it. The scouting parties will pursue you and you must run from them as though you are avoiding capture. But capture you they must. You will tell them that you are a survivor from Endolith seeking food. If all goes well you will be taken to the arenas. You know what to do from there. Fare well my young warrior friend. You are now on your own.”

Both Pintach and Rhonan moved forward to embrace Michael. They had come to admire and love this young Nephilim and Rhonan was sincere in her concern for him. There was something not right in all of this. She could not identify the problem clearly but she knew something was wrong. As she hugged him briefly she fought to prevent herself from putting an end to this foolish venture and simply send the young man back home to his family and to the world where he belonged.

“Be careful!” was all she said.

A light yet refreshing breeze brought relief from the incessant sunlight that seemed to intensify in its radiant heat here on the open red earth plain. The monotonous rolling gait of the baruch, adding to the constancy of the landscape, lulled Michael into a trance-like state.

He had no idea where he was on this strange planet. Alone for the first time, light years from his own familiar environment and moving steadily forward over a relentless earthen desert toward an uncertain destiny. For most, the fear and loneliness of this predicament would bring them undone, but for this newly born warrior, the harsher the surroundings, the stronger his determination and confidence grew.

Michael sat rigidly in the saddle of this elegant beast, allowing it to guide him due north. With each rise and fall of the baruch's padded feet, small wafts of red dust rose from the desert floor like a jet stream behind them indicating their passage through this barren wasteland.

Occasionally he reached over to the water flask suspended from the saddlebag, to sooth his parched throat. His mouth seemed as dry as the desert around him. The light fabric hood of his garment shaded his face and gave adequate protection from the afternoon sun.

For hours he moved slowly across the red surface, staring ahead to the horizon, searching for a change in the landscape, or any sign of the guardsmen who patrolled the wasteland borders of the southern entrance to Duandor.

As he stared into the distance, he was finally rewarded by what appeared to be irregular shapes on the horizon. He rubbed his eyes seeking greater clarity but it was still too far to be certain. Slowly the shapes became more distinct as he came nearer, revealing a distant outline of low-rise buildings. Michael reined the baruch to a halt, raised himself up in the saddle and surveyed his first view of the city. "So this is Duandor!" he thought to himself, relieved to see an end in sight from the inhospitable wasteland. "Now all I need to do is to find a way in."

Remembering the advice of Pintach, Michael directed the barruch forward again with the intention of heading north around the city. He had not travelled far when he stopped again, this time staring at a rising cloud of dust directly west of him. Gradually he could make out the details as they drew closer. It was a band of about a dozen riders, seemingly headed straight for him.

“I guess this is the welcoming committee and my free pass to accommodation for the night.” He spurred the baruch into a slow run, eager to give the impression of escape, but slow enough to assure that his pursuers eventually overtook him. He hunched forward clumsily in the saddle, holding the reigns in an awkward fashion to dissolve any impression that he was an accomplished rider. That was not hard to do since this was his first time on a baruch. In this area he did not have to pretend to be a novice.

Michael glanced over his shoulder as he held tightly to the reigns, gripping the saddle with his knees. The group of riders were steadily gaining on him as he fled unceremoniously toward the city. He was growing weary from his already long journey and was keen to end this peaceably. He drew back on the reigns of his mount, guiding the great beast around to confront his pursuers. He then sat motionless in the saddle waiting for them. Within moments they surrounded him, with their long lances extended towards him. Michael raised his hands as he stared defiantly at his captors. They appeared to be all about the same age, hardened men with expressionless faces. With spears still levelled ready to strike, one of his captors reached over and grabbed the reigns of his baruch. Finally raising their spears they turned swiftly, leading their captive, and headed toward the sprawling mud brick and timber barracks that was Duandor.

Michael woke to the seemingly distant tolling of a bell. It was not yet dawn and only the faintest rays of morning sun previewed the coming day sufficiently to expel the deep darkness of the night. In this semi-darkness he could not define his prison. He recalled being roughly thrown into a small room and violently interrogated as to where he had come from and why. He had rehearsed his story well and presumably conveyed it convincingly enough to reassure the guards. When darkness fell he was relocated to the room he was now in, given food, water and a blanket and left to fumble in the darkness to care for his bruised and battered body.

As the sound of the bell ceased, a new sound quickly replaced it. The timber bar on the door that served as a primitive lock was forcefully slid aside and the door to his cell flung open. A faint yet brighter lighter entered the room. Michael was surprised to discover that he had not been alone. Six other men lay sleeping around the room.

“Wake up you lot!” came the gruff voice of the guard at the doorway. “Your first day of training begins in a moment, so eat your food and get ready to learn.” He stepped aside as three women entered carrying trays of food and drink, depositing them on the floor then silently withdrawing.

The groans of his fellow prisoners exceeded his own. Michael was stiff and sore and longed for a shower and a cup of tea. He rubbed the ring on his finger and for a brief moment was tempted to twist the top and beam safely out of there. He looked around at the other men and saw the pained expressions on their red and swollen faces. He listened to their groans of despair as they tried to rouse themselves.

“Better get on with the job!” he thought to himself as he stood up and promptly started to distribute the food and drink, offering what little comfort he could to the other prisoners.

Michael stood dutifully with the small group of men who, like himself, had apparently been captured only recently. The early morning sun began to warm their dust-coated bodies as they anxiously awaited some indication of their future. They comprised a group of twelve men of different ages, each

stripped to the waist and left to wait in a small arena. Thick timber posts pointed at the top, had been lashed together to form a circular training arena, which for most of the men served more effectively as prison walls.

Most of the men were talking nervously amongst themselves, exchanging stories of their capture and theories of what would now be their fate. Two of the older men spoke openly of rebellion and escape, urging the others to assist them in refusing to obey their captors.

Michael remained silent and focussed, surveying his surrounds. As he looked at his companions, examining each one, one other man stood out from the others. He was an older, heavily built man who also remained silent, speaking only to acknowledge comments made to him by others in the group. The banter continued for some time until the sound of the arena gates being opened silenced the men. Six heavily armed guards stepped in and took up positions around the arena.

Immediately the older, heavily built man stepped forward from amongst the other prisoners. A guardsman handed him a solid wooden cudgel as he stood to address the prisoners.

The look of surprise and shock on the faces of the prisoners was to be expected as he spoke. "I am your commanding officer and I want to thank you for your introductions, they were most helpful. Guards! Take these two men and put them to work with the women as servants; they are trouble makers." He pointed out the two men who had spoken out inciting rebellion and had them escorted from the group.

"Clever!" thought Michael to himself.

From that time on, amongst the new captives, all hope of escape or rebellion disappeared. For centuries, intrigues such as this bred uncertainty and distrust. No one dared share with another his hopelessness and longing for freedom in case the listener be a guardsman. Demoralisation and the perception of powerlessness was as effective a prison as a steel cage.

"Today you commence your training. If you prove to be efficient you may have the honour of ultimately joining the elite guard of the warlord." The officer spoke proudly in an effort to impress the new prisoners.

"To guard him from what?" Michael thought. This doesn't make sense. This Korth must have some intelligence if he realises that even he could be defeated by open rebellion if he stood alone. His guardsmen increased his power and his control over these people.

“You will start with the basics of sword play, using wooden replicas. We don’t want to kill you, or at least not all of you, before we can turn farmers into soldiers. But don’t be misled by wooden swords, they can still do a lot of damage if used properly. Let me demonstrate. You! Boy! Come here!”

The officer pointed to a young boy of about fifteen. He was of thin build and his dirt encrusted brown cloth rags hung loosely from his skeletal frame. The boy was obviously terrified. The ideal of his capture and separation from his family had already traumatised him, now to be selected as an object to be beaten with a wooden club in order for a bully of a guardsman to show off, simply added to his fear. He stood whimpering, the tears forming a stream through the dirt on his face.

“What do we have here, a snivelling little coward of a farm boy? Let me show you what we do with cowards in my army.” The officer raised his cudgel, poised to strike the boy. This was getting out of hand for Michael. He had no time for this. He stepped to the boy’s side and caught the officer’s wrist as he swung the blow, stopping him in mid swing.

“I will volunteer. Demonstrate on me!” he said, with his steely blue eyes fixed in challenge on the officer.

The officer glared back at the blonde slave in anger and humiliation at having his authority challenged. Never before had this happened. The other guardsmen stepped forward to seize him but the officer waved them back.

“Yes! Perhaps you would make a better example. Stand where you are!”

Dutifully Michael stood his ground in the centre of the small arena, away from the other men. He realised that if he was to accomplish his mission quickly he did not have the time to work his way up the ranks of their training school. That could take fruitless years. He needed to confront the warlord and the sooner the better.

“Watch closely!” bellowed the officer, enjoying this opportunity to enhance his prowess by belittling another. “You will see what sort of damage even a wooden training sword can do and also what sort of punishment you can expect if you think that you can oppose us.” He returned his gaze upon Michael as he snarled arrogantly into the fixed stare of the young man before him.”

Michael did not move, but stood poised, ready for action with every fibre of his muscular frame tensed like a coiled spring waiting to be released.

“If you should happen to be struck by one of these things,” the officer continued in his instruction of his students, “it can easily break a limb. A blow to the head can kill, but a blow to the

body, skilfully aimed, can bring intense pain and suffering for a long time. Like this!” The officer drew his arm back and high above his head in order to deliver a forceful blow upon Michael’s ribcage.

As the arm of his assailant drove towards him with club in hand, Michael shot out his left hand like a cobra striking its prey. The blinding reflex action caught the man’s wrist before he could deliver the blow. With his other hand he grabbed the upper arm and brought it down hard upon his own upraised knee. There followed a loud ‘crack’ accompanied by a cry of pain from the officer as the bone in his arm snapped in two. Quickly Michael retrieved the fallen weapon and stood, armed now, to face the other soldiers who instinctively rushed forward.

Despite the obvious disadvantage of being armed with only a wooden club as opposed to the glimmering blades of the short swords of the soldiers who now attacked him, Michael was unquestionably far superior in skill. Moving with astonishing speed and agility Michael confounded the guards who had never before witnessed a fighting style such as his. His movements were unconventional as he spun and danced around his opponents blocking their attacks and delivering painful blows that immediately disabled them. It took only a moment to disarm and immobilise three of the guards. The fourth man fled from the arena before Michael could get to him. As the other prisoners huddled together in surprise and confusion, Michael crouched down beside the injured commander, who sat nursing his broken arm.

“I am not interested in your childish lessons. Do you have any real soldiers in this city or is that the best you can do?”

“I understand you boy! My mistake! Oh we have some real soldiers as you call them. Next time you will be more evenly matched. You had the element of surprise with you then. In future we will eliminate that advantage. As for this,” he indicated his smashed and throbbing arm, “this will cost you dearly.”

“You would have done far worse to me, I only got in before you. Here!” Michael added, holding the wooden club out to the officer. “You may have your toy back!”

The officer snarled, held his throbbing arm and rocked back and forth on his haunches groaning with the pain. Michael stood, uncertain as to what to do next. His need to plan a strategy was averted by the arrival of a troop of about thirty armed men, led by the young guard who had escaped to raise the alarm. The evidence of the conflict was obvious in an instant as they viewed the four soldiers lying injured in the arena. They halted in surprise, expecting this had been done by all of the new



prisoners acting together. There was uncertainty as the young soldier pointed to Michael, testifying that he alone had devastated four highly trained guardsmen armed only with a wooden training sword.

The hesitation lasted only briefly before Michael was securely gripped and paraded from the arena by an escort of thirty men. He was led through the dusty city streets, past a succession of arenas filled with the dirt and clamour of combatants. His escort led him down a side street and across three rows of buildings, following a laneway that serviced the city centre like a spoke on a wheel. At the hub was the central palace, private domain of Korth. From the description of the circular layout of the city given to him by Pintach, Michael began to hope that he might that get the audience with Korth that he hoped for, sooner rather than later. As he continued the march through the streets his hopes to accomplish this mission within only a few days seemed increasingly plausible. He allowed his mind to picture the scenario of meeting with the warlord, seeing himself boldly confronting this menace and quickly dispatching him, thus ending a thousand years of oppression within a ten minute encounter.

His dreams of an easy victory seemed suddenly dashed as the troop halted before a stable-like building with barred windows. A bolt was drawn back from the stout timber door and Michael was unceremoniously thrust through, sprawling onto a pile of stinking hay. He lay stunned for a moment as he heard the door clang shut behind him and the bolt thrown back in place.

The room was well lit with two large barred windows on either side of the timber door. Two armed guards stood sentinel-like on the other side of the door, to ensure that both entry and exit was restricted.

Once he had adjusted to the smell of the straw, Michael was comfortable enough as he lay back on his makeshift bed staring out through the window to the mud-brick buildings opposite against a backdrop of a brilliant blue sky. A gentle breeze wafted in through the bars of the window to both cool and refresh him. Closing his eyes, he allowed himself the luxury of drifting slowly off to sleep.



“What does this one look like?” Korth paced the floor of his chamber, deep in thought and anxious to hear more of this and any other displays of unusual skill. He was cautious now, since discovering the reality of a potential threat behind Pintach’s journey to earth. As far as he was aware the threat had been dealt with, but one could never be too careful. Such a plan as this, and the discovery of the survival of Nephilim elsewhere, made him more than a little concerned. Consequently he had

ordered that anyone who displayed ability in combat above the ordinary, be reported to him immediately.

“As far as we are aware he is a simple craftsman from Endolith, although he appears very fit and well toned to be one of the remnant from the hills.”

“And where did a craftsman learn such fighting skills?” Korth asked, staring out of the window overlooking his city. It was a question asked of no one in particular, simply a thought expressed vocally.

“I am not certain your lordship if this boy is skilled. He is strong and quick but we do not know if he has battle skill. He caught these guards by surprise. His skill is yet to be determined.”

“Then you will test this boy and you will do it now. Match him against a middle grader. If he survives then report back to me immediately. Now go!”

There had been many reports of displays of skills, most of which had been lucky breaks. All had to be reported; which to the guards seemed to be a paranoid waste of time. None of these skills had been exceptional. To the guardsmen, this probability was non-existent.

For the first time for centuries, the soldiers of the warlord began to secretly question the orders they were given. The first chink in the armour had appeared.

The serenity of his prison actually appealed to Michael for the brief period that he was held in the barn. He slept comfortably on a mattress of straw, blanketed by the warm rays of sunlight that filtered through the barred windows. He had lain back watching the dust particles dance in the sunrays, whilst his mind raced back to his beloved Rachael. If only she were here with him there would be less urgency in this adventure. He had no choice now but to wait patiently for his release.

His patience was finally rewarded by the chinking sound of the bolt being thrown back from his prison door. He was momentarily confused as to his location before a slap on the soles of his feet with a poleaxe quickly sobered him. “Get up boy!” yelled a rough-looking, unshaven guardsman. It’s payback time. You were lucky before, but this time you get to meet some real swordsmen and they are ready to meet with you. There won’t be much left to recognise of that pretty face of yours after Arlex is finished with you. How does it feel to be Korth’s entertainment for the afternoon?”

The guard seemed to enjoy his taunting, expecting it to demoralise and terrify the prisoner. Michael could not help but feel sorry for these people. All dressed up and nowhere to go. An army without a battle to fight whose blood lust and desire for control was metered out on each other. "I hope he feels better now he's got that off his chest!" Michael thought to himself.

The guard continued to prod at Michael until he stood submissively. He guided him out of the barn door into the glare of the sun where two other guards mobilised into action to escort their prey to the chosen arena.

They filed past many arenas of varying sizes until the escort halted at the gate of a particularly noisy pavilion. Large crowds of both men and women, warriors and civilians, were assembled to watch their favourite warriors locked in combat together. This was the middle level arena, and provided both entertainment and displays of skill for the amusement of the elite guard and their women. From this sporting arena came the selections of those skilled enough to then enter the advanced training reserved for Korth's personal bodyguards. These were not fights to the death, however many men were severely injured or maimed by an over exuberant swordsman who forgot to pull his blow. These were not timber training cudgels that this group played with, but short-bladed gladius, close contact stabbing swords with pointed tip and sharpened blade on both sides. This weapon was effective for both cutting and stabbing and was favoured because of its manoeuvrability in close combat and in the confusion of a battlefield.

For most of these men the experience of engaging in battle was either minimal or non-existent. It had been centuries since there had been any armed resistance to the warlord's sorties and attacks on the cities of Gragon. Korth's campaign of tyranny had been so successful that all that remained for his army to do was to maintain fear and cruel oppression over the scattered inhabitants of the known area of their planet, thus preventing the consolidation of an opposing force.

With his guards by his side, Michael stood inside the entrance to the arena, watching with interest as contestants fought it out against each other in a process of elimination. The excited crowd heralded one particular name constantly. Arlex was obviously a crowd favourite and his superior skills made the afternoon of sport more of a spectacle.

As he waited, one of his guards, a tall thin man with a blank yet important look on his face, approached a very loud and aggressive figure, whom it seemed was in control of this fiasco. They spoke briefly together. The organiser turned and cast a fleeting glimpse at Michael, nodded to the tall guard

then continued to shout instructions. The guard returned to his post in front of Michael. Within moments, the director of events waved his stocky arm toward Michael's guards, yelling at them to bring the prisoner. As he approached, the organiser stared briefly at Michael, grinned momentarily and then held out a short bladed steel sword to him. "You! Against Buloth!" He ordered, shoving him out into the arena.

A confident looking young man of around Michael's own age stood waiting, poised for battle in the centre of the arena. The boy, whom Michael assumed must be Buloth, grinned sarcastically and motioned for him to take up a position, Michael was happy to oblige.

He was becoming tired of the bullying, the foolish display of making yourself look stronger and more important by humiliating or weakening another. As he stood in the arena, a mere object of cruel entertainment, Michael began to feel intense anger rising up within him. He was Nephilim and instinctive battle skills beyond compare, mingled with the care and compassion for others of his own nature, made him more determined to end this oppressive culture decisively. He would play their games for now, but only because it was a key to the heart of Korth.

Michael's trained eye had already surmised his opponent's skill. He did not even take a battle stance, but simply stood with both arms by his side, sword pointed to the ground, staring at his challenger. Buloth took this for cowardice and inability and he shrugged mockingly to the crowd. They began to jeer and hiss insults, calling for a decent fight.

His back half turned to Michael in feigned indifference, as though walking away, Buloth played to the crowd. His arms raised in a gesture of questioning, the soldier suddenly turned, bringing his sword in a savage cutting arc intended to sever the head of his victim. This boy was really getting carried away, breaking all the rules. This was not meant to be a death duel. Buloth was enjoying the disgust of the crowd over his opponents seeming refusal to fight. In an effort to gain their respect he was aiming a decisive blow to establish his own superiority over a slave.

With lightening speed Michael's sword shot straight up to block the vicious swing. The blow resounded through the arena as sword met sword as if Buloth had struck a solid wall. Michael remained stiff still staring ahead, with only one arm raised to stop his opponent's swing. Slowly he turned his head and his steel blue eyes, fired with anger, locked on to his attacker.

Michael was not a killer, and he refused to kill simply for sport. He tossed his sword into his left hand then swung his fist with full force into his opponent's stomach. Buloth doubled over, winded.

Restoring his sword to his right hand he brought the hilt smashing down onto Buloth's wrist, the impact of which caused the boy to drop his sword. Michael picked it up and tossed it aside, holding his own sword to his attacker's throat. Once again the battle was won in an instant. So great was the prowess of the Nephilim that he had not yet found even a decent sparring partner.

The crowd was stunned into silence momentarily, before the excitement of a challenge stirred them into a chant. "Arlex! Arlex! Arlex!"

The crowd of spectators were stirred now to a fever pitch of anticipation. They demanded a challenge by their hero, Arlex. Michael had not even drawn a sweat as he stepped away from the boy to meet his new challenger. The mighty Arlex.

Arlex stepped forward dutifully, his muscular body glistening with sweat from a dozen victories already won that morning. He would champion the crowd against this impudent slave.

Arlex wasted no time. He parried methodically with a consistent hanging guard before putting all of his weight behind a beautifully executed moulinet and a slice to the side. Michael twisted aside to avoid the arcing blade. He could not help but smile to himself. "This is their champion?" He bemused. These manoeuvres are pure textbook basic routines. This man excelled purely through discipline. He had learnt the basic moves so well that in the emotion of battle he continued to apply what he had learnt. He did not panic and slash out as did most of his opponents. This man had nerves of steel. Yet he was very predictable.

Michael met his parries, slices and thrusts with ease. Like table tennis players the two settled into a rhythm with Michael taking the defensive position; but not for long. Michael simply broke the rules and the pattern. As Arlex thrust forward, this time Michael stepped aside. He grabbed the outstretched arm of Arlex and twisted it sharply, forcing him to lose balance and fall with his face humiliatingly thrust into the dirt. The point of Michael's sword nestled menacingly behind his earlobe.

Murmurs of confusion spread through the crowd. This was unexpected. Who was this man? The guards did not know what to do next. Two officers rushed off to inform Korth of the results of the match as he had ordered.

Three members of the elite guard, the finest swordsmen on the planet apart from the warlord, now stepped forward to disarm him. Now at least it was getting interesting for Michael, as he turned to face the challenge.

"Drop your sword boy!" ordered one of the guards.

“Actually,” Michael replied sarcastically, toying with the man, “it’s not really my sword, and besides, I could do with some further practice. Won’t you teach me some moves?”

“We will teach you alright! Drop your sword or die where you stand!”

“I don’t think so!” Michael stated boldly. He raised his sword before him in an aggressive stance, ready to challenge his captors.

They moved forward in response. This boy may be good but no one can match the swordplay of an elite guardsman, let alone three at once.

They did not take into account that before them stood an armed and angry Nephilim. In his fury he was devastating. Michael danced amongst them blocking and thrusting. So fluid and intentional were his moves that it caught the guards by great surprise. His cuts drew blood from deep gashes that he inflicted continually upon his now panicking opponents. In a blinding melee of metal blades, Michael was untouchable. A swift slice to one man’s sword arm rendered him useless. Another withdrew from a painful kick to the groin followed by a sharp blow to the back of the head with the pommel of his sword. The third man reeled back from a volley of blows to his blade, before a decisive thrust through the shoulder disarmed him. His opponents dealt with, Michael looked up at an astonished audience, stunned into silence.

Like a wave receding, the onlookers peeled back as a dark shadow fell on the arena. A massive ominous figure stood watching in the doorway of the arena. It was Korth, warlord and dictator of Gragon. His eyes locked onto Michael. Fear and hatred blended and fuelled an explosive emotion.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

## 12

**R**honan squatted near to the entrance of the cave which now served as their home. She gently stirred a broth as it simmered in the steel pot that hung permanently over a small fire. The smoke from the cooking fire rose gently to the roof near to the cave entrance and was then plucked by the breeze and carried heavenward. A steady rain was falling outside and the air was cool. The warmth and protection that the cave offered was enhanced by the aroma of the prepared broth, creating an atmosphere that was, for the moment at least, comforting.

“Our informers within Duandor are insufficient!” Rinid expressed as he waited impatiently for the broth to be ready. “We have no way of knowing how many they have reached or what support we can count on within the city.”

Pintach sat quietly on the timber bench, staring into the fire whilst he clutched his mug of ale. Mond, along with four other young men, sat around them, eager to be in on the anticipated debate.

“We must raise an army to march on Duandor. Our only hope is to attack from a fifth column within and a larger army to follow to draw them out,” mused Pintach, finally breaking his silence.

“An army?” Mond gasped startled by the suggestion. “Where would we get an army? The only soldiers on this planet are in Duandor working for Korth and have been for centuries.”

“He may have the only soldiers, but he does not have the only inhabitants. There are many farmers and craftsmen still in the southern cities.”

“And all of them afraid of Korth!”

“We know that!” said Pintach in frustration as he stood and walked to the cave entrance, staring out into the rain. “But Korth will be dead, and when he is we may need the farmers to overwhelm the city in the confusion and take back control.”

“Yet they have no weapons!” argued Mond.

“They may not have swords but they do have tools and poles and axes. Remember, we need to win this freedom not by force or else it becomes only an enslavement of a different kind. We will only win by a change of heart from fear of oppression to a desire for freedom. We hope to avoid a major conflict.”

“We have very little time to prepare.” Rhonan reminded them as she served out the broth in small earthenware bowls. It was warming and refreshing, causing the remnant to enjoy a brief moment where they could ignore their circumstances. They all knew that they had come too far in their plans to give up now. They must carry it through to a conclusion, one of either death or liberty.

“We must send an envoy to the southern cities requesting that they send an army of men to march on Duandor.” Pintach slotted easily back into his role as leader and the others respected his claim. “Mond and Rinid, you two should leave immediately to convince the southern cities to join us. Mond has inside knowledge of Duandor and Rinid is a politician. A formidable representation of our cause I should think.”

Mond and Rinid looked to each other and slowly nodded. “We will leave as soon as we are ready,” agreed Rinid.

Korth stepped curiously into the arena, his piercing gaze fixed on Michael. He paced around menacingly, carefully examining the young blonde warrior who stood confidently before him. Michael grinned. This was the opportunity that he had come for. Victory would soon be his. His easy defeat of the elite guard just moments before had boosted his confidence and already filled his mind with thoughts of returning home triumphant. He waited and watched, feeling like a piece of merchandise being considered for purchase as Korth continued his silent assessment. His fingers twitched on his short sword, anxious to swing into action and finish the game.

Korth, finally satisfied with his inspection, stood face to face with Michael, their noses almost touching. Too close for combat.

“You,” spat the warlord in Michael’s face, “are slime! You are nothing to me!” His huge fist shot up instantly and grasped Michael’s exposed throat, squeezing tightly.

Caught by surprise, Michael did not have time to jump back. He had not anticipated this. At his first encounter with the warlord he realised that he had underestimated him. He had made a mistake and this was definitely not the time to be making one. Gasping for air he swung his sword out to the side in an attempt to stab into Korth’s side. Korth was too fast. His other hand shot out and grabbed



Michael's wrist, twisting it to almost breaking point. The pain was unbearable and with lack of oxygen he was considerably weaker. He dropped the sword.

The massive man released Michael and pushed him backward. Michael collapsed onto the ground holding his bruised throat, drawing in gulps of air. As he lay humiliated in the dust, the figure of the warlord towered over him. His sword lay near him in the dirt, his eyes and his mind fixed on it. As though reading his thoughts, Korth drew his own shining blade, a weapon clearly made of different material to the weak steel blades of his soldiers, as well as being considerably longer.

Michael raised himself to a half crouch and then leapt forward to retrieve his weapon. As soon as his hand touched the sword, Korth released a massive kick to his stomach that again sent Michael sprawling in the dirt.

He rose to his knees, doubled over in pain, winded, but with his sword now back in his hand. Holding his aching ribs he staggered forward to face the giant. With blinding speed Korth swung his blade in an arc of flashing steel that would have severed an ordinary opponent. Despite his weakened condition, Michael, dazed as if in a dream and seemingly moving in slow motion, managed to step backward and raise his sword to block the deadly blow.

The strength of Korth's blade and the force behind it sliced through Michael's borrowed sword as though it were butter. He again lost grip on the now useless blade as he watched in disbelief his only weapon fall in two pieces to the ground.

"You are nothing!" snarled the warlord, as he stood before Michael, preparing for the kill.

His confidence shattered, Michael became afraid. The huge frame of the menacing black figure towered over him, sword raised for a killing blow. Michael staggered backward, fear gripping him. As panic overwhelmed him, he fumbled for the ring on his finger and twisted the disc.

Instantly the terrifying scene before him dissolved in a blue haze as his mind blacked out and his eyes closed.

The warmth of the spring sun comforted Rachael as she sat staring out to sea. Her arms folded on her knees and her chin pressed against them, she escaped into her dreams yet again. Many times she had come to this grass-covered hill overlooking the sea in Coffs Harbour. It had been a favourite place for her and Michael for many years and when she needed to be near him, she came here. She had been

lonely without him. Her fear of never seeing him again haunted her constantly. She longed to be with him again.

Rachael sighed deeply, pushing her fingers through her long auburn hair. Her gaze left the ocean as she turned her head slightly, distracted by the sight of a tall lone figure standing on the hill beyond, looking in her direction.

She sat transfixed, curious. The man stood motionless, legs together, slightly hunched shoulders and hands in his pockets, a forlorn figure even from this distance. The only movement she detected was the occasional lifting of his long blonde hair by the breeze.

Her heart began to race. It couldn't be him. He would have come to her. And yet?! She stood up slowly in anticipation as she did so the man turned and sat down, facing the ocean.

"Michael?" Rachael called with excitement tinged with apprehension, as she drew nearer to the seated figure. As she drew alongside, Michael turned to look at her. She fell to his side as she embraced him passionately, burying her head into his long hair. "What is it? What is wrong?" A thousand questions fought to be spoken out, yet were held back by Michael's depressed response.

"I failed Rachael!" He confessed as tears formed in his eyes.

Rachael hugged him closer.

"I was so confident. I was supposed to be this great warrior ready to set the world free, an all-conquering hero. I found out that I am nothing except a coward and a failure."

"You tried!" Rachael reassured him. "That is all that was asked of you. You gave it your best."

"I thought that I was so great!" Michael looked at his friend. "Rachael, I ran! I was afraid. He almost killed me so I ran. I was afraid. I am still afraid."

Rachael did not reply. With her arm around his shoulder she cradled her warrior to her breast, relieved to have him back, at any cost.

For days Michael had sat brooding in his room, refusing to speak of his journey to Gragon despite a barrage of questions from his anxious parents. He tried to erase the journey from his mind as well as his life. He lived in a world of denial, convincing himself that if he refused to believe that the journey actually took place then that concept would become truth.

Yet what could he do with the demons that haunted him ceaselessly? The dark snarling face of Korth was ever before him. The words “You are scum! You are nothing!” resounded convincingly in his mind. In light of his failure and humiliating defeat he believed the taunt. His pride was shattered and he chose to hide away in shame.

The doorbell rang but it too was but a distant sound for Michael and he paid it no attention. Only dimly did he hear voices talking quickly. From their tone Michael could tell that they were spoken in some distress. Something within him stirred slightly and for a moment he was curious. He tried to ignore it and returned to his brooding.

A rapid knocking on his door prepared him for its opening. Bob’s face appeared, the stern look indicating that something was not right.

“Michael, Drew is here and he has something to say that you need to hear!”

The door opened wider to reveal a fidgeting Drew who smiled nervously and gave a quick wave of his hand in greeting.

Michael shrugged indifferently and motioned for them to come in if they wanted. Bob and Drew both entered Michael’s room and sat down near to him.

Bob could not contain his anxiety. “Michael, its Rachael! We think that she has been taken!”

Michael looked up with concern, wanting to hear more. “What do you mean?”

“Drew, you tell him!”

Drew fidgeted somewhat. “I don’t know what to do Michael. I was with her this morning at her house. She had asked me to come over to help her with some computer work. Well, it was when I was leaving - she walked to the front gate with me to say goodbye. I was halfway down the street when I turned to wave. It was then that I saw the two men. They seemed to come out of nowhere and just grabbed Rachael. They held her as she struggled and tried to scream.”

Michael listened with growing concern, his mind painfully picturing the scene.

“I dropped my bike and started to run back to her. The men just seemed to be waiting for me, standing, watching until I got real close. As soon as I reached them they vanished, along with Rachael.” Drew was breathing heavily, in obvious distress. “I couldn’t help her. I went to the police but they just thought I was loony toons and told me to come back in forty eight hours if she didn’t show up.”

“What were they wearing?” Michael asked, “The men Drew. What clothes did they wear?”

“Not much. A brown skirt and something like a T-shirt with a leather harness, Reminded me of Roman centurions.”

“Korth’s guardsmen!”

“You mean from Gragon?” yelled Bob. “Rachael’s been kidnapped to Gragon?”

“Korth obviously wants me out of the way. He wants me back on Gragon so he can finish me off.”

“Why didn’t he kill you here like he thought he did me?”

“I guess he needs to get some credibility back by killing me in front of his people. I failed my mission but at least I must have made some people wonder. I guess Pintach’s resistance efforts must be increasing.”

“What about Rachael?” Drew asked in concern.

Silence followed, pregnant with apprehension.

“Michael?” Bob was astounded that his son had not responded instantly.

“I can’t! I’m sorry!”

“Why? Won’t the Dracnians transport you?”

“They live for this. They are historians. They won’t interfere, but they are observing and recording. They have committed themselves to observe the final outcome, so they will transport.” Michael stood and walked to the window, his back turned on Bob and Drew. “I am a failure as a warrior. I am nothing. Of course I want to help Rachael, but I can’t. I’m sorry!” He turned and left the room.

Drew and Bob were incredulous. Anne stood at the doorway. She had been listening silently. Seeing the anger and frustration in her husband’s reaction, she went to him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“I don’t believe this!” Bob gasped, infuriated.

“We don’t know what he has been through.” Anne stood up for her son. “It must have been hard for him.”

“But to abandon Rachael?”

“Give him time. He will heal.”

“Rachael doesn’t have time.” Bob paused momentarily. “I will go!” he stated, determined in his decision.

“Bob! What could you do? You are not trained. If Michael didn’t succeed, how could you?”

“I am Nephilim! I have been practicing a move or two. Besides, I am not going to pick a fight with king whatsit, I am going to try to bring Rachael back.” His mind set on the task ahead of him, Bob took hold of the signal transmitter that Michael had next to his bed. He held the device momentarily in his hands as he considered the consequences of his action and the commitment that he was about to make. “For Rachael!” he stated to himself as he went through the procedure for contacting the alien ship. The signal sent, he replaced the device where he had found it and went to prepare to be transported to a different world, to face an unknown enemy.

Anne and Drew both felt helpless and deeply distressed. “I’ll go and see if I can find Michael.” Drew suggested awkwardly.

Anne simply nodded.

## 13

The captain of the elite guard, Korth's own regiment, pondered deeply in his heart for the first time in his life regarding his loyalty to Korth. Many of his men were questioning. He had heard the discussions in the mess room. Korth had changed; always had he been a mighty warrior and conqueror of Gragon. Yet he had not been cruel. His armies were used as a peace force, enslaving by a display of power and authority, but never murder.

Now Korth was instructing them to kill innocent citizens. Their prowess before had proved sufficient. To the men of Duandor it was like a game, a chance to learn a martial art and to wield its power like a police force. But to be ordered to torture and murder unarmed civilians such as at Endolith was another matter entirely that many did not like.

In the training arenas, for the first time, they were being told to fight to the death as though Korth was trying to kill off his best fighting men. The incident last month in the arena where Korth attempted to kill a skilled young warrior, probably the best they had seen in a while, was still a talking point in the city. The boy had apparently disappeared. What powers were they now threatened with? Had they angered a god?

And now, the captain himself was reduced to a prison guard, ordered to watch over a female. Why? Who was this and why should he be the one to do it? The captain's mind was alive with uncertainties. Never before had he dared to question his warlord. But the routine was changing.

Rachael lay exhausted on the prickly straw-filled mattress that was provided as a bed. The room was dimly lit by a small unsealed window near the ceiling, out of reach and too small to crawl through. The room was basic and claustrophobic, providing only the minimal requirements. She had not slept soundly since her abduction, which was for her both frightening yet exciting. The fear of her unknown fate and the intentions of her captors were almost insignificant to the awe and wonder of being transported to a spacecraft and whisked away through the galaxy. Her captors, despite their rough handling, had not abused her, presumably due to the orders from a higher authority.

She was fascinated by the thought of now being on a distant planet and this awareness kept her occupied for the moment. How long she would be held here concerned her greatly. She felt she would go insane if confined too long. What were her captor's plans for her and why was she brought here? She presumed she was being used as bait to force Michael to return, but Michael had shared very little with her about his journey. She did not know if these were the same people or even the same planet. Rachael would not allow herself to panic. Her young warrior would rescue her. He would come and she would be ready.

Bob stood at the base of the rocky cliffs surveying an unfamiliar landscape. His journey here had left him with a sense of uncertainty as to whether this was a dream or reality. His senses were numbed as he climbed the hillside. According to the Dracnians who brought him here, he should locate Pintach and Rhonan somewhere in the labyrinth of caves that were now visible before him. He knew nothing of this planet; therefore he needed help to quickly locate Rachael.

He climbed methodically until he came to a wide ridge just above him. He groaned as he pulled himself upwards and on to the ledge. A climb such as this was not easy for him with a partially paralysed left side. There must be an easier way to get to these caves; surely Rhonan would not have climbed up here he thought to himself. Before him now was a series of cave entrances, which by all accounts was the new city of Endolith. The area seemed deserted, just as he would have expected from a people in hiding. From within one of the caves a thin wisp of smoke gave the only indication of habitation. Bob walked carefully to this cave entrance and, standing in the shadows, peered in.

A number of women and children occupied the cave, mostly seated around the small campfire, as another served them from a large blackened cooking pot strung over the fire. There were no men in sight. Bob slowly moved out of the shadows and stood silhouetted in the doorway to the cave.

A young girl screamed as she saw him and pointed, warning the others. Instantly all eyes were upon him as they pressed backwards away from him in obvious fear.

"Please!" Bob squeaked out before clearing his throat. "Don't be afraid! I come in peace!" He had always wanted to say that, as cliché as it was. He thought to say "take me to your leader!" but he

could not bring himself to continue with such a corny introduction. "I am a friend of Pintach and Rhonan. I have come in search of them. Are they known to you?"

Slowly one lady stepped forward. In the darkness of the cave her appearance was not clear. "Step forward into the cave out of the glare so that we may see who you are." ordered the lady.

Bob obliged by walking forward towards the cowering group.

"Bob? Is it you? How? Why? Bob what are you doing here?" It was Rhonan, overwhelmed by the recognition of her friend.

"Rhonan!" The two friends hugged each other, giving temporary relief from the worries that assailed them. "Where is Pintach?"

"He has left with the other men to meet the forces from the Southern cities. They plan to march on Duandor in the hope that Michael will soon eliminate Korth."

Bob sighed. "You haven't heard then? Rhonan, Michael is no longer in Duandor. He has returned to earth."

Rhonan stared at Bob for a moment before moving aside to stand at the cave entrance, surveying the peaceful grassland valley that stretched out before them. In the distance she could make out the buildings that she used to call home. Beyond Endolith lay the great Red Desert. On the far side of the desert the Northern Lake brought reprieve from the dry expanse. Here, built beside the lake, was the sprawling city of Duandor.

"Then all is lost!" Rhonan stated softly without shifting her gaze. "We must warn Pintach to withdraw the troops from the south and not to march on Duandor or else many lives will be forfeited.

"It is more complicated than that I am afraid. I do not know what happened in Duandor with Michael, only that he says that he failed. He will not return. I am here because they have taken Rachael. I must try to rescue her, but I need your help. Rhonan we have come too far to give up now. If you have an army to oppose Korth, then use it. If there is discontent within Duandor, now is the time to stand together and say "no more" to this tyrant. Don't give up. You placed all your hopes on one boy to do your work for you. This is your world and it is your freedom that you fight for. You are the ones to claim your rights. It is your responsibility; don't put that on Michael. He risked his life for you. He tried and he failed. Now it is your turn."



Rhonan turned slowly to look at Bob. Her agonised expression revealed the anguish in her thoughts. “You would make a good general my friend. Come, we must meet up with the others. Can you ride?”

“**I**n light of this information we need to review our strategy. Do we still advance on Duandor?” Rinid had resumed his role as chancellor, pacing the floor of the great hall, leading the discussion. Pintach’s army of farmers had grown to fifteen thousand men, armed mostly with clubs and farming tools. A supply of swords and shields had been obtained from a blacksmith who had been making a lucrative trade catering for roving mercenaries. Only one hundred swords were available, which had been supplied to the leaders.

The force was now camped in the decimated city of Endolith, waiting on further orders from the politicians who led them. This council of leaders were now meeting in the damaged Great Hall, which had been since cleansed of the grisly corpses. For Pintach this was where it had all begun and now he stood here with the man he had originally travelled the universe to find.

“Do you feel up to this?” Pintach asked of Bob, keen to pass the baton of responsibility for his planet’s redemption on to a new and more mature saviour. “Can you match Korth?”

“When Michael returned from England he taught me a few basic manoeuvres. I have been practicing hard ever since, just out of interest. My left side still restricts me but I can handle a sword. I will do what I can, but let me remind you Pintach that I didn’t come all this way to save your world. I came to save a young girl whom I love as a daughter. She is my priority.”

“Then we must free her first,” insisted Rinid.

“Yes but how?” Bob queried. “Do we just march our rag tag army up to the gates and make our demands? Not while Rachael is in his hands.”

“We attack from the inside first!” stated Mond, deep in concentration.

“A fifth column!” mused Bob, “It has worked before.”

“What is your proposal?” Pintach enquired eagerly, turning to Mond.

“There are many within Duandor who would rebel and turn against Korth’s warriors if they thought they had a chance. We need their help. I suggest one of us sneaks inside and spreads the word of the approaching army. Once inside the aim would be to free the girl. When she is safe the Nephilim can challenge the warlord, with the backing of fifteen thousand determined men.”

“There are ten thousand skilled fighting men in Duandor, any one of whom would be more than a match for ten of our unskilled farmers. An all out assault would be suicidal.” Rinid countered.

“Not if their leader was taken out. Our expectation is that they would become uncertain and that the majority would swap sides. After all, many of these men are our relatives, held against their will. We can win this.” Pintach was determined.

“It is a huge gamble Pintach,” mused Rinid. “Many lives are at stake.”

“Freedom can never be gained without cost and risk. Look at the alternatives Rinid, continued oppression or annihilation of our cities. Too long have we been enslaved by fear, we are so close now to the only chance for deliverance that we have had in over a thousand years. We cannot give up now. Do not become fearful Rinid. This is time for a bold challenge.”

“This is something that I do not want to do my friend, but I feel you are right. I do not want to dwell in a cave for the rest of my life, hiding away in fear. We will continue as planned.”

“And what of the girl?” asked Mond, fearing that these politicians had overlooked some practical issues.

“How can we enter Duandor unnoticed?” Bob queried.

“It cannot be done!” stated Rinid, shaking his head in dismay.

“There is a way!” Mond’s statement surprised them all, but he had their silent attention. “Duandor is built on the edge of a lake which supplies water for the city. There is a tunnel that feeds the water into the various wells in the city. The entrance is submerged, but once in the tunnel there is plenty of breathing space. The tunnel goes right through to the warlord’s palace where I am certain the girl would be kept. I would be willing to try.”

“There would be many dangers in this attempt and I see little chance of it succeeding, in fact if you were captured it could ruin our whole advance on Duandor by forewarning them.” Rinid warned pessimistically.

“I think that it may be hard to miss fifteen thousand men marching across a desert.” Bob commented sarcastically. “The element of surprise will not be with us anyway.”

Pintach folded his arms across his chest and leant back on his seat to further question Mond.

“Have you been in these tunnels Mond?”

“It is how I escaped in the first place after a fellow prisoner told me about them.”

“Can you do this?”

“I don’t know, but I can only try!”

“I will go with him!” Bob stated firmly. “It is after all the reason I came here. This sounds like my best option to free Rachael.”

“Do you think this is wise?” Pintach questioned.

“Nothing about this whole venture is wise. If I were wise I would have stayed at home. You lead your army to the city gates Pintach. I will go to Rachael. I will offer whatever help that I can once inside.”

“I am uncertain about this, but I see I have little other choice. We will do as suggested.” Pintach stood and moved toward the door, the parliament over. “I will give you two days. Take whatever weapon you need from our small supply. I wish you both well. We will meet at the gates if all goes well. You should begin immediately.”

# 15

The great baruchs strode monotonously across the vast red plains of the desert towards Duandor. For a day and a half Bob and Mond had been making the tiresome journey north, seeing nothing but red dust plains. By mid day both the outline of Duandor and the shimmering lake surface came into view. They veered further east to avoid being seen and continued on, ever vigilant for patrolling guardsmen. By late afternoon they had moved as close to the city as they dared to go in daylight. There was nothing to hide behind on the plains and they feared moving into full view from the city.

“We should wait here for nightfall!” Mond stated, reining in his baruch.

“I won’t complain!” Bob added, drawing his huge mount to a halt. He rubbed his aching back. “I think that I am getting a little too old for this. What’s for dinner?” He climbed down from the beast and rummaged through the saddlebags.

“You rest!” smiled Mond. “I will prepare the meal.”

“Biscuits and water again huh?” grinned Bob.

The television hummed unnoticed in the background as a remorseful Michael slouched in the large comfortable reclining chair that Bob had claimed as his own. His mind would not switch off and his thoughts swirled through his head in a confused jumble. He continued to stare blankly at the screen in an effort to refocus and to lessen the pain of his thoughts.

“What are you doing here?” Drew ambled into the lounge room, stood at the doorway for a moment, and then took a seat next to his friend.

“Not now Drew, I’m not in the mood!”

“So I see! What are you doing here?”

“I’m trying to watch TV! All right?”

“That’s not what I meant. You are here sulking whilst your father fights your battles.”

“Leave it Drew!” said Michael angrily, looking away.

“You can’t sit here feeling sorry for yourself. So you lost a battle! So What? If you are still alive you can try again.”

“I was afraid! I ran from the fight!”

“Since when has it been a crime to be afraid? Fear should heighten your senses. It is not through pride and arrogance that you win battles; that makes you just like this warlord they spoke of. Your confidence should be in your motive to want to set people free, not in your own ability. Then if you try and fail, you have still won.”

Drew sat forward, knowing he had Michael’s attention now. “You are supposed to be this great warrior; it is in your blood. You already have the skills, but they are nothing without the motivation. It seems that was what you lacked. You did this for you, and now others are paying the cost. Now do it for others. Rachael needs you. The people of that world need you. Do it for them. Do it for love. Then you cannot fail. If this is about you, then you have already lost. You are Nephilim. It’s about time you acted like one.”

Michael turned his head quizzically, his long blonde hair half obscuring his vision of Drew. Without uttering a response he stood and left the room.

Drew put his hands to his head in frustration.

Returning to his room, Michael lay on his bed reflecting on all that Drew had said. Drew had simply stated what Michael knew to be true all along. He had withdrawn into his own fear and self pity, hiding away in some darkened recess of his mind, refusing to come out. He feared that if he withdrew from his depression he would have to face the fact that he had let so many people down. He was not prepared to risk that again, even for Rachael. To go to her would only give her a hope of rescue. This would be destroyed if he were to fail her.

He sat up and moved to sit on the edge of his bed, burying his head in his hands in agony of thought. This was insane thinking and he knew it. By doing nothing he had already let Rachael down. How could he do this to her? Drew’s advice kept resounding in his mind. Is it wrong to be afraid? Suddenly a primeval roar born of anguish, fear and determination erupted from somewhere deep within his soul.

Slowly, Michael crouched down on his knees and reached under his bed, withdrawing the sheaved long-sword that had been awarded to him. He sat on his bed and slid the glittering blade from

its protective cover. He gripped the ornate weapon in both hands before him as the light flickered on the razor sharp steel edge of the sword, reflecting from his piercing blue eyes.

Bob drew a sudden gasp of air as the shock of the cool water alerted his senses. “This is a short swim now isn’t it?” he asked Mond for the third or fourth time. “I don’t swim very well with a disability. My doctor says that I should be on a disability pension, but what would I do all day? I would rather...”

“Just down and across, not far at all.” Mond tried to reassure him. “Here! Tie this rope around you. I don’t want to lose you in the dark. It will be pitch black down there. If you have trouble swimming I will haul you along.”

“I’ll stay close, don’t worry.” Bob took the rope and tied it around his waste just to be certain.

The moonlight was their only source of illumination on the still and balmy night. The outer walls of the eastern edge of the city stood above them, almost in arm’s reach. They swam together as the water deepened. Bob struggled with the weight of his clothing and the sword at his belt. He hoped Mond knew where he was headed and what he was looking for. Possibly a mark on the city wall, Bob figured. He hoped it would not be far for he was already tiring as his limp left arm gave him very little assistance in the water. Whatever Mond was searching for he had best find it quickly.

“Are you ready?” Mond asked in a whispered voice, having presumably located the object of his search.

“I guess!” panted a nervous Bob.

“Then on my count. One, two, three!”

Both men took a deep breath and dived into total darkness. Immediately Bob became disoriented, feeling a sense of panic sweeping over him. A sudden jolt on his stomach did little to reassure him as the rope pulled him further down into an unknown depth. He flayed around seeking to get his balance and direction, the rope pulling him along now rather than further down. Another thump on his body, this time to his head, gave the awareness that they had reached the tunnel. He raised his arm and pushed himself through, kicking his legs and settling finally into a momentum that propelled him forward.

Bob's lungs felt they were about to burst. He knew he was not going to make this. He had come all this way to die in a dark watery grave where he would never be discovered. He had held his breath for what seemed like an improbable length of time, yet in reality was most likely only just over a minute. The increasing pain in his chest caused him to stop swimming momentarily. For a split second he floated weightless in a dark chasm expecting now to die. Once again he felt a tug on his stomach from the rope before a hand fumbled for a grip on him. Strong hands pulled him forward and upwards and on to a water covered ledge. Bob's mouth exploded open, gulping air desperately.

"You ok?" Mond asked in concern. His voice echoed slightly in the dark watery tunnel they were now in. To Bob it was an eerie experience of uncertainty for a moment as to whether he was alive or dead.

"I thought," he gasped "you said it was a short swim. I nearly drowned down there."

"I guess your injury restricts you more than we realised. Once you get your breath we need to keep going. I don't know about you but I can't wait to get out of this water."

"I can't see a thing, how can we find our way?"

"There is only one way to go. Once we reach a well we will have some light. Come on! Take my arm!"

"I'm ok, just lead the way and I will hold on to the rope."

Moving forward was slow progress through the waste deep water and total darkness. The surface was slippery with weed and every step had to be placed with care. This was for Bob the most eerie experience he had yet encountered.

At long last a faint light ahead of them gave a focal point to move toward. When finally they stood beneath the first well there was sufficient moonlight to see each other's forms.

"How do we get up there?" Bob asked anxiously, desperate to get out of this slimy pit.

"We don't!" Mond advised, fortunately not able to see the disappointment on Bob's face. "This exit leads to the second row of streets only, and besides, there is no way up. We need to follow the tunnel to the very end then exit into the palace. This well services the slave quarters so it has no footholds. The other wells have climbing rings, though for what purpose I do not know. They are never used and I am sure no one even knows about them. Come! It is not far." Mond removed the safety rope before leading the way forward.



“Bob was getting use to Mond’s exaggeration in the use of the term “not far.” He anticipated the long slow wade to continue for quite some time. He was not mistaken. For at least another hour they pressed on wearily, aided this time at least by the ability to have some, if limited, vision.

As they came to the last well, Mond raised his finger to his lips indicating the need to move quietly. Bob was happy to oblige just so long as they were able to quickly get out of the wet claustrophobic tunnel. It was a difficult climb for Bob with the ability to only loosely grip the climbing stirrups with his weakened left hand. Climbing quietly out of the well, they found themselves in a small courtyard. The surrounding buildings were lit only by the full moon that was visible overhead. Keeping to the shadows they explored the perimeter buildings.

The sound of heavy footsteps startled them and they immediately pressed back against the wall beneath an overhanging awning. A solidly built man stepped from around the side of the building, adjusting his leather skirt. He stood picking his teeth in front of a heavy wooden door. Bob and Mond nodded to each other in mutual agreement. This was the only door being guarded, so chances were that Rachael was inside this room. They made ready to spring out on the guard and moved forward slightly to do so when another guard, hand on the hilt of the short sword at his side, marched down the corridor and joined the first guard.

“About time you came!” said the first guard irritably. “This is not my idea of fun standing outside in the dark half the night.”

“Why do we have to do this anyway? Who is she?” queried the second guard, unperturbed by his friends reprimand.

“I have no idea. I find it a grave insult to be ordered to guard a woman. I am very sick of this. Anyway, it’s your turn. Try not to be afraid of her! I’m going!”

“Yeah! Whatever! Waste of time if you ask me!” The disgruntled guard took up his post reluctantly, standing with arms folded with his back to the intruders, watching as the first guard disappeared around the building.

Mond carefully inched forward, dagger in hand. When he reached the guard he quickly placed the knife at his throat as he firmly held him across the chest with his other arm. “Don’t make a sound!”

Mond only managed to get these first instructions out before the guard, moving swiftly, grabbed his wrist that held the knife and elbowed him in the stomach with the other.

Mond reeled back in pain as the elite guardsman whipped out his sword and held it at his chest. Bob sprang into action, sliding his short sword from its place at his side as he sprang to Mond's defence.

The guard immediately responded to the new threat, attempting to knock the sword from Bob's hand. Bob parried easily and continued to trade blows with the guard. The clamouring of sword upon sword echoed noisily through the still courtyard. Bob knew he had to finish this quickly. He feigned a swing to the left, changed direction in mid arc and brought his blade down firmly onto his opponents sword hand. Bob's blade cut deeply into the man's hand, forcing him to drop his sword and cry out in pain.

"Sorry about that my friend," said Bob apologetically, but I don't have a lot of time. Now if you will kindly open this door." The guard hesitated. "Open it!" Bob snarled aggressively, brandishing his sword in the man's face.

The stunned guard obliged. In the dim light Bob could only make out a shadowy form huddled in the corner of the room. "Rachael?" he called. "Rachael! Is that you?" It's me, Bob!"

"Bob!" came a cry of surprise. "How..?"

"Never mind, I'll explain later. Can you walk?" Bob stepped into the room and took Rachael's hand. He helped her to her feet and the two hugged in relief. As they turned to go, Mond's limp body was thrown into the room and the door slammed shut, imprisoning all three in the sturdy cell."

"I thought I heard a noise," came the voice of the original guard. "Just as well I came back to check it out. Rest comfortably. We will deal with you in the morning."

"So much for my rescue attempt, sighed Bob. "Sorry Rachael!"

"I am very grateful for the company, although it would have been nice to get out of this lousy room." Rachael collapsed back on to the mattress, running her hand through her now itching scalp in frustration, "now what?"

## 16

The first rays of sunlight filtered softly across the bed where Korth and his choice of partner for the night lay still sleeping. A nervous knocking at his door woke him suddenly. Korth did not like to be disturbed and so this inconvenience had better be significant.

“My lord! Forgive the intrusion.” The guard apologised, bowing repeatedly as he opened the door, trying not to look directly into the room. “But there is a large force of men approaching from the south. Many thousands I believe.”

“What?” Korth bellowed, leaping from his bed. “Assemble all troops immediately. I want every available division ready to march into battle in fifteen minutes. Send in my attendants!”

Korth dressed quickly and strapped his sword around his waist. He sat down to a loaf of bread and a jug of water while he waited for his attendants to come. Within moments two servants cautiously entered the room, bowing low before their master.

“How may we serve you?”

“You will stand by me as we go into battle. One of you will carry my shield until I have need of it, and this...” Korth handed the servant a small metal device. “This is a transmitter to the alien ships. Stand near me and use it only in an emergency. And you!” he ordered pointing to one of the men, “tell the captain of my guards to bring the girl prisoner with us, and guard her well.”

“I believe my lord that there was a rescue attempt last night. It failed of course and those responsible are also being held.”

Korth considered momentarily before giving his order. “Bring them as well! They could be useful if I make an example of them. We will scare these southern farmers back to their holes. Now go!”

For two days the fearful yet determined rag tag army from the south, led by Pintach, marched bravely forward toward the very heart of the oppressor who had enslaved them for centuries. Having heard of the slaughter that had occurred at Endolith, they had cried out “enough!” It was one thing to be

forcibly conscripted into Korth's meaningless army to satisfy one man's lust for power, it was another to have that same man murdering your family and friends and destroying your village. A deep motivating force, though unskilled in war and without adequate weaponry or strategies for battle, drove these men. They marched for freedom and the right to live in peace. So strong was their belief that they were now prepared to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of their sons and daughters.

They moved incessantly across the great red plains toward Duandor like a tidal wave pounding toward the coast, ready to engulf and wash away anything that stood in its path.

As they came within vision of this sprawling mud hewn city, a dark line was detectable, as though drawn in the ground between them and their goal. Finally the distant blur became clearer. The warriors of Duandor lined up to a man in solid block formation in front of the city. Far be it for Korth to hide away inside the walls and defend against a siege. He was too confident an assailant for that. He was not a defender of cities but rather the all-conquering warrior king against whom none could stand.

As the southern army drew close to the patient battalions of Duandor, Pintach raised his arm to halt the advance. Both armies stood silently, assessing each other's strengths and weaknesses. Pintach knew that if these two forces were let loose on each other the result would be catastrophic. In an effort to avoid a pitched battle where many would die, Pintach, Rinid and two other southern officials marched forward to parley with Korth, who stood defiantly in front of his men. This was a situation that he lived for and had missed for many years. He was in his element and was enjoying it immensely.

"Well I see the southern vermin have crawled out of their holes." Korth ridiculed. "And who gave you the confidence to do that I wonder?"

"We, the people of Gragon, demand an end to tyranny. We demand our right to freedom of..." Rinid began.

"You demand nothing! The freedom you get will be the freedom I choose to give you as your lord protector. If you will bow to me now, all of you, I will let you crawl back to the holes you came from. If not you will all die today!"

"Your little scheme did not work! You have no saviour!" Korth continued. "He went snivelling and defeated back to the meagre little planet you brought him from. There is no saviour but Korth. To

show my supremacy over your would be hero I even collected a trophy. Guards!” Korth raised his hand and clicked his fingers as he continued to stare down his opponents.

Four guardsmen with swords drawn, shoved the humbled figures of Rachael, Bob and Mond before them. Humiliated, they stood dutifully at Korth’s side. The look of surprise and despair on the faces of Rinid and Pintach was fuel for Korth’s continued attack.

“Oh yes, another little surprise. Your secret rescue party are my guests as well; now for a practical demonstration to all of you. This is what will happen to you and your families if anyone attempts to oppose my authority” Turning to the guards, the now pacing warlord issued his command. “Take the girl! Behead her!” With a snigger he spoke again to the delegation before him. “This is how much I fear the warriors you send against me!”

The guardsmen firmly grasped all three hostages as they shuffled Bob and Mond to one side. They dragged Rachael to her knees, a man holding each of her arms stretched out between them. Her terrified scream drowned out the yell of “No!” that came from Bob’s own throat.

From the gathered southern army, a solitary cloaked figure raced forward like the wind, his cloak flying up behind him as he ran directly towards the soldier who had raised his sword high above his head, ready to swing it down in a deathly blow upon Rachael’s outstretched neck.

From somewhere beneath his cloak a dagger was drawn and flung with deadly accuracy, finding its mark in the back of the would-be executioner. The executioner’s blade dropped to the ground and the guard’s now lifeless body quickly followed.

The rescuer flung aside his cloak and reached with both hands over his shoulder, through his long blonde tresses until he firmly gripped the hilt of his magnificent hand and a half double edged long sword. It slid effortlessly from the scabbard strapped to his back and continued in a deadly arc of blinding steel, slicing into the bodies of the two men who held Rachael’s arms. The lightening speed of the attack continued unchallenged, taking out the guards who held Bob and Mond whilst the element of surprise was still in his favour.

Korth spun around in alarm. This was unexpected. Before him now, stood the daunting figure of the blonde haired warrior, brandishing a sword the likes of which Korth had never seen. The early morning sun reflected blindingly from the polished steel blade as Michael stood, legs firmly apart, before his opponent. With one hand he released his cape, allowing it to fall to the ground beside him as he prepared for the battle ahead. Michael was young and fit, freshly trained and fiercely determined.

The fixed stare from his cool blue eyes pierced Korth's heart with fear. For the first time in his life the warlord faced an opponent of his equal. He faced a young Nephilim warrior, with the potential skill to destroy him.

"This is between you and me Korth!" Michael challenged. "It ends here!"

"So!" said Korth calmly, "the coward returns! Then let the world observe as I reaffirm my sovereignty over all, especially pretend warriors like you who would dare to oppose me. Let them watch and learn!"

Michael was still some distance from Korth and he readied himself to move quickly now to the battle that he had known was inevitable. Before he could get within striking distance, Korth swung his sharpened blade almost casually, slicing into Rinid's arm. The unfortunate man stood nearest to Korth and served as a convenient victim to demonstrate his contempt for what he considered an inferior race. He continued forward, pulled back with his sword and stabbed deep into the chest of the elderly statesman. Rinid crumpled to the ground, the first victim of the southerner's defiant move.

"First to quench the rebellion, now to mop up the slime that it produced; guards! Kill them!" Korth motioned toward Bob, Mond, Rachael, Pintach and the other statesmen who all stood before him. "I'll take care of this one!"

Michael looked around in a moment of uncertainty; his immediate thought being to protect Rachael and his father. Rachael lost no time in collecting the swords of the fallen guardsmen and tossing one to Bob and Mond, retaining a weapon for herself.

Once again with a sword in his hand, confidence returned to Bob. "Leave us boy!" He yelled to his son. "Just attend to him!" He nodded towards Korth then turned his attention on the guardsmen that surrounded them.

The captain of the guard hesitated, looking first at the cruel eyes of Korth and sensing fear, then at the rest of the guard. Some of these men also held back, seeking direction. Uncertain as to what he should do, he could not respond to the senseless command that called for blind obedience. The slaughter appeared to serve no purpose. The killings at Endolith of innocent unarmed women and children that he had been ordered to carry out still screamed out to him as a nightmare that he could not wake from. He looked at Michael. Who was this blonde warrior who seemed to appear and disappear at will? Surely he was a god whose wrath had been stirred by the recent senseless killings; the captain could not bring himself to obey. For the first time since his captivity years before, he now openly

refused to carry out an order from his master. Seeing the captain hesitate, others also held back. There were however other guardsmen who were lusting for blood and the sport of a kill, loyal to Korth always and keen to display their skill.

The number of their opponents diminished, father and son stood before the advancing foe. In the brief moment as they waited something happened deep within them. More than an adrenalin rush, it came like an explosion of power and energy, a seed planted centuries ago and travelling through generation after generation, finally found its release once again. Truly the race that is Nephilim was now reborn. It exploded from father and son in a scream of defiance. Nothing could oppose the raw power, skill and courage of these warriors, determined to shatter the chains of injustice that had enslaved a race of people for hundreds of years.

Sensing the awesome manifest power of the Nephilim that was about to be unleashed, Rachael, Pintach, Mond and the other officials stepped back in fear and wonder, just as a whole planet had stepped back in fear when it was displayed to them through one man.

**K**orth now knew who stood before him. Not one but two ancient warriors. He snarled in fury as Bob stood his ground against the few loyal guardsmen who dared to attack him. Four swords swiped simultaneously at Bob then stabbed expectantly at where his side should have been. They were about to learn that a Nephilim is not that easy to kill. Bob deftly stepped backwards, swiping away the swords first to the left of him then to the right. He moved amongst his attackers like a tornado in fury, destroying all who threatened his life. So swift and sure were his blows that rarely did another blade touch his.

For Michael, there was no time to watch his father's battle, as he turned his full focus on the approaching Korth. Standing before Korth for the second time, the fear that had so crippled and weakened him previously, was no longer evident. This time he was not caught unprepared nor was he inadequately armed.

Korth danced cautiously around Michael, swinging his sword in acrobatic manoeuvres designed to both intimidate and impress his opponent. Michael stood his ground, gripping his long-sword firmly and waiting for the precise moment to strike, like a cobra poised before its victim.

It was Korth who struck the first blow, his great strength sending vibrations through Michael's body as he met the forceful downward cut with an upward block, causing Korth's blade to slide down to the hilt of Michael's broadsword.

Korth had the advantage of size, strength and experience over Michael's untried skills. Ten thousand men pressed forward anxiously, transfixed by the skilled swordsmanship and precise moves of all three men as they battled before them. Never had any of them seen anyone able to last more than two or three blows against the warlord, yet here was a warrior who matched him blow after blow as they fought tirelessly together.

Every move that the warlord made against Michael, his sword was there to counter it. His long sword enabled him to keep his opponent at a distance and give more force to his blows. As the field resounded with the sound of steel clashing on steel from Michael's constant defence from the aggressive Korth, Bob waited menacingly amidst the pile of bodies of his slain attackers. All who would challenge him had paid a high price and now the remainder of the guard held back in awe and



respect of such a skilled warrior. Bob, devoid of any further opponents, stood at the ready, watching with the others the now almost monotonous attack and defence of his son's battle against the warlord.

From amongst the contingent of trained guardsmen, one young warrior, proudly loyal to his warlord, inched closer to the duelling pair. As Michael stepped backward and within reach of the soldier, the man raised his blade for an assassin's blow. Before the deathly thrust could be delivered, the captain of the guard was there, quickly blocking the young man's attempt with his own sword. The soldier scowled and quietly slipped back amongst the ranks, his plans foiled by his own captain.

The distraction, though slight, was sufficient to break Michael's concentration momentarily. Korth made the most of the opportunity. A sudden slice to his shoulder caused Michael to wince in pain. Korth followed through with a yell of delight and a strong downward blow near to the hilt of Michael's sword, knocking it from his hand and sending it spinning to the ground.

Korth gloated over his victory, prancing defiantly around Michael, screaming his superiority. "I am Korth! Warlord of Gragon! No one can defeat me! This is what happens to all who oppose me. Men of the south, watch and learn before you run back to your caves. I Korth am master and lord. Your would-be hero has been defeated yet again. Now I destroy him before you all!"

Bob tensed, poised and ready to defend his son. At the same time, Mond raced forward, sword raised to strike. This was his opportunity to avenge the humiliation that had been inflicted upon him by Korth years before in the training arena. He had never forgotten it, and the hatred now drove him forward with a cry of defiance. His blow was aimed at the warlord's mid section, but before it reached its mark, Korth easily blocked the blow, retaliating with a deadly strike that dropped Mond instantly.

This was all Michael needed. He rolled to the side and reclaimed his sword, rejoining the fight with renewed fury. So mighty and aggressive were his blows that Korth reeled back in surprise at the deadly onslaught. Korth now was on the defence, but this time not for long. Michael countered high to the left, forcing Korth to raise his sword to counteract the strike. He followed instantly with a stab to the now unprotected side of the warlord, sinking his sword deep into the flesh. Seemingly undaunted, Korth brought his sword down and across, ready for an upward cut, but Michael was ready and reigned a forceful blow down onto Korth's blade. The warlord's sword split in two as Michael's glistening blade sliced through it with ease.

Michael did not hesitate as he moved swiftly to end the battle. Now defenceless, the warlord was no longer a match against the young Nephilim. Michael's upward swing from a rear guard action

sliced deeply across Korth's exposed mid section. Grasping at his wound, his eyes wide with shock, the mighty warlord slumped forward onto his knees before collapsing to the ground with a resounding thud. The battle was over.

Stunned silence permeated the two opposing armies. They watched in disbelief as the seemingly immortal dictator was slain before their eyes. For centuries they had believed that bondage and oppression would never change, but now the enslaver was suddenly removed. The one who could not be defeated had been defeated. Surely only a god could do this.

Murmurings rose up from both sides, each in a state of bewilderment and confusion, waiting for direction. Had they witnessed the death of one dictator only to be replaced by another? Thousands of eyes watched the blonde warrior with interest. What would he do?

Sensing the tension that he had caused, Michael walked up to Pintach, knelt before him and yielded his sword in a gesture understood and joyously received by the men of the south. Pintach raised the sword hilt first above him in a display that proclaimed freedom. A tumultuous roar of jubilation rang out from amongst the southerners.

The warriors of Duandor looked around in uncertainty, hesitant to respond. Finally one member of the elite guard drew his sword and as though he had thrown a switch, over half of these disciplined fighting men simultaneously drew their weapons, ready to advance against the southern army.

Without hesitation, the captain of the guard stepped out, turned and faced his men. "Warriors of Duandor! Put away your weapons! There has been enough blood shed this day. Korth, your master is slain. Let us see an end to fear and control amongst our people. It is time to live in peace. Many of you are a part of this army against your will, due to your forced conscription; to you I say return now to your homes. Those who desire to stay should remain as part of a peacekeeping force, to ensure law and order on our planet. We have no quarrel with the men of the south. I pay homage to the nephilim! I have served the one, now I will serve another if it means living in freedom.

With that the captain bowed low before Michael in humble submission. Michael raised him to his feet before addressing the crowd.

"I did not come to take the place of Korth. I want nothing from this world. My only desire was to see its people set free from bondage. Today I give you your freedom!"

Slowly, cautiously, a wave of celebration and affirmation began to swell throughout the ranks of the fighting men. Peace was restored on Gragon.

The night sky was a glorious mass of sparkling lights as a myriad of stars gave a display unequalled on earth. Michael and Rachael stood together, locked in a romantic embrace, gazing up at the heavens.

“You know it’s hard to contemplate that home is somewhere amongst all of that. I never dreamt I could be in such a place as this, involved in such an adventure. Thank you for rescuing me.” Rachael nestled her head against Michael’s strong shoulder.

“You know I almost couldn’t bring myself to come back here!” Michael confessed, feeling ashamed.

“Yes I know! Your dad told me. But you did and that is all that matters. I know it would not have been easy to face all that you have and I cannot judge your reasons. I only know that you did come, and that you saved my life.”

“I was afraid to fail. I guess I was too proud. I only came because of you!”

Rachael closed her eyes and leant forward to find Michael’s lips with hers. They savoured the moment, lost in their love.

“I hate to interrupt this precious moment,” Bob interjected, walking up behind them, “but the meal Rhonan has prepared is ready. It may be our last one on Gragon.”

“We’re coming!” Michael answered. “You know dad, it is not going to be easy returning to earth to a normal life after this. We can’t even tell anyone where we have been or what we have done. Who would believe us?”

“I have the feeling that we haven’t seen the last of our adventuring days. I believe it is just the beginning.”

“I will miss this place. I have grown fond of the lifestyle here.” Michael lamented. “What did the council decide?”

“No surprises there!” Bob answered. “Pintach was reinstated as governor of Endolith and the captain of the guard is now head chancellor of Duandor, overseeing a new police state. Most of the men of Duandor have returned home. A few renegades apparently headed for the hills, so it looks like the new force in Duandor will have their work cut out for them.”

“You did well Michael!” Bob affirmed. “I am very proud of you!”

“Hey what about you?” laughed Rachael, “You did pretty well yourself!”

I am only grieved that people had to die, but freedom is never won without a high price. We are most fortunate that it was not us who paid that price, this time. Did you hear that Korth’s body disappeared? When they went to retrieve it for burial it was gone. Looks like our alien friends took care of the body for us. But come! We return home tomorrow and we have many farewells to make tonight. They have prepared a feast in honour of a mighty man of valour, or so they tell me, and I do not think they are referring to me.”

“Well, only if you agree to share the accolades. You know dad, we could make a pretty reasonable team.” Michael and Rachael linked arms with Bob and strolled under a starlit sky, towards their waiting and appreciative audience.

