

THE PLANET

A

Novel

Written

by

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CHAPTER 1

A huge space craft approached the outskirts of the solar system. There was a spectacular view of the sun from the ship, millions of miles away.

In the corridors of the space craft, sporadic flashes of light cut the darkness and the structure of the ship trembled. The sound of metal clanking and blasts of vapor filled the air. Stalactites of ice took up the corners of the ceiling. Several chambers of the ship were deserted. It seemed to be malfunctioning, abandoned and drifting in space.

It was four million years before Columbus crossed the Atlantic when this space craft cruised by the small planet of Pluto.

A red light pulsed in the darkness inside the control chamber. A main frame computer seemed to be the only “living” thing aboard. On a screen, there was an image of a bluish planet next to strange symbols from a non-human language processed at high speed as the computer collected data.

The space craft cruised by Neptune. Next it left Uranus behind and gradually approached the

majestic Saturn. On the screen inside the space craft, the image of Saturn was fuzzy.

In a hibernation chamber, jets of vapor, short circuit sparks and stalactites of ice on the ceiling blurred the view of twelve hibernation vaults set at a forty five degree angle against the wall. The cracked transparent cover of the first vault revealed a skeleton of a being, similar to a human skeleton. The shape of the skull indicated it belonged to another species. The second vault was also cracked, with liquid dripping slowly from it. A body in advanced state of decomposition could be seen immersed in the liquid. One by one the next six vaults also revealed dead bodies in different stages of decomposition.

Finally the ninth vault revealed the perfectly preserved body of Wes, a male in his thirties with long blond hair and bearded. His hands had six fingers. The next three vaults also had survivors: Vic, a dark-haired female in her late twenties, an exotic beauty; Tor, a tall, muscular male in his thirties; Uri, a short, bald male in his fifties.

The space craft approached Jupiter. Slowly the immense planet was left behind. In the control chamber, the computer processed information at high speed. Additional instruments were activated and soon the whole chamber lit up. Sparks from a short circuit in a panel shut down some instruments. The planet Mars could soon be seen from a window. The space craft cruised by Mars.

On the screen in the control chamber, a distant blue planet was the object of the analysis. The

image was sequentially enlarged, revealing the planet in detail: Earth.

In the corridors, lights turned on consecutively. Some didn't work, some blinked, malfunctioning. Sparks briefly illuminated dark corners. In the hibernation chamber, the room was partially lit. A control panel on the wall processed information. There were twelve red columns on a screen. Eight were steady, four pulsated.

The liquid was drained from the vaults. Wes' wet body lied steady for a moment. Suddenly his eyes opened. In another vault, the opened eyes of a dead body, partially putrefied, reveal terror before death. Vic's naked body moved. She opened her eyes.

Outside the scorching sun shined in the distance as the space craft headed to Earth.

CHAPTER 2

Wes, Vic, Tor and Uri showered naked as if the jets of water were bringing them back to life. Vic's nudity seemed natural for the other male crew members and vice-versa. They dried themselves in circular jets of vapor next to the showers.

In the dormitory, a circular chamber, there was no room for privacy. There were several cylindrical beds coming out of the wall next to a closet. Tor and Vic got dressed. Wes' bed and closet were bigger than the others and placed on a higher deck. He put on a fancier uniform, opened a small box and took out a badge showing three triangles above three semi-circles.

Uri, already dressed, entered the room. He was perspiring, outraged, trying to contain his anger. Tor and Vic stared as he kicked open a closet door and threw everything out. Wes was impassive. He put on his commander badge.

“Twenty five cycles,” complained Uri.

“What?!” questioned Tor, surprised.

“We left behind the point of return,” said Vic, outraged.

“We have crossed the boundaries of the known universe,” added Wes.

“In our coffin,” replied Uri.

“We can turn around and take our chances”, suggested Tor.

“There's no return possible. Dox has set our course,” said Wes.

“To where? There's no life out there,” said Uri.

“We should return now,” demanded Vic.

“Trespassing the point of return is a violation of our contract. It's a violation of Urizen's code of space exploration. Were you aware of Dox's directive program?” asked Tor to Wes.

“I want everyone in the control chamber,” said Wes, as he left the room.

“I don't trust him,” said Vic.

“I don't trust Dox or any machine. I could have been one of the dead,” said Tor.

“Maybe you should've been. I need my other engineer not security personnel,” said Uri.

“We need to set a course of return immediately,” concluded Vic.

“We'll override Dox after we fix the ship,” added Uri.

In the control chamber, Wes stared at a screen. Dox's red light pulsated nearby. The computer processed information.

Uri entered the chamber. “I need a summary of the ship's damages.”

“I'm waiting for a report on the time frame and level of exposure of the planet to the energy source,” said Wes.

Uri looked at the screen showing the image of Earth. “There's no life out there,” he said.

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“This planet’s distance to its star is proportional to ours,” argued Wes.

“That means nothing,” replied Uri.

“The question is how long it has been exposed to this level of energy,” concluded Wes.

Tor and Vic entered the chamber. They approached the screen and stared in silence at the beautiful blue planet.

“Why did Dox cross the point of return?” asked Vic.

“You're looking at the reason,” said Wes.

“What about the others? What about our lives?” complained Vic.

“This is a violation of Urizen's code,” repeated Tor.

“I have a family,” added Uri.

“You might be witnessing the most important moment in the history of space navigation. The code was written by law makers with no spirit of adventure,” said Wes.

“Dox suspended the live support of the other eight crew members,” said Vic.

“He had a high potential target. Dox is programmed to ration our energy, water and food supply. There might be life in that planet,” explained Wes.

“We should override Dox,” disagreed Uri.

“And return,” added Vic.

“I want a complete reading of Dox's directive program,” demanded Tor.

“I'm the commander and chief scientist. You are my crew. A doctor, an engineer and a soldier that talk too much. That planet is our only chance of

survival. We will do what I say. We will follow Dox's directive program. It's our best chance," concluded Wes. They stared at the screen showing planet Earth.

The space craft flew in the direction of Earth. Inside the space craft, in the dining room, the four crew members devoured everything on a table filled with bland, processed food.

"I never thought there would be a day I'd enjoy this garbage," said Tor.

Uri looks at Wes, concerned but fearful of saying anything.

"Still tastes like garbage to me," said Vic.

"We won't reach a stable orbit. We need to override Dox if we want to save this ship," tried Uri.

Wes continued to eat unconcerned. Tor stared at him.

"We want the password to access Dox's directive program," said Tor to Wes who continued eating unconcerned.

"That planet will be our burial ground if we don't do something," insisted Uri.

Wes exploded sweeping off the table with the plates of food.

"There's no energy left for this ship!" yelled Wes.

"There's enough for a five-cycle journey. Maybe another exploration vessel will find us," explained Uri.

"This is my ship. You want to know Dox's directive program? All the energy left will be used to propel the rescuer," said Wes.

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“No rescuer has ever returned to Urizen. We stand a better chance in the mother ship,” disagreed Uri.

“The rescuer will deliver the location of this planet. More vessels will one day join us,” added Wes.

“Let's take a vote,” suggested Vic.

“I'm in command, doctor,” said Wes.

“Urizen's space code is clear, commander. Dox took us beyond the point of return. You're the only one with access to Dox's directive program,” said Tor.

“There's life out there! Do you realize what this means? Life beyond Urizen. A new world,” insisted Wes.

“What about our lives commander? What about our families?” asked Vic.

“This planet's gravity can give us a good swing for the return propulsion,” said Uri.

Tor put a weapon on the table and stared at Wes. “You're no longer in command,” he said.

Wes paused for a moment. “You can decide whatever you want after the funeral. The ship is yours, soldier.” He stood up and put his commander badge on the table.

Uri and Vic looked at each other, relieved.

“I hate funerals. I've seen too many,” said Uri.

“Funerals should remind us how precious life is,” said Vic.

“Reminds me I could be next,” added Uri.

“This was a one-way ticket, my friends. That planet is our destiny. We are alive. They are dead.

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It's that simple. We'll join them some day,"
concluded Wes. He then left the control chamber.

CHAPTER 3

In the space shuttle chamber, Uri, Vic and Tor stood in front of eight metal cylinders lined up on a track. There was a space shuttle docked behind them. Wes pressed a button and joined the others. One by one the metal cylinders ran down the track into a compartment. A door sealed the compartment and the cylinder was ejected into space. One by one the cylinders spun into space.

The space craft was now closer to Earth. Wes looked into a periscope-like instrument. Vic approached. “Don't you miss home?” she asked.

“Never seen anything like it. Urizen’s atmosphere isn’t that perfect,” said Wes.

“Uri is working on Dox.”

“It's useless. Even with my password.”

Disappointed, Vic left the room.

In an inclined microchip tunnel, Uri, tired and sweating, examined small computer components with an instrument. He plugged a terminal into the mainframe computer and entered a password on a keypad with strange symbols.

In the space shuttle chamber, Wes examined a small space craft probe. On the bottom of it there was a spherical camera.

In the inclined tunnel, Uri replaced a microchip. He turned the terminal back on and received a powerful electric discharge. Uri slid down the tunnel unconscious.

Wes was working on the probe as the lights shut off. Walking down the dark corridors with a flashlight strapped on his chest, Wes turned into another corridor and found another beam of light.

“I see you're not dead,” said Wes.

“Where are the others?” replied Vic.

They looked at each other in the darkness. She was intimidated by his look.

“You can't override or shut down Dox. Power will return soon,” said Wes.

Outside, the space craft was approaching Earth. Inside, in the dark corridors, Tor pulled Uri out of the tunnel.

“I'm okay,” said Uri, still dizzy.

Two light beams approached from down the corridor as Uri tried to stand up.

“Relax. Let Vic take a look at you,” said Tor.

“I said I'm fine,” repeated Uri, as Wes and Vic joined them.

“What happened?” asked Vic.

“We can't override Dox. We need to destroy the rescuer, and make Dox create a new directive,” explained Uri.

The light returned. Wes was doubtful. “It won't work,” he said.

Tor tried to walk away, but Wes grabbed his arm. With incredible ability Tor twisted Wes' arm and threw him to the floor.

Tor disappeared down the corridor. Uri followed him. Wes agonized on the floor.

Vic stared, mesmerized, through a huge window in the corridor, at a clear view of planet Earth. Wes got up and joined her.

“It’s pulsating life,” said Wes.

“Beautiful,” said Vic.

In the space shuttle chamber, Tor pounded the controls of a small space craft with a huge hammer, destroying it.

Uri connected a terminal into a main frame connector. He typed on a keypad and laughed.

“It's working! Dox is confused.”

Wes entered the chamber. He stared at the destroyed controls of the rescuer spacecraft.

“Fools. The rescuer was your only chance.”

“Wrong. You were our only problem,” replied Uri.

Wes pushed the probe with a spherical camera onto a track and locked it into position. He walked to a control panel.

“What are you doing?” asked Tor. Vic entered the chamber.

“The probe will go down to the planet's surface,” finally answered Wes.

Tor looked at Uri. “The probe's energy consumption is insignificant,” said Uri.

Wes moved a lever and the probe slid into a hatch. “This planet is our only chance.”

“Your only chance. We're going home,” said Uri.

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“What's down there?” asked Vic to Wes.
“We’ll soon find out.”

CHAPTER 4

In the engine chamber, Uri worked on one of two huge cylindrical engines with a terminal connected into the main frame system.

Outside, the small probe separated from the huge space craft. Suddenly a rocket-propeller ignited and the probe flew towards the immense blue planet. Some of the continental land could be seen.

The huge space craft orbited Earth as the probe disappeared, plunging into the atmosphere.

In the control chamber, Wes and Vic stared at a screen.

Tor entered the chamber. “We're in control! Dox allowed the recharging of the mother ship's engines. But Uri said they're in bad shape.”

“Those engines will never reach propulsion status,” warned Wes.

“You're not an engineer. And there's nothing down there,” replied Tor.

On the screen there were no images. Just black.

Like a comet, the probe cut Earth's atmosphere at an incredible speed leaving a tail of flame behind.

Back in the space craft, Wes checked the readings on a panel. “It won't stand the heat much

longer,” he said, as Vic and Tor stared at the screen.

Uri entered the chamber. “We might not reach a stable orbit with one engine.”

“This ship is a coffin. I'm going down,” said Wes.

Uri checked the instruments for the probe next to Wes. “It’s over. Your toy melted down.”

“It’s in!” said Vic.

On the screen, a fuzzy image appeared for a second. They all stared at the screen.

On Earth, the probe dived through the clouds as the view of the ocean below gradually cleared. It dived at an incredible speed towards the ocean when suddenly metal wing blades opened and the probe’s diving angle gradually decreased. Finally the probe cruised above the immense clear blue ocean.

Back on the space craft, a fuzzy image appeared on the screen for a second. Wes moved a control lever trying to bring back the image. “It didn’t melt down,” he said excited.

“I saw something,” said Vic.

“Water...” said Tor.

“I didn’t see anything,” said Uri.

“Water,” repeated Vic.

On the screen, the image of the ocean became clearer. Some sporadic bursts of interference cut the screen. Wes stared closely at the screen.

“Water. The cradle of life,” he said mesmerized.

Down on Earth, land could be seen far away as the probe cruised at high speed above the ocean water.

On a beach in front of a cliff, different species of bird filled the air. Some returned to their nests on the cliff rocks. A gigantic turtle slowly lumbered across the white sand. The probe hovered above the beach, slowly descending to the sand.

Back in the space craft, Wes, Tor and Vic were mesmerized by the images.

Uri, finally taken by the delightful curiosity of the others, got closer to the image of the gigantic turtle. "Looks like a seatank from my homeland."

"The water and the air have a chemical composition similar to that of Urizen," said Wes.

"How could that happen?" asked Tor.

"This planet has a level of exposure to the source of energy similar to Urizen. It's the key to a pattern of chemical reactions leading to life forms. Our star is bigger, but our planet is further away from it," explained Wes.

At the beach, the probe slowly took off vertically and hovered in front of the bird nests on the cliff rocks.

It arrived at the top of the cliff. In front, there was a sea of green: A dense forest extending to the horizon. Several huge wild boars grazed near the edge of the cliff. All of a sudden they ran into the forest. A loud roar came from inside the dark forest. The probe flew to where the sound came from, over the forest, close to the tree tops.

On the screen, back at the space craft, there was an infra-red image of a lion-like animal running through the forest as the probe followed it.

"What a terrifying roar," said Vic.

"A hungry predator," said Tor.

“We have to go down. I want to see it with my own eyes,” said Wes

“I’ll pass on that,” said Uri.

“We’re losing it,” said Wes.

Flying close to the tree tops, the probe's left blade wing hit a tree branch, spinning out of control and plunging into the forest.

At the space craft, the crew members stared in dismay at the black screen.

In the forest, the animal came to a stop. Sunlight penetrating the dark forest illuminated the wild cat: an enormous saber tooth lion with its huge sharp fangs sticking out.

Nearby, a group of animals gathered at a forest clearing: cannibal ape-men, furious and dangerous creatures, looking like a cross between a furious human and a furious baboon. They tore apart and devour an animal.

The animal satisfying their hunger was an ape-man of a different race: the X ape-man. The features of this race were a cross between a peaceful human and a peaceful chimpanzee. It was still alive.

A cannibal ape-man struck the X ape-man in the head with his fist. Plunging his fingers into the X ape-man's eye, another cannibal ape-man took it out and ate it as a delicacy. The other terrified eye of the X ape-man lost the last sign of life. The cannibal ape-men continue the feast with blood dripping from their mouths.

In the forest, the saber tooth lion approached the clearing. One of the cannibal ape-men sniffed the air, suspiciously. All of a sudden the saber tooth

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lion bursts from the forest and jumped on one of the cannibal ape-men. The others ran into the forest. The saber tooth lion tighten its jaws on the cannibal ape-man's neck as he fought desperately for his life. The saber tooth lion held on to its prey which finally succumbed to death. A saber tooth lioness joined the feast accompanied by her cubs. They devoured the cannibal ape-man and the X ape-man.

CHAPTER 5

In the corridors of the space craft, everything trembled. In the engine chamber, Uri desperately examined a panel of exposed microchips, hanging next to the top of one of two huge cylindrical engines. Worried, Tor observed him from below.

In the control chamber, Wes checked a control panel. “The orbit is unstable. We’re closing in,” said Wes into a communicator.

In the shuttle chamber, Vic loaded the shuttle with additional supplies. The trembling of the space craft increased. She lost her balance and fell to the floor.

In the engine chamber, Uri held on to the cylindrical engine-rocket as the space craft trembled. Tor stood below talking on the communicator. “We must evacuate the ship. The shuttle is ready,” he said to Uri.

“We still have time. I’m staying,” replied Uri.

“I’m going down,” said Tor.

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“This ship is our only chance,” repeated Uri as he continued his work testing microchip panels with an instrument, one by one.

The space craft drifted in a low orbit. Earth’s continental plates could be clearly seen.

Down in the plains, different animal species grazed and wandered around the beautiful scenery of the “paradise” planet.

Up in space, in the craft’s shuttle chamber Wes helped Vic load a container into the shuttle. Tor entered the chamber carrying weapons.

“We’re not going to a war. We’ve just found paradise,” said Wes.

“There’s no such place. Either we’ll be predators or prey,” replied Tor.

“Where’s Uri? He didn’t take the immunization shots,” said Vic.

“He still thinks he can fix the engines,” said Tor.

“Maybe I should stay with him,” added Vic.

“You’re a doctor not an engineer,” said Wes.

“You really don’t care if we ever return home?” asked Vic.

“I wouldn’t risk my life for it,” said Wes.

“Neither would I. And neither will you. By the book we evacuate now,” added Tor.

“Uri can still make it in the survival capsule,” said Wes.

“If he doesn’t, he doesn’t,” concluded Tor as he loaded the weapons into the shuttle. The space craft’s trembling increased.

In the engine chamber, inside a narrow tunnel, Uri unscrewed a panel. Below him Earth’s continental plates could be seen through a window.

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Freezing, he illuminated the panel with a flashlight: It was completely cluttered with ice and rust.

In the other chamber, the shuttle was being placed on the launching tracks as the space craft shook terribly.

CHAPTER 6

The space craft roamed in a low orbit around Earth. Only one of two engines worked. The shuttle finally left the huge space craft and plunged into Earth's atmosphere.

In the space shuttle, Wes, Tor and Vic trembled in their seats as the shuttle entered the Earth's atmosphere at an incredible speed.

Cutting through the planet's atmosphere, the shuttle left a tail of fire behind.

Down in the ocean, a gigantic whale floated in the calm waters.

Inside the space shuttle, the three passengers, sweating and tense, held on to their seats. Wes was confident, Vic frightened and Tor desperate.

The shuttle cut the sky at an incredible speed, going down to the ocean. It gradually leveled off, reaching a horizontal trajectory and cruising above the ocean waters, passing by several whales .

Inside the space shuttle, Tor laughed wildly, relieved. Vic took a deep breath. Wes was fascinated with the outside view.

“This was the toughest entry I've ever had,” said Vic.

“You haven't seen much then. This was easy,” said Tor.

Wes stared out the window, mesmerized. “I've never seen anything like this... blue water... blue sky... Urizen was never this beautiful...”

The shuttle cruised over the ocean and gained altitude as it approached land. There was a high cliff in front of the ocean. Huge waves slammed into the wall of rock.

The shuttle cruised over a forest, then over open plains, flying over a mammoth and a herd of running buffalo.

Wes, Vic and Tor stared out the shuttle's window as it hovered over a clearing next to a waterfall of a crystal clear creek.

At the waterfall clearing, a deer drinking water ran into the forest, scared, as the shuttle hovered over the clearing and reached the ground. The engine was turned off.

A side hatch opened. Wes came out, feeling the sun rays on his face. Kneeling on the ground, he grabbed a handful of dirt as if it were gold.

Vic stepped out, taken by emotion. “It's beautiful...” she murmured.

Tor looked around laughing and fascinated. He approached the creek. “Water!” he shouted to the others and jumped into the crystal clear water of the creek. Vic joined him in the water.

Wes looked around exploding in curiosity. A huge eagle cruising the sky grabbed his attention. “Look at that creature.”

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Vic and Tor splashed water like little kids. Wes walked to the creek and scooped up the “precious” liquid with his hand. Vic and Tor pulled him into the water.

In the forest, a deer watched the “bizarre creatures” having fun in the water.

Way above in orbit, one of the space craft turbines worked at low power. Suddenly the second turned on at full power and went back off.

In the engine chamber, in front of the control panel, Uri moved a lever slowly.

Outside, both the space craft’s turbines turned on at full power. The space craft gained speed in its low orbit around Earth. But not for long. One of the turbines exploded. Both shut down. The space craft slowly drifted in space.

The engine chamber was on fire. Uri put out the fire with an extinguisher. The corridors were now inclined. Uri walked at a fast pace as the space craft trembled terribly. He tripped, fell and got back on his feet. Earth’s continental plates could be clearly seen through the corridor window.

Down on Earth, at the waterfall clearing, it was night. Wes and Vic sat around a camp fire. Wes stared at the stars.

Vic looked up. “Which one is ours?”

“I don’t know. I can’t see it,” said Wes. He pointed to the Capricorn constellation. “That’s the Riz constellation... My wife died on a planet near the second star of Riz... We were part of a mining expedition...”

“You survived Riz? Amazing. Do you think we’re ever going home?”

“No,” answered Wes immersed in the view of the stars.

“You’re supposed to say yes,” said Vic, disappointed.

Tor came out of the shuttle. “Nothing. We lost contact,” he told Wes.

“He has our location.”

“He’ll be fine,” added Vic.

There were different animal sounds coming from the dark forest. “I’m concerned about us,” said Tor as he stared at the dark forest.

“They’re afraid of fire,” said Wes.

“How can you be so sure,” said Vic as the noise of cracking wood coming from nearby made them apprehensive.

In the dark forest, an X ape-man stared curiously at the space ship and crew members standing around the campfire.

Wes took a torch from the fire and walked towards the forest as Vic and Tor watched.

“Come back, Wes!” shouted Vic.

“I’m not taking chances with any predators” said Tor, picking up a gun. “I’m sleeping inside with one of these.” Tor walked back to the shuttle. Vic followed him.

Looking curiously into the forest, Wes couldn’t see anything and returned to the campfire.

CHAPTER 7

The space craft drifted sideways in a very low orbit. It was closing in.

The shuttle chamber was totally inclined. The walls trembled towards destruction as Uri struggled to board a survival space capsule.

The space craft plunged into Earth's atmosphere. The fuselage steamed with the heat. Friction with the air made a tail of fire.

The capsule left the space craft, diving into the atmosphere at a less inclined angle.

The space craft dove in a ball of fire. It cruised the night sky filled with stars and a full moon.

Down in the dark forest, the immense ball of fire hit the ground, opening a trail of destruction through the dense forest.

The forest burned around the clearing opened by the space craft, illuminating the night.

The next day, the sun rose in "paradise." There was wild life everywhere.

The sun rays reflected from a silver object in the green tree tops. Uri's survival capsule, badly damaged, was entangled with a silver parachute.

Inside the capsule, Uri was unconscious.

Back at the waterfall clearing, Wes collected samples of the soil while Vic took a bath under the waterfall, naked. Wes looked at her for a moment.

Carrying a powerful high-tech gun, Tor exited the space shuttle. "I'll secure the surroundings."

"There's nothing to secure. Wild life is unpredictable," said Wes.

In the tree tops of the forest, Uri, still dizzy, came out of the capsule with difficulty. Evaluating the situation for a moment, he tried to get down but lost his balance, taking a terrible dive to the ground, hitting branches.

He slowly recovered. The head of a huge python, sleeping under leaves, made him get quickly back on his feet. Scared, he retreated, staring at the python which was digesting its last meal: a huge animal in its belly.

Uri checked a locator instrument, a high tech compass with a red dot flashing on a small screen, as he limped across the forest.

At the waterfall clearing, Vic took a deep breath as she contemplated the "discovered paradise."

Wes walked out of the shuttle. "A capsule was launched before mother ship's destruction. I have a signal."

"Uri's all right. I know it," said Vic.

"He might be injured."

A blast came from the forest: a mixture of a gun shot with a short circuit sound of electricity.

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“Tor,” said Vic.

“I’m following the signal.”

Tor came out of the forest dragging a wild boar.

“Look at the fangs on this predator.”

“You’re the only danger around here,” said Wes.

“We have a signal from Uri,” Vic told Tor.

“You two stay here. I’m following the signal,” said Wes.

“Nobody goes anywhere alone. I’m going with you,” said Tor.

“I’m not staying here by myself,” said Vic as she followed Wes and Tor into the forest.

Miles away, Uri walked through the woods. There was a sound of branches and wood cracking far behind him. He stopped, looked back and started running. A group of wild animals ran in pursuit. They couldn’t be clearly identified.

Uri reached a clearing, exhausted. The wild animals were the cannibal ape-men. They stared at Uri in the clearing. Frightened, Uri stared at the cannibal ape-men coming out of the forest from every direction. He didn’t move. The cannibal ape-men closed in, confident they've got their prey.

Uri tried to run into the forest. A cannibal ape-man knocked him down. He avoided a ferocious bite from a second one and escaped into the forest. The cannibal ape-men screamed and chased their prey.

Wes, followed by Vic and Tor, reached the top of a hill, facing a sea of green covering the land all the way to a group of mountains in the distance.

Wes checked on an instrument similar to Uri's locator. “He stopped moving.”

“He must be resting,” said Vic.

“Or dead,” added Tor as he looked through high-tech binoculars: a group of mammoths grazed near a lagoon. “Take a look at those creatures.”

“Fascinating,” said Wes.

“We’re wasting time,” said Vic.

Wes, Tor and Vic walked through the forest.

Wes checked the locator instrument. “He’s close.”

Vic shouted, “Uri!”

“Uri!” repeated Tor. “You lousy stupid engineer.”

They reached the clearing where Uri was earlier.

Wes found Uri's locator.

Tor approached. “He dropped the locator. Couldn’t expect anything else.”

Examining the ground, Wes picked up some fur fibers. “There were creatures in this area.”

Investigating the surroundings, Vic kneeled to the ground. “Wes. Tor.” There was blood on the ground. Wes and Tor approach. “Blood. He must be injured,” she added.

Holding up his gun, Tor examined the branches leading back to the forest. “He's being pursued by a hungry hoard of beasts.”

Wes found a trail of blood leading into the forest. Walking at a fast pace, Wes, Tor and Vic followed the trail of blood.

They reached a clearing next to a tree where there was a huge puddle of blood. Vic was horrified. Tor was angry, ready for revenge.

Wes found the continuation of the trail of blood. This time it was unmistakable, as if a bloody

carcass had been dragged through the forest. They carefully followed the blood.

Next to a tree, a cannibal ape-man with a bloody mouth ate something. He sniffed the air suspiciously.

Wes, Tor and Vic stared at the cannibal ape-man who screamed, threatening. Tor blew him away with his gun.

“Don’t!” shouted Wes.

“This isn’t time for scientific investigations,” said Tor as Wes kneeled beside the cannibal ape-man and Vic stared at the shot species who resembled their own.

“Remarkably similar,” said Wes. He held the cannibal ape-man’s hand.

“Five fingers,” noted Vic.

Tor picked up what the cannibal ape-man was eating: a six fingered hand similar to his own.

“This one has six.”

Vic was very upset. “He didn’t want to come...” Wes comforted her.

Tor found the continuation of the trail of blood. “There are others. I’ll take care of them.”

“They’re just following their instinct for survival,” said Wes.

“So am I.” Tor followed the trail, gun in hand, ready to shoot.

A group of cannibal ape-men came out of the forest in front of a river. One carried Uri's bloody carcass. They drank water.

On the other side of the river, a bigger group of X ape-men, males, females and offspring, ate fruit.

The males rushed to the river screaming, slamming their fists on the ground, threatening their enemies on the other side of the river not to dare come closer. The females took their young ones into the forest.

The cannibal ape-men, outnumbered and already carrying a prey, weren't up to a fight. They screamed back but slowly moved away alongside the river.

Tor came out of the forest and gunned down the cannibal ape-men.

The X ape-men, on the other side, backed off scared.

Wes and Vic reached the river. Fascinated, Wes watched the other race of ape-men fleeing into the forest.

Tor stared at Uri's bloody carcass, next to the dead cannibal ape-men. "You don't want to see this," he said as Vic approached.

Vic looked anyway, horrified. A cannibal ape-man moved, grabbing her leg. Tor finished him off.

"Killing them, won't bring Uri back," said Wes.

"I'm worried about us."

"Please, don't worry about me. This is a scientific expedition. No more killings, unless it's in self defense."

"That's exactly what I'm doing. There are more on the other side ready to eat us for lunch."

On the other side of the river, hiding behind the vegetation, frightened X ape-men stared at the "powerful strangers."

Wes walked into the river and swam to the other side.

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“Where does he think he’s going?”

“He can take care of himself,” said Vic.

“I’m sure that Uri could too.”

Vic covered Uri's body with leaves and branches.

“Uri spent most of his life inside a starship. Wes was at Riz. His wife died there.”

“And he'll be next.”

“Compared to Riz this is paradise.”

“Death is the same anywhere,” concluded Tor.

On the other side of the river, Wes examined the remains of fruit that the X ape-men were eating.

CHAPTER 8

At the waterfall clearing, it was night when Wes and Tor placed Uri's body on a pile of wood.

Wrapping a small green branch and a flower in a piece of white cloth, Vic placed it on the body.

Tor lit the fire. They stared in silence as the flames consumed Uri's body.

Moments later, Wes, Tor and Vic sat around the campfire in silence. A wolf howled. Tor threw wood in the fire.

“Those creatures remind me of the katagas of Urizen,” said Vic, breaking the silence.

“We evolved from the katagas,” added Wes.

“Maybe you did. Not me,” said Tor.

“I’m talking about science.”

“I believe the scriptures. The founders of Urizen came from the sky.”

“I’m going back to that river tomorrow,” said Wes, changing the subject.

“I’m going with you,” said Vic.

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“We’re staying on this planet a long time. We should secure the perimeter with a security fence,” suggested Tor.

“...Forever ...That’s how long,” murmured Vic.

“Perhaps you are right. We can use the waterfall as a source of energy,” said Wes.

“I’m right! It’s good to hear that from you at least once in a lifetime.”

The next day at the waterfall clearing, Vic helped Wes lift a pole and place it into a hole. Tor connected two poles with a silver web. They were building an electric fence around the camp.

“I don’t like the idea of living in a cage,” said Vic.

“Perhaps you would like to be free and dead,” said Tor.

“I’m returning to that river as soon as we’re done. I’m also planning to go to those mountains we saw yesterday,” said Wes.

“Suit yourself. I’m shooting down any katagas in sight.”

“The ones I saw on the other side were eating fruit.”

“That’ll be their desert after they have you for lunch.”

“I’m going with you,” said Vic to Wes.

At the top of the waterfall, one kataga, or X ape-man, watches the “strangers.” He picked up some fruit and left.

Tor placed a device under the waterfall. It had several spoon-like spears around an axle. The water

propelled them turning a generator and creating electricity.

Red lights on top of the fence poles lit up. Wes touched the fence rapidly, receiving a shock.

“It’ll scare any predator,” said Vic.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” said Wes.

Tor jumped into the water as Wes packed a bag for his exploration expedition. Tor approached, soaked. “Relax, Wes. The katagas aren’t going anywhere.”

“Maybe we should go some other day,” said Vic.

“You can do whatever you want. I’ll be all right,” said Wes as he left the camp. Vic followed him.

Tor relaxed for a moment. He dried off, put his clothes back on, grabbed a gun and followed the first two into the forest.

Wes, Vic and Tor walked through the forest. Wes kneeled next to a tree. Giant ants devoured a dead bird. He picked up one of the ants with tweezers and placed it in a small container.

“These small creatures are everywhere. I thought we were after the katagas,” said Tor.

“This is a different species. The last one had wings.”

“Stop calling them katagas. They are not. Perhaps we should name them,” said Vic.

“X. They’re the evolutionary counterpart of the katagas,” said Wes.

“They’re our enemies if we’re planning to survive on this planet,” said Tor.

“They’re an irrational species. We’re not. This is their planet.”

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“Irrationality is something they have in common with you, Tor,” concluded Vic.

Buffaloes grazed on a hill as Wes, Vic and Tor exited the forest. The buffalo ran away.

“They think we’re predators,” said Wes.

“Look at all that fruit,” said Vic.

Wes walked to a tree filled with fruit, took one, examined it, smelled it and took a bite.

“Are you crazy?” said Tor.

“The Xs were eating this fruit. If they can eat it so can we.”

“If this is their source of food they might be around,” noted Vic.

“We and everything that moves are their source of food,” added Tor.

They sat on the grass, eating the fruit and resting. A buffalo came out of the forest.

“Poor animal. They left him behind,” said Vic as she walked slowly towards the buffalo. All of a sudden it ran away.

Ahead, a saber tooth lion darted out of the forest and knocked the defenseless animal to the ground.

Vic retreated. Tor pointed his gun to shoot down the lion but Wes held him. Tor pushed Wes to the ground and opened fire, killing the lion.

“Sometimes the best defense is to attack,” bragged Tor.

“I’m the commander of this expedition.”

“You were, remember? I’m in charge of security” Tor approaches Vic. “Are you okay?”

Vic ignored him and helped Wes get up.

“You sure scared every living thing in this area,” said Wes to Tor.

Later that night, Wes, Tor and Vic sat around the campfire. Vic stared at the stars. Tor reassembled one of his guns. Wes wrote on a small laptop computer that had only a dozen keystrokes with non-human symbols.

“Don’t waste your time. We’re never getting out of here,” said Tor.

“Maybe these notes will.”

Noise of branches breaking and trees falling came from the forest. The tree tops moved as something huge went through the jungle.

At the waterfall clearing, Tor, Wes and Vic stood apprehensively as a mammoth came out of the forest.

Wes held Tor’s gun. “He’s just after water.”

The mammoth walked to the river. A second came out of the forest closer to the camp fence. It rubbed against the fence receiving an electric shock. The mammoth cried out furiously.

“We should hide in the shuttle,” suggested Vic.

Tor aimed his gun as both mammoths approached threateningly and walked right through the fence.

Wes and Vic retreated to the shuttle. Tor fired. One mammoth went down. The other mammoth charged furiously. Others came out of the forest. Tor ran and jumped in the river.

The mammoths completely destroyed the fencing around the camp. The electric shocks made them even more furious.

One mammoth attacked the shuttle and turned it over. Wes got out of the shuttle and led the mammoth away from it.

Vic got out of the shuttle and ran to the waterfall, climbing the rocks to the top.

One mammoth pursued Wes into the river. He joined Tor on the other side.

They climbed the waterfall rocks joining Vic at the top. The mammoths calmed down and took over the camp.

The next day, at the top of the waterfall, the sun rised as Vic and Tor slept on the ground while Wes stood guard with the gun.

He carefully looked down at the camp. The mammoth were still there, resting. The injured mammoth lied still.

Wes stared at Vic for a moment. An insect crawled up her body. Wes carefully removed it. She moved sideways, sound asleep. He caressed her face.

A mammoth cry made him turn back to the edge of the waterfall.

At the waterfall clearing, the mammoths slowly returned to the forest following the trail they had opened. The injured one was left behind.

At the top of the waterfall, Wes woke up Tor and Vic. "Time to wake up."

Tor's back ached. "I need a real bed."

"The long-nose creatures are gone," said Wes.

"I hope the shuttle is okay," said Vic.

They slowly walked down the rocks next to the waterfall.

The camp was filled with mammoth excrement.
The shuttle was turned over.

Wes and Vic checked the injured mammoth. It was almost dead.

“I need my medical equipment,” said Vic as Wes examined the overturned shuttle.

Tor examined the wrecked fence. “I can’t fix this.”

Wes hooked a cable to the top of the overturned shuttle. “Let’s turn the shuttle upright.”

“I hope we can fly away from here. This place stinks.”

“The shuttle is made of an alloy that's light but very strong,” said Wes as he and Tor turned the shuttle back on its base.

Inside the shuttle everything was messed up. Wes checked the instruments. They were working. He grabbed a metal medical case and exited.

Outside, Vic quickly took an injection gun from the medical case and shot at the mammoth’s skull.

“His heart has stopped,” said Vic.

Wes and Tor observed as the mammoth’s eyes bulged and then closed.

“We should have treated him yesterday,” said Wes.

“Tell that to his friends,” said Tor.

“He’s gone. Nothing I can do,” said Vic.

Wes looked at the sky. Vultures circled in the air.
“Let’s get out of here.”

“We finally agree on something,” said Tor.

“We should burn the carcass,” said Vic.

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Wes stared apprehensively at the forest. A pack of huge wolves with long hair had smelled the fresh carcass. “No sudden moves,” he said.

Tor realized that his gun was next to the shuttle. Other wolves stood in front of the shuttle. They growled threateningly.

“The river,” said Vic.

“Slowly,” said Wes.

A vulture landed on the dead mammoth, scaring Vic.

The wolves attacked. Wes, Tor and Vic ran to the river and jumped in. Some wolves followed them down the stream but soon gave up, returning to the banquet where the wolves devoured the dead mammoth.

CHAPTER 9

Wes, Vic and Tor floated down the river. Wes swam to the shore followed by Vic and Tor. They rested on the riverside. Wes started to laugh.

“What’s so funny? We almost got killed. Twice,” said Tor.

“You should’ve seen your face when you saw you didn’t have your weapon,” said Wes.

“I’ve got to get it back.”

“All these creatures are irrational. We have the best and most dangerous weapon,” said Wes pointing to his brain.

It started to drizzle. Wes stood and helped Vic get up. “I’m not sleeping outside again,” she said.

“We’ll do just like our ancestors. Back to the caves,” said Wes.

“Now I know how it must have felt to be a kataga, fighting to survive,” said Tor.

“There must be caves in the mountains we saw the other day,” added Wes.

“The camp should be clear by tomorrow,” concluded Tor.

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Vic reached in her boot and took out a cylindrical object. “We still got some protection.”

Tor took it and turned it on. It was a red laser beam blade knife. He turned it back off and put it in his belt. The rain poured.

They ran into the forest. The rain fell through the tree tops as Wes, Tor and Vic walked fast.

In the middle of bushes behind a big tree, a group of X apemen huddle close to each other, rain drops hitting their faces. They patiently waited.

At the mountain the rain was still intense. Wes, Tor and Vic were soaked and exhausted.

Wes examined a rocky formation several feet up the mountain. “There!” he shouted. Tor and Vic followed Wes up the mountain. Vic slipped. Tor helped her.

They reached the rocky formations. There was a tight entrance to a cave. Wes carefully examined the entrance. “The cave might be taken.”

Tor took out his laser knife. “I’m sure they’ll excuse us.” Tor entered. Wes and Vic followed.

Inside the cave, the laser beam barely allowed them to see in the darkness. They sat near the entrance.

“I’ll secure the area.” Tor walked into the darkness holding the laser beam ahead of him.

Vic hugged her knees, freezing. Wes got closer and held her. “This’ll keep us warm. Tor! find something dry we can burn.”

Tor stopped. Near his feet there was a den where lion cubs were asleep and unnoticed. The cave seemed very deep.

Tor returned. "I can heat up the rocks," he said as he plunged the laser beam knife in a rock. It soon turns red from the heat. They all got close to the rock.

"How much energy is left?" asked Wes.

Tor looked at the knife's handle. "Not much."

They waited in silence as the rain continued to pour outside.

Fighting the rain, a saber tooth lion dragged a dead infant X ape-man covered with blood up the mountain. It stopped, suddenly alert, dropping its prey.

Inside the cave, Wes relaxed. "I feel like a kataga. This is life. Not what we had back home."

"I would rather be in the sand dunes of Thyhui," said Tor.

"Why did you volunteer?" asked Vic.

"For the money of course."

"Money you can't spend isn't money," noted Wes.

"My family will spend it for me."

"We're the discoverers of a new world. No one has ever seen what we've seen," said Wes.

The mother saber tooth lion appeared at the entrance of the cave roaring furiously.

Vic and Tor retreated towards Wes. The lion attacked. Vic pushed the beast back with her arm. Tor tried to help her. The lion bit Tor in the neck.

Wes killed the lion with the laser beam knife, slicing the beast in half.

Vic helped Tor. Her arm was bleeding. Blood poured from his neck. Wes took off his jacket and pressed it against Tor's neck.

“We have to get him back to the shuttle,” said Vic.

“He can’t go anywhere like that. I’ll bring the shuttle here.” Wes left the cave.

The rain continued to pour heavily as Wes ran down the mountain. He slipped and slid down landing in a puddle of mud.

Branches scratched his face as Wes ran through the forest.

He reached the river. The water level was much higher and the current dangerously strong. Wes swam diagonally across the river, almost reaching the other side. He grabbed a branch and pulled himself out of the river with difficulty.

Inside the cave, Vic held the bloody jacket against Tor’s neck. “I’m not going to make it...” he said.

“Yes you are. Wes will be back soon,” she said.

“If you ever make it back... Don’t tell my family how I died.”

“You’ll tell them how you survived yourself.”

Vic looked at her bleeding arm.

Tor stared at the eyes of the dead lion. There was noise coming from inside the dark cave.

Vic grabbed the laser beam knife, holding it up firmly. The lion cubs came out of the darkness crying for their mother.

Back at the waterfall, the clearing and the shuttle were gone. Tons of water poured down the waterfall, flooding the area.

Coming out of the forest, Wes went to the edge of the river, staring at the strong currents.

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Lightning cut the sky, striking a tree nearby as
Wes returned to the forest.

Exhausted and defeated by the rain, Wes
searched for shelter. Freezing, he sat under a tree
next to a rock and patiently waited.

CHAPTER 10

Back at the mountain, the rain stopped. The clouds dissipated. The sun shined. A rainbow appeared over the beautiful valley.

Inside the cave, Tor rested in Vic's arms. She was asleep. The hungry lion cubs tried to feed on their dead mother's tits. Vic opened her eyes. Tor was dead.

Wes found the shuttle in the middle of mud and tree branches on the river bank. He examined the damage. Pumping a lever manually, Wes opened the door of the shuttle slowly. A noise in the woods attracted his attention but he didn't see anything. Wes entered the shuttle.

Inside, everything was a mess. Water slowly dripped through the walls. Wes checked the instrument panel. Nothing worked. The shuttle moved slightly. There was a thump on the fuselage of the shuttle.

Debris coming down the river accumulated around the shuttle: a log, tree branches and a dead deer. It deflected water into the shuttle.

Wes found the metal medical case and a weapon. Water poured in from the door. He rushed out and pushed the debris away with his foot. Dragging the dead deer aside, he let the river take it away.

The shuttle started to tip. More water poured in. Wes desperately tried to close the door, but it moved too slowly.

A figure in the woods observed Wes trying to save the shuttle.

The river won, dragging the shuttle away. Wes jumped off and tried to swim to the shore with the medical case and the weapon. The river dragged Wes. He let go of the medical case and the weapon, swimming to the shore. Exhausted, he watched the river swallow the shuttle.

Back at the mountain, the sun shined and Vic touched the lion cubs as they drank from a puddle of rain.

Soaked, Wes walked through the woods, heading back to the mountain where he left Vic and Tor still alive. A figure followed him far behind. Wes stopped and looked back. There were several figures far behind. He ran. Several cannibal ape-men gave chase.

Apprehensive, Vic watched Wes exit the forest and climb the mountain toward her. Wes looked back. The cannibal ape-men did not come out of the forest.

Fearful, a cannibal ape-man watched Wes reach Vic outside the cave as if knowing he was near the cave of a dangerous saber tooth lion.

“What happened?” said Vic.

“They’re following me.”

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“They who? Where’s the shuttle?”

“How's Tor doing?”

“He’s dead.”

Wes was disappointed. Slowly several cannibal ape-men came out of the forest.

Wes left the cave dragging the carcass of the dead saber tooth lion and pushed it down the mountain.

The cannibal ape-men retreated, staring at the dead beast. A cannibal ape-man fearfully approached the dead lion.

Wes came down the mountain screaming. The cannibal ape-men retreated into the forest. Wes returned to the cave. Vic stared at him in surprise.

“Tor’s body is in the cave...” said Vic.

“How’s your arm?” asked Wes.

“It’s okay, for now.” Vic examined the bite on her arm and rolled a piece of cloth around it. “I need my medical case.”

“I lost it. The shuttle is gone. We’ll have to do our best to survive, just like any of these creatures.”

It was night in the forest when a cannibal ape-man observed a big fire burning outside the mountain cave.

The fire consumed Tor’s body. Wes threw more wood in the fire. Vic held tighter one of the lion cubs sleeping on her lap.

Wes helped Vic lie on the ground, moving the lion cubs. “Watch my back,” she said.

“I will,” he said, caressing her. She fell asleep.

CHAPTER 11

The next day at a forest clearing, a large number of X ape-men, male/female adults and young ones, picked and ate fruit from trees.

An X ape-man was suddenly attentive, listening and sniffing the air. He screamed. Immediately the females grabbed their young and climbed up the trees.

A large group of cannibal ape-men attacked. The X ape-men raced for safety in the treetops. Two cannibal ape-men dragged down one X ape-man as he tried to climb a tree. Several other cannibal ape-men joined in to tear their prey apart with their sharp teeth.

In the tree tops, fearful, the X ape-men watched the hungry cannibal ape-men drag the bloody carcass of the dead X ape-man into the forest.

Two cannibal ape-men climbed a tree in pursuit of a young X ape-man. Two adult X ape-men rushed down to help the youngster. They furiously knock down the cannibal ape-men who weren't as agile as the X ape-man in the tree tops.

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Back at the mountain, a saber tooth lion cub licked Vic's face. She was asleep in Wes' arms. He was also asleep. Only hot coal was left in the fire. Vic waked up. Staring at Wes asleep she caressed his face. Wes opened his eyes. She smiled.

"You fell asleep. We're lucky to be alive... Did you at least have good dreams?"

"...I'm sorry."

Vic rubbed her cheek against Wes', looked into his eyes and walked into the cave. Wes followed her.

Inside the cave, they hugged, half side ways, each other with one of their legs locked in between the other's legs, and sensually rubbed cheeks.

Hours later, they exit the cave half naked. The lion cubs were playing outside. Vic looked to the forest. "The katagas fear these creatures."

"Very wise of them. How's your arm?"

"Infected. I need clean water."

"Let's return to the river."

"What if the katagas are still out there?"

"We'll just have to protect ourselves." Wes turned the laser beam knife on. It was not as bright as before.

"We can't recharge it," said Vic.

Inside the forest, Wes slowly cut a small tree with the weakening laser beam knife. He sharpened the point, making a deadly spear.

Vic, dizzy, sat by a tree. The two lion cubs sniffed around. Her arm ached.

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One of the lion cubs sniffed a nearby bush. A coral snake tried to slither away. The lion got closer. The snake struck. The lion cried in pain.

Wes struck the snake with his spear. He missed. The snake escaped. “Did you see that? A creature with no legs. But it moves. Never seen anything like that.” Wes turned to Vic. She looked sick. “Are you okay?”

Wes and Vic watched the lion cub collapse and slowly die. Wes examined the lion cub. “Dead. The legless creature must be venomous.”

“I’m sick, Wes.”

Wes touches her forehead. “You have a fever.” He tied a piece of string to the spear and hanged it on his back. Taking Vic in his arms, he carried her into the forest. The other lion cub followed.

At the river, Wes cleaned Vic's arm wound with water from the river and gave her some to drink. The lion cub also drank from the river.

“The bite from its mother must have contaminated my system...”

“Your immunity shot will protect you.”

“It would have done it by now... I’m weak... I’m burning inside...” Vic looked at the lion cub. “Let him go. He may contaminate you.”

“He won’t bite me. You’ll be fine.”

At night, outside the mountain cave, Wes put a log on the fire. Vic shivered, the fever was worse then before. It started to drizzle. Wes took Vic into the cave.

In the cave, Wes embraced and caressed Vic. The lion cub slept next to them. The sound of rain filled the dark cave.

The next day, a cannibal ape-man carefully approached the cave and investigated the extinguished fire. He sniffed it and plunged his hand in the wet, black pile of coal. Hot coal, underneath, burned the hand of the cannibal ape-man who screamed and retreated.

Wes exit the cave. The sunlight blinded him for a moment. He and the cannibal ape-man stared at each other, measuring strengths. The cannibal ape-man screamed, bluffing. Wes stood his ground. The cannibal ape-man ran away.

Inside the cave, Vic's body shook. Bubbling white froth dripped from her mouth. Wes wiped her mouth with a cloth.

“I’m dying...”

“You’re not. Fight it.”

“Take me outside.”

“I must find your medical case. It’s somewhere in the river.”

“No. There’s nothing you can do... The immunity shots won’t work... It’s too late... I’m burning inside... Take me outside...” she asked.

Taking her in his arms, Wes walked out.

Outside the mountain cave, Vic felt the sun rays as if they were a potion of life.

“It feels good... The star is a great source of energy...”

“The source of life.”

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“You’ll survive...” said Vic as her eyes closed.
She was dead.

Wes sat on the ground, holding her body tight
against his chest.

CHAPTER 12

Years earlier back at a city in Urizen, their home planet, a sun shined in the bluish sky. The tone of blue was distinctively different from the one on Earth.

It was a futuristic high rise city built around a space shuttle launching facility. It looked more like a monument, with arches and other architectural extravaganzas.

A crowd was gathered for a very important event. A ramp connected a high rise to the launching platform.

Wes lead the crew of twelve to the shuttle. The crowd roared far below. Vic, Tor and Uri were among the others.

Wes and an Urizen priest put their six fingered hands together as in a ceremonial blessing. Vic, Uri, Tor and the other members of the crew did the same. Wes walked into the shuttle.

Moments later, the shuttle rose into the sky. Inside the shuttle, the crew members held on to their seats as the shuttle cut through Urizen's atmosphere.

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Vic and Uri were tense. Tor hid his fear. Wes was determined.

In space, the shuttle reached a stable orbit. The continental plates of Urizen could be seen below. The shuttle slowly moved towards the huge spacecraft. Wes stared at his homeland.

The shuttle entered the spacecraft. The sun appeared from behind the planet as the spacecraft slowly moved in its orbit.

Moments later, the spacecraft's engines lit up and it rocketed away from Urizen.

One after the other the planets of Urizen's solar system were left behind.

The spacecraft left the solar system of Urizen and flew into the immense dark and unknown universe.

CHAPTER 13

Back to the present on Earth, at the top of the mountain, it was night. Vic's body lied on a pile of wood. Wes approached with a torch and lit the fire. Beneath a full moon, Vic's body burned in the night.

In the dark forest, an X ape-man stared at the fire burning up in the mountain.

Months later, the sun was shining when Wes sat by the river, staring at something on the other side. He now wore fur rags, looking like a cave man.

The young saber tooth lion approached and drank from the river. "Get out of here, Urizen... You'll scare them..." said Wes as he pushed the animal he adopted and named after his home planet. The animal swung his paw at Wes, playfully.

On the other side of the river, behind bushes, an X ape-man stared at a basket of fruit lying on the river bank.

Carrying his spear and followed by the young lion, Wes got back into the forest. The X ape-man shyly approached the basket, grabbed some fruit and ran back into the forest.

Later, Wes, followed by the young lion, returned to the mountain cave carrying the basket of fruit. He had constructed a hut from branches and leaves next to the cave entrance. Sitting outside, he ate a fruit. "Taste this, Urizen. It's much easier than hunting."

The lion sniffed the fruit, rejecting the offer with a roar. It left for the forest.

Moments later, Wes was lying on the ground, relaxing, with nothing to do or worry about. A small rock rolled down the mountain, bouncing near him. He looked up but didn't see anything.

Wes turned to find a cannibal ape-man staring at him from a rock to his left, fifty feet away.

Other cannibal ape-men came out of the forest and head up the mountain towards Wes who grabbed his spear. The cannibal ape-men slowly closed in, cautiously measuring their prey's strength.

Wes screamed and swung his spear trying to show strength and scare them away. He turned around to find a cannibal ape-man standing on a rock above the cave.

The cannibal ape-man dove on him. Wes skillfully turned the spear which plunged into the attacker.

Wes ran up the mountain with the cannibal ape-men in pursuit. Up on a rock, he poked them with the spear, holding them back. The cannibal ape-men surrounded him.

Attacking, Wes plunged the spear into one of the cannibal ape-men and fled to his left. A cannibal ape-man struck him in the back. Losing his

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balance, Wes rolled down the mountain. The cannibal ape-men ran down the mountain after their defeated prey.

Injured and dizzy from the fall, Wes dragged himself away from the approaching attackers and towards the forest. The cannibal ape-men attacked Wes, striking and biting.

Urizen, the young saber tooth lion, returned carrying a dead rabbit. It dropped the rabbit and attacked the cannibal ape-men. The lion bit a cannibal ape-man. The others retreated.

Another cannibal ape-man jumped on the young lion's back and bit its neck. The lion spun the ape-man off his back. Urizen was badly injured and could not keep his balance.

The other cannibal ape-men, seeing the injured young enemy, returned to kill. They shredded the young lion with their sharp teeth, leaving just a bloody carcass.

They screamed celebrating their victory. The hungry cannibal ape-men feasted on the lion like a pack of hyenas.

Injured and covered in blood, Wes stood still, playing dead as the cannibal ape-men surrounded him. They dragged Wes and the lion's carcass through the woods. Another cannibal ape-man carrying an infant X ape-man joined them.

CHAPTER 14

Dragging their prey, the hunters brought food home, a rocky cliff formation filled with small caves.

Young cannibal ape-men and females came out of the caves and ran down: lunch was served.

The hunters tossed the lion's carcass to the ground.

The youngsters devoured what was left of the animal. The females waited until their young ones were satisfied.

Wes and the infant X ape-men were dragged to a small cave. They were being "saved for dinner."

Inside a cannibal ape-men's cave, Wes opened his eyes. The bloody infant X ape-man lied on his chest. Wes moved him aside. The infant X ape-man coughed blood out of his tiny mouth. His eyes opened slightly.

Wes examined the injured infant X ape-man who was too scared and weak to react. "Hang on, little friend."

Wes' shoulder ached as he tried to move, dragging himself to the cave's entrance.

Outside, the cannibal ape-men rested, digesting their meal.

Wes pulled the tiny X ape-man by his foot. “We’re getting out of here.” He put the infant X ape-man over his shoulder.

All of a sudden, a cannibal ape-man appeared in the small cave entrance, blocking their way and screaming as if sounding an alarm.

Wes shoved his foot into the cannibal ape-man, pushing him off the cliff.

There was a screaming chaos among the cannibal ape-men. The adult males climbed the cliff after Wes.

Wes climbed up the cliff carrying the infant X ape-man who slipped and almost fell.

A cannibal ape-man came out of a cave above Wes, screaming and showing his sharp teeth.

Wes moved sideways. Below him the other cannibal ape-men closed in. Wes threw rocks at them. One cannibal ape-man was hit on the head and tumbled down the cliff.

The cannibal ape-man above Wes attacked. Wes pushed him off the cliff and almost dove with the attacker who crashed into another cannibal ape-man.

Wes climbed the cliff with the cannibal ape-men after him. Reaching the top, he almost lost the infant X ape-man who slid off his shoulder.

At the top of the cliff, Wes put the infant on the ground, grabbed a piece of wood and struck the cannibal ape-men who reached the top. But they were just too many.

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Grabbing the infant X ape-man, Wes ran into the forest. The cannibal ape-men gave chase.

Exhausted, Wes ran through the woods, chased by the ferocious cannibal ape-men.

Wes reached a dead end. A high cliff with wild rapids below. It was too high to jump.

The cannibal ape-men reached the cliff. Wes had no choice but to jump with the infant X ape-man over his shoulder.

Wes and the infant X ape-man plunged into the river. They were carried away. Wes struggled not to drown. The rapids reached a waterfall. Wes and the infant X ape-man took another dive.

After the waterfall, the river current slowed down. Wes swam to the shore carrying the infant X ape-man.

Exhausted, Wes lied down, coughing water out. He examined the infant X ape-man and blew air into his mouth. The tiny ape-man coughed out water. His weak eyes stared at Wes who smiled. "What a ride... We're lucky to be alive little friend." Wes lied on the ground finally resting in safety.

Later, at a field, Wes walked towards the horizon, carrying the infant X ape-man on his back. The sun was setting.

CHAPTER 15

Wes found a new place under a rock, below a steep cliff, for a new camp.

Days later, he was cutting a tree using an ax made with a sharp rock. The infant X ape-man ate a fruit, observing his friend.

Weeks later, he played with the infant X ape-man, spitting fruit seeds and hiding behind a pile of logs.

Months later, Wes dragged a log towards a half built log-house under the rock. The infant X ape-man chased a rabbit, playing around.

Ten years later, Wes, placed sharp spears in the ground, fixing the third row of a complex defensive fence. His new hideout was a log fortress built under the rock below the steep cliff. The infant X ape-man was now a teenager. He attentively observed Wes working.

“X, bring me another one,” said Wes, pointing to the pile of spears. X, the young ape-man, clumsily dragged a spear to Wes. He took the spear and finished the repair. “We're done. Good job X.”

Later, sitting next to a campfire, Wes stared at the stars. X slept at his side. Wolves howled in the night. X woke up scared and ran to the house.

“Come back, X. I want to show you where I came from...” said Wes, completely immersed in the vision of hundreds of stars.

The next day, at the river, Wes and X picked fruit from a tree. X ate the fruit. Wes put his in a basket. X tried to grab a fruit from the basket but Wes didn't let him. “Go get your own.”

X stole one anyway. Wes threw a fruit at the excited young ape-man. X grabbed a fruit from the tree and retaliated. They got into a fruit war.

On the other side, a group of adult X ape-men stared. “Our friends are back,” said Wes.

The X ape-men grabbed fruit from a basket and returned to the forest.

Wes signaled X to follow him across the river. The ape-man was afraid of the water. X got on Wes' back and they crossed the river.

X followed Wes into the forest and they tried to catch up with the X ape-men who disappeared way ahead.

They walked through the woods for hours, but didn't find the X ape-men.

Wes and X rested near a tree. Wes hummed a song, catching X's attention. He swung his spear to the rhythm of the song. X looked curiously.

Wes handed the spear to the ape-man. “You're getting old enough to learn how to use this.”

X could not hold on to the spear firmly. Wes showed him how to wrap his hands around the

spear and throw it. X awkwardly held on to the spear.

“That’s it. Hold it tight.” X swung the spear almost hitting Wes. “That’s not exactly the idea but it’s a good start.”

Wes showed him how to pound the ground with the spear as if it was an ax. X tried it. The spear flew behind some bushes. X ran to get it.

Hours later, Wes and X walked back to their camp. It was getting dark. Wes stopped. There was a wild boar grazing near a tree. “I’m tired of fruit.”

Behind bushes, Wes cautiously approached the wild boar. The animal sensed danger but it was too late. Wes’ spear plunged into its flesh.

Later that night, Wes roasted the wild boar over the fire. X walked back and forth, waiting for food. Wes cut a piece of flesh with a stone made knife and tasted it. “Good. Taste it.”

X wouldn’t come too close to the fire. Wes brought the food to X’s mouth. The ape-man rejected it. Wes ate it. “I was never a big fan of roasted flesh. My father loved it.” Wes cut another piece for the ape-man. “I really miss the crew... Vic, Tor, Uri...”

The ape-man chewed the crisp roasted meat. The fire burned in the night. A full moon shined in the sky. The two friends satisfied their hunger quietly.

In the dark forest, an animal walked through the woods. It got to the border of the forest facing Wes’ new camp. The animal was a cannibal ape-man. He stared at the camp. Other cannibal ape-men approached behind him.

At the new camp, X stared at the dark forest suspiciously and ran into the house. Wes put more wood into the fire.

Lighting up a torch, he walked towards the forest. Still behind the spear fence, he lit up three piles of wood, placed symmetrically behind the fence. Wes stared at the forest, but didn't see anything.

The next day, a cannibal ape-man cautiously approached the surrounding spear fence. The camp fires were down to ashes.

In the house, Wes slept on a bed of leaves covered with leather. X slept on the ground. He suddenly waked up.

Screaming, the X ape-man retreated into the cave entrance in the back of the house.

Wes woke up and grabbed his spear. Looking through a small hole in the fortified front door, he didn't see anything. X returned cautiously from the cave.

"There's nothing out there, X. At least nothing to be scared of... I mean nothing we can't deal with," said Wes as he opened the front door. "Grab your weapon, X. You have to learn how to survive. Self defense."

Motionless, X watched Wes grab a stick and strike the floor several times. Wes took another peek out the door. "Of course if it's more than we can handle. We'll hide in the cave."

Relieved, Wes walked out of the house. A coyote sniffed around the extinguished fire, smelling the wild boar banquet they had last night.

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Wes stared at the coyote. The animal growled.
Wes threw a stone but missed. “Get out.”

The coyote became more threatening, showing his teeth. X came out of the house holding the stick and screaming. He struck the ground several times, moving back and forth towards the coyote. Intimidated, the coyote walked away.

Wes smiled, surprised. “Good job, X. You won the war with no battle.” X, even more excited continued to strike the ground and scream. “You like it? Stand guard while I finish sleeping. I was having some interesting dreams.”

Wes returned to the house. X continued to play around with his stick.

Hiding, the cannibal ape-man observed them for a moment and returned to the forest.

CHAPTER 16

Holding a thin spear, Wes tried to concentrate, looking into the river. He was fishing. His thick “war spear” was always strapped on his back. X swung his stick around, making a lot of noise. It was his favorite toy.

“Quiet...” said Wes before plunging the spear into the river. Triumphant, he showed the fish to X. “It’s a big one!”

On the other side of the river, a basket of fruit lied on the river bank. An X ape-man came out of the forest, shyly approaching the basket. Others followed. They helped themselves.

Wes looked at them. Curiously, X stared at his “brothers and sisters.”

Wes slowly crossed the river. The X ape-men became apprehensive. X, followed Wes. They reached the other side. The X ape-men retreated.

“Go ahead,” said Wes to X. Holding his stick, X didn’t move.

Slowly walking to the fruit basket, Wes threw a fruit to the closest X ape-men. They were less fearful.

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All of a sudden, the X ape-men's behavior changed. Screaming, they climbed up the nearby trees.

Apprehensive, Wes grabbed his spear and retreated to the river shore, looking around. Nothing happened.

A furious cannibal ape-man burst out of the forest and jumped on X who screamed in fear.

With incredible agility, Wes plunged his spear into the cannibal ape-man's neck and turned around to confront the hungry cannibal ape-men who emerged from the forest.

In rage, X grabbed his stick and repeatedly struck the agonizing cannibal ape-man lying on the ground.

The cannibal ape-men retreated for a moment, intimidated by the demonstration of power, but confident they outnumber the enemy they carefully approached.

Surrounded, Wes and X retreat to the water. "Let's get out of here X."

X screamed, stomping his stick on the ground. The other X ape-men hiding in the tree tops, screamed and shook the tree branches, joining X in their "war ritual."

The cannibal ape-men responded with their war cries, but were clearly losing confidence.

A bigger, scarier cannibal ape-man, showing his sharp teeth advanced towards X who was still a youngster.

X swung his stick around, but intimidated, retreated.

Wes confronted the leader of the cannibal ape-men. They measured their strengths. Wes kept the beast away poking him with the spear. The others were spectators of the battle.

Wes was confident he could kill the cannibal ape-man, but was willing to spare his life.

The cannibal ape-man screamed a terrifying last warning and attacked.

Wes stabbed him in the chest. The cannibal ape-man fell to the ground, dead.

The other cannibal ape-men accepted the defeat, returning to the forest.

X and the other X ape-men screamed for victory. X struck the dead cannibal ape-man with his stick. The X ape-men came down from the tree tops, joining X in the lynching of the dead cannibal ape-man. But not for long.

A hungry pack of wolves came out of the forest. The X ape-men ran away. X and Wes crossed the river.

The wolves feasted on the two dead cannibal ape-men.

CHAPTER 17

Five years later, it was a sunny day at the top of a mountain. Wes admired the beautiful valley. X, sitting next to him, was now a fully grown X ape-man. Wes pointed to the sky. “That’s where I came from, X... From the sky... Far away...”

Wes lied on the grass, relaxing. They passed time. An eagle glided in front of them. “That’s a lucky creature. It can fly anywhere it wants to.”

X poked a line of ants crawling on the ground with a club. He suddenly stood, holding his club in the air.

Wes looked back. A coral snake came out of some bushes behind him. Wes moved back.

X killed the snake with his club, striking with incredible precision.

Wes examined the dead coral snake. “Beautiful but deadly. Good job, X.”

X stepped on the line of ants. They bit. X screamed and jumped around, trying to brush the ants off his foot. Wes laughed.

Later, Wes and X walked by an incredibly high waterfall. Then they walked through a canyon.

Deer drank from the peaceful blue waters of a lagoon. A saber tooth lion dashed out of the woods, capturing a deer. The others ran for their lives.

Behind bushes, Wes and X moved carefully around the lagoon, where the lion devoured the deer.

In the forest, Wes and X head back home. X stopped.

“Come on. It’ll soon be dark,” said Wes as X walked back. Wes followed but lost the X ape-man from sight.

At a clearing, a group of X ape-men ate fruit from the trees. X observed one of them, a female. He approached. They gazed at each other for a moment.

The dominant male of the group, noticing the intruder, screamed threateningly.

X stood ground, doubtful. The female joined the rest of her group. In a spurt of rage, the dominant male X ape-man attacked.

X ran into the forest, chased by the attacker who soon gave up and returned to the group.

Slowing down, X looked back. He was not sure which way to go.

In another point of the forest, Wes looked for X. He finally gave up and headed back home.

The protection fires illuminated the night when X returned to the camp. He knew exactly how to move across the reinforced rows of spear fences. There was a point with a gate way.

Wes sat next to the main fire. “I don’t have to tell you how dangerous it is to stay out there at night.”

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X walked to the house. Wes grabbed his leg.
“Dangerous.”

X, irritated, broke free and entered the house. A wolf howled in the darkness.

“Everybody eats somebody else on this planet,” said Wes as he threw more wood on the fire and looked up at the stars.

The next day, in the house, when Wes woke up, X was gone. Wes walked out slowly.

Outside, the sun blinded him for a moment. X was not there. “X!” Wes looked around and gave up, returning to the house.

Hours later, Wes worked on the roof of the house. Sweating, he took a break and drank water. Wes looked around trying to spot X, somewhere near the forest. He sat worried. Grabbing his spear, Wes went into the forest.

Wes searched for hours, shouting, “X!”

The sun was setting when Wes returned to the camp.

At night, Wes sat alone, watching the stars, once in a while glancing at the forest, trying to spot X returning.

The next day in the forest, holding his club, X reached a clearing, home of a large group of X ape-man.

He was soon “greeted” by the same dominant male who threatened with screams and gestures.

Confident, X stood his ground. The other X apemen got out of the way, realizing that soon there would be trouble.

The dominant X ape-man approached, staring at the intruder as if it was the last warning.

X swung the club in the air, screamed and pounded the ground.

The dominant X ape-man attacked. X swung the club at the attacker but was knocked down by the strong X ape-man.

X got back on his feet and counter attacked with the club. Struck several times, the dominant X ape-man felt the power of the weapon and retreated.

X approached the other ape-men instead of finishing the fight. The dominant X ape-man attacked again from behind.

This time X was merciless, striking repeatedly. He lost the club, but continued to strike with his fist.

The dominant X ape-man grabbed the club and ran away. X ran after him.

The long chase ended when they ran into a group of cannibal ape-men.

X and his rival were now chased by the cannibal ape-men.

CHAPTER 18

At a lagoon, behind bushes, Wes peeked at a group of cannibal ape-men devouring a carcass that appeared to be of an X ape-man.

He took out two stones wrapped in a piece of leather and lit up a torch made of dry bushes with sparks from the stones.

The sound grabbed the cannibal ape-men's attention. They stared at the bushes.

Wes came out of the bushes holding a burning torch in one hand and his spear in the other. Like an experienced "tamer" he threatened the cannibal ape-men.

The cannibal ape-men screamed, showing their sharp teeth, not willing to give up their prey easily. Wes advanced. "Leave or die." They threaten to attack, but the fire scared them.

One of the cannibal ape-man stood his ground. Wes looked at the carcass. It was an X ape-man similar to X, half way devoured. Wes lift his spear. "I warned you." Wes struck. The spear plunged into the chest of the cannibal X ape-man who

screamed in terrified pain. The other cannibal apemen ran away.

Pulling out the spear from the agonizing cannibal ape-man, Wes struck again to kill.

He examined the carcass closely. The X ape-man's face was bloody and in shreds. Near the carcass, Wes found X's club.

Deeply saddened to lose another friend, he threw the club into the lagoon.

The next night, at the top of a mountain, the carcass of the X ape-man, wrapped in leather, lied on a pile of wood.

Holding a torch, Wes lit the fire, looking at the body of his friend for the last time.

The fire burned in the night. The moon shined in the sky surrounded by a sea of stars. Wes stared at the dark valley below, alone in the darkness. He let out a scream of deep pain.

In the house, still at night, it was raining heavily. Wes tried to stop the leak in the roof, but it was useless. Water poured in. Wes retreated to the cave.

Outside, a mud slide caused the entire roof to collapse. In the cave, next to a fire, Wes stared at nothing, waiting for daylight.

The next day, Wes made his way out of the collapsed house. The sky was dark, strong winds blew intensely. It was cold. The rain and the mud slide destroyed the surrounding fences. Wes sat on the ground, disheartened.

Hours later, Wes searched through the rubble of the house.

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In the forest, a cannibal ape-man watched Wes. Another joined the first one. Soon there were others.

As experienced hunters, they spread out to surround the prey.

Wes turned around to the forest. He heard something, but didn't see anything. Suspicious, Wes slowly walked into the cave and returned holding his spear.

A large group of cannibal ape-men were out in the clearing. They were confident the prey had nowhere to go.

Motionless, Wes evaluated the situation. All of a sudden, he dashed through an open flank, running into the forest. The cannibal ape-men gave chase.

Wes ran through the woods confident he could outrun the cannibal ape-men. They pursued him not far behind. Knowing his way through the region and having more endurance than the ape-men, Wes left them behind.

Seeing he was no longer being pursued, he finally slowed down. Wes caught his breath, staring at the land extending to the horizon in front of him. He walked away from "home."

CHAPTER 19

Wes walked through beautiful landscapes, valleys and mountains, determined not to stop.

In the forest, a large group of X ape-men, including females with their youngsters, gathered and ate fruit from several trees.

Some lied on the ground, satisfied with their meal. Two young X ape-man, playing around, chased each other into the woods, away from their mothers. A female X ape-man sniffed the air, alarmed. It was too late. Cannibal ape-men on a raid, attacked the youngsters. One was bit on the neck and spun around until dead. The other was smashed against a tree.

The cannibal ape-men left the dead prey, attacking the other X ape-men. Screaming, they fled to tree tops. More cannibal ape-men appeared from other directions, trying to kill as many X ape-men as possible.

An adult X ape-man put up a fight, but was soon outnumbered and torn apart by the powerful sharp teeth of the cannibal ape-men.

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All of a sudden, X burst out of the woods, screaming and swinging a thick piece of wood. The “dominant X ape-man,” not X, was the dead prey at the lagoon earlier. X cracked open a cannibal ape-man’s skull with a powerful blow.

The other cannibal ape-men were intimidated by the unexpected reaction. X struck in all directions. The cannibal ape-men retreated for a moment. X pounded the ground with his new club. Confident they outnumber the powerful enemy, they cautiously tried to surround him.

A strong adult X ape-man jumped from the tree tops on one of the cannibal ape-men. X helped him kill the enemy with furious blows.

Other adult X ape-men came down from the trees. The cannibal ape-men retreated. Lead by X, the X ape-men chased them away.

One of the cannibal ape-men grabbed the agonizing infant X ape-man that was smashed against the tree earlier and dragged him away.

X chased him and soon caught up, knocking him down. The cannibal ape-man turned from predator to prey as X beat him to death with his club.

Carrying the injured youngster, X returned to the group of X ape-men.

Months later, outside a snowy mountain cave, it was almost dark. Wes, carrying a torch, freezing and exhausted, examined a rocky formation, searching for a cave.

Carefully approaching a small entrance, he was soon greeted by a furious bear. Wes retreated.

He threw wood and dry bushes in the cave entrance. The bear stuck its face out again, roaring and showing its sharp teeth. Wes made it retreat, poking it with the torch. “Sorry, but I’m taking your home.”

Wes piled wood and dry bushes in the entrance. Holding the torch, he was doubtful for a moment. “It’s you or me.” Wes lit the bushes. Soon a huge fire burned in the cave entrance. Wes waited from a distance.

It was night, outside the snowy mountain cave, when the fire was almost out. Wes sat outside, waiting.

Lighting up a torch, he walked into the cave, carefully. The cave was filled up with smoke. Wes coughed. Fanning with a branch of leaves, Wes cleared the air of the cave. A huge grizzly bear and two cubs lied on the ground, dead.

CHAPTER 20

It was a bright cold day on the snowy mountain. Covered with the fur of the grizzly bear, Wes carefully approached a deer, holding his spear. The deer sensed the danger and ran away.

Moments later, Wes stalked a rabbit. From a distance he hit the target. Wes walked through the snow back to the cave carrying his prey.

Inside the new cave, it was night when Wes stared at the rabbit, roasting over the fire. Moments later he cleaned every bone of the rabbit, still not satisfied.

The next day at a snowy forest, behind a tree, Wes patiently waited holding his spear. All of a sudden he burst around the tree, throwing the spear at a moose. The wounded moose tried to escape limping. Wes jumped on the wounded animal, furiously stabbing him to death with a sharpened rock knife. “The predator” dragged his prey away.

Wes dragged the moose up the mountain with difficulty, leaving a trail of blood all the way back from the forest.

Starving wolves soon tracked down the fresh kill.

Wes held on to his spear, ready to defend his meal. The wolves closed in, growling and showing their sharp teeth. Wes plunged the spear into the closest wolf. The others backed off. Wes shredded the wolf with his knife and threw the bloody carcass to the other wolves. “Eat your own flesh, beasts! Leave me alone!”

The wolves ignored their dead “friend.” They were not into cannibalism. Their eyes stared at Wes. More wolves arrived, joining the rest of the pack. They tried to surround Wes. He retreated up the mountain, distancing himself from the dead moose. The wolves were soon on the moose, helping themselves with the “free meal.”

Wes returned, counterattacking, poking the wolves away from the moose. “It’s mine! Get away!”

A wolf bit his leg. Wes killed it with his rock knife. The wolves just kept coming from all directions. Wes escaped running up the mountain. The wolves chased him but soon gave up, returning to “their” kill.

The wolves tore pieces of flesh from the dead moose, satisfying their hunger. Wes observed them from a distance, conceding his defeat. He checked his leg, bleeding from the wolf bite and returned to the cave.

The cannibal ape-men’s cave was crowded. They sat close together keeping each other warm. The dominant cannibal ape-man walked among his group. He grabbed a youngster from his mother who fought to protect her child. The dominant

cannibal ape-man bit her face and took the youngster. He bit the youngster in the neck, shook him till he was dead and found a spot to have his meal.

The other cannibal ape-men attacked the bleeding mother, biting and tearing a piece of flesh before there was nothing left.

At a snowy valley, a long queue of X ape-man walked through the snow. One of them fell to the ground, exhausted and freezing. The others continued, fighting to keep themselves alive. X, carrying his club, was among this group searching for a warm shelter. Two other X ape-man also carried clubs.

A roaring saber tooth lion came out of the bushes to take down an X ape-man who, in terror, managed to escape. The others used their last energy to run away. The lion pursued the X ape-men, grabbing a youngster.

Carrying clubs, X and another X ape-man tried to help the screaming youngster, swinging their weapons. The lion stood its ground with a paw on its agonizing prey. It attacked and killed the second X ape-man. X fled for his life, joining the others.

CHAPTER 21

At night, in his new cave, near the fire, Wes examined his leg, washing the wound below the knee with snow. It was very painful.

The next day at the snowy mountain, Wes limped through the snow. Tired, freezing, desperate for food, he tasted a leaf of a green bush and spat it out. A rabbit hopped nearby and fed on some plants. Wes desperately tried to strike it with his spear but missed. He went for the rabbit's food, devouring the leaves.

Later outside the cave, Wes stared at the valley below covered in snow, feeling the pain of his leg and the cold winds blowing. Wes examined his wound. It was infected. He had the image of defeat, leaning against a rock, passively waiting for winter to take his life away.

Years earlier, at a Riz constellation solar system, jammed with asteroids, comets, blazing and gassy planets, a space craft orbited a huge purplish planet.

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On this planet the sun barely shined through this gassy purplish atmosphere. A rain of blazing asteroids cut the sky, exploding on the ground.

Space explorers in huge space suits ran to a space shuttle. The atmosphere was so thick and the gravity so strong that it looked like they were running in slow motion. They reached the shuttle.

One of the explorers, a young woman, didn't get in, risking being struck by the rain of blazing rocks. She searched the horizon trying to find someone.

At a mountain, young Wes climbed down a cliff. Near the ground, he lost his balance and fell as a blazing asteroid exploded nearby. Wes watched the rain of asteroids cutting the sky. He desperately got on his feet and ran.

At the space shuttle, the engine started. Two men came out of the shuttle. The young woman continued staring into the horizon. They tried to drag her inside. She resisted. They forced her in. The space shuttle door closed behind them. The shuttle took off.

Wes watched the shuttle take off. A blazing asteroid exploded nearby. Wes sought shelter under a rock.

In space, the shuttle approached the mother ship in the middle of the rain of asteroids. An asteroid hit the shuttle. It exploded. The blazing hull plunged into the planet's atmosphere.

On the planet, Wes desperately tried to get deeper under the rock as the blazing rocks fell all over.

Moments later the inferno was over. Wes came out from under the rock. He stared at the clear purple sky.

Back to the present, in the cave, at night, perspiring with fever, Wes uncovered his gruesome wound. It was badly infected all the way to his foot. The tissue was dead, with no blood circulation. He tied a strip of leather tightly above his knee. Shivering, he grabbed a sharp ax made from a rock and ran the cutting blade through the fire. Gathering energy and courage, Wes aimed the ax above the infected area.

He struck his own body, repeatedly. Blood splattered over his face. The pain was channeled into other furious strikes. His face could barely contain the pain.

Outside, on the dark mountain, a terrible scream echoed in the night.

CHAPTER 22

A group of X ape-men sat crowded together under a rock formation. They could barely survive the cold of the night, waiting for the sun to come out. X was among them, sitting next to a dead X ape-man who had lips and eyes frozen.

Moments later, the sun slowly crept up on the horizon. The rays of life shined on X's face.

Days later, the sun was shining when the group of X ape-men roamed, searching for food. They ate leaves, roots and insects. The snow was almost entirely melted away. The cruel winter was ending.

In the cave, Wes carved a piece of wood with his ax and measured it against his leg. He stood with difficulty. His left leg had been amputated below the knee. Wes tied the wood leg in placed it with a leather rag. Sitting down, he enjoyed the sun rays shining on his face, breathing the soft breeze.

Later in the forest, the snow was gone when Wes limped, holding his spear and carrying the rock ax in his fur belt, searching for food.

A wild boar grazed nearby. Wes' clumsy movements scared the animal.

Moments later, Wes' spear missed a rabbit.

At a river that same day, Wes cleaned the thick dirty roots of a plant and sat on the shore, munching his lunch.

In the forest, a cannibal ape-man observed Wes from a distance. The cannibal ape-man soon had company. Three others had joined him to take down the prey.

Wes returned to the forest limping. He seemed to be easy prey. Wes realized he was being followed. But it was too late to run. The cannibal ape-men, hiding in the bushes, had surrounded him.

Limping, Wes ran to a tree. Losing his spear, he managed to pull himself up with his strong arms.

The cannibal ape-men came out of the woods, surrounding the tree. Wes was calm, accustomed to the dangers of this planet. "You're going to have to find something else to eat."

Confident they had trapped a large prey, the cannibal ape-men were patient to make the final kill, walking around, studying the situation. One of the ape-men stood still, eyes locked on Wes.

"I'm not coming down," said Wes climbing further up the tree with difficulty, dragging his wooden leg.

A cannibal ape-man sprinted towards the tree, managing to get up to the bottom branches.

Apprehensive, Wes took out his ax. "New tricks... I still have my old one." Another cannibal ape-man managed to get up the tree.

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Descending from the treetop, Wes counterattacked, striking the ape-man with the ax, slashing his elbow. The cannibal ape-man screamed, showing his sharp teeth.

“Get off or die,” threatened Wes.

A third cannibal ape-man tried to get up the tree but failed. Wes delivered his threat. The ax crushed the first ape-man’s skull and slipped out of his hand. The cannibal ape-man fell out the tree. Below, the other cannibal ape-men screamed threateningly.

The second cannibal ape-man climbed up towards Wes with difficulty. Wes held onto the tree branches and struck the attacker with his wooden leg. The second cannibal ape-man fell out of the tree, hit the ground hard but was soon back on his feet.

The cannibal ape-men calmed down, conceding they lost the first round of a long fight. The one with the injured head, agonized on the ground.

More hungry cannibal ape-men arrived on the scene. As soon as the injured one died, the others tore him apart, fighting for a chunk of meat. Two managed to drag what was left of the carcass into the forest. Others with smaller pieces in their mouths, dripping blood, also fled. One took the bloody arm of his former hunting partner.

Three unsatisfied cannibal ape-man remained, turning back to their original target. Wes descended to the lower branches, ready to defend his position.

One cannibal ape-man jumped, grabbing the lowest branch. Wes kicked him repeatedly. The branch broke. They fell to the ground.

The beasts attacked. Wes reached for his ax and swung it to keep them away. Like hyenas, the cannibal ape-men tested the strength of the prey, approaching and retreating.

Wes attacked, slashed one of the cannibal's face and retreated into the forest. The cannibal ape-men followed.

Losing his balance, Wes rolled down a forest slope, landing with his face near a dozen of ape-men feet. Head down, he knew his time had come.

The three cannibal ape-men ran down the slope after their prey but soon froze, staring at what was ahead of them: a group of X ape-man, carrying wooden clubs.

Up the slope, more X ape-men surrounded the enemy. X was among them.

Wes lifted his head, realizing his luck hadn't left him. The X ape-men attacked the cannibal ape-men with their clubs, beating them to death.

Fearful of the once "docile" X ape-men, Wes retreated away from the lynching, dragging himself on the ground. His eyes soon were locked on X, the X ape-man he saved, raised and lost contact with long ago.

X approached, recognizing his "master," pounding his club to the ground as if showing he had learned his lesson. Wes stood with difficulty. "X... my friend."

The group of X ape-men ran into the forest searching for more enemies, ready to crush any cannibal ape-man who dared to be in their territory.

X looked at Wes for a moment but followed them.

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The group of X ape-men ran through the forest, screaming. They came across another unfortunate cannibal ape-man who was mercilessly clubbed to death. Sniffing the air, X lead the group in the direction of more intruders.

After finding his ax and spear, Wes walked away, leaving the territorial battle behind, as screams of war echoed in the forest.

CHAPTER 23

Five years later, Wes, with signs of aging, as his graying hair, sat in front of his new house, feeling the breeze on his face.

A group of X ape-men hanged around as if they were at home. A young one approached Wes, poking him with a stick. “Go play with someone else,” said Wes. The X ape-man continued. Wes threw the stick as far as he could. The young X ape-man darted after the stick and returned carrying it. Wes repeated the procedure.

X and a group of X ape-man came out of the forest. One limped painfully, grabbing Wes’ attention. His leg was broken. Wes said, “What happened to you?”

The others ran towards a basket of fruit. They soon were fighting for the few left.

Wes closely examined the injured ape-man. “It’s all right. You’re lucky you still have you’re leg.” Wes knocks on his wooden leg. X looked at them.

The fight among the ape-men got rougher. X intervened and they respectfully quit the fight.

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Taking the injured X ape-man in his arms, Wes walked into the house.

Wes placed two flat pieces of wood on opposite sides of the leg of the X ape-man who screamed in pain, trying to move away. Wes held him. “I’m trying to help, idiot.”

Wes stuffed a fruit into the X ape-man’s mouth. He tied the wood firmly with leather rags.

Outside the house, X opened a jar made of clay and with a wooden scoop drank the water stored inside. He walked back to the forest followed by the X ape-men, except the one with the broken leg, still in the house.

At the X ape-men colony, a large group of X ape-men, including females and infants, sat around in a clearing in front of a rocky formation under a cliff.

X and his group arrived, carrying fruit. Females and youngsters approached and feasted on the fruit. The X ape-men colony was now as big as the cannibal ape-men’s colony where X and Wes almost lost their lives.

X walked to the rocks, entering a cave. It was huge. He walked by a group of females with their babies sucking on their tits.

Nearby, Wes and the injured X ape-man walked through the forest. Wes gathered wood. They reached the clearing of the X ape-men’s colony.

Wes walked among the X ape-men, who made sounds as if they were saluting their friend. The X ape-men curiously surrounded the injured ape-man with the wooden cast on his leg.

X came out of the cave, joining his friend. The sun was setting. Wes felt the cold, rubbing his

arms. Most of the ape-men slowly retreated to the cave.

“Come on X, let’s make our fire,” said Wes. Followed by X, he placed dry bushes and wood against a rock. Wes took out two rocks wrapped in a piece of leather and rubbed them trying to produce sparks, making several attempts until he managed to light up the dry bushes. “Hail to the fire!” The fire amazed a young X ape-man. Curiously, other ape-men approached.

Moments later, Wes and the ape-men sat around the fire, below hundreds of stars and a shining moon. Wes whistled a tune. The ape-men listened, intrigued. Wes pointed to the sky. “That’s my star. I came from the sky.”

The young ape-man finally gathered courage to stick his hand close to the fire. He got burned and ran away. Wes laughed. The ape-men screamed, excitedly.

X carefully picked a piece of wood from the fire, holding the torch in the air. The ape-men stared, fascinated.

“My father used to say: ‘If you play with fire you might get burned.’ But of course that’s what’s fun about it.”

The next day, Wes was the only one sleeping outside, between two fires almost burning out. As an X ape-man approached, Wes woke up instantly, holding his spear in an instinctive reflex. The X ape-man got scared. Wes put it down. “It’s all right.” The X ape-man played with the hot coals in the remaining camp fire, poking them with a stick. Wes walked back to the forest.

CHAPTER 24

In the forest, an earthquake shook the land. Wes froze, frightened, trying to keep his balance. It was soon over.

At his house, the same day, Wes sharpened his new spears when another earthquake followed by a huge explosion far away shook the house.

Apprehensive, Wes stared at the horizon where a huge cloud of smoke ascended in the air. Soon the wind brought ashes from the sky.

Wes climbed up a hill, eager to find out what was going on. At the top, Wes looked at the horizon, mesmerized. In the mountains, far away, a volcano spat lava in the air. He ran down the hill.

In the forest, animals ran away from the blazing wood.

At the X ape-men colony, they moved around in panic. The horizon was colored with the red flames of the burning forest. X lead them away from the fire.

In was night in the valley when the volcano continued to pour lava. The entire forest was engulfed in fire, illuminating the night.

Sitting at a mountain in the dark, Wes stared at the burning valley.

The next day, Wes lied in the same place, sleeping. A deer ran nearby. Wes woke up. He looked at the valley. Nothing was left. Paradise was now a sea of darkness. The volcano still poured lava down into the burned valley cut by the red streams of lava. Wes walked in the opposite direction.

At a lagoon, a group of cannibal ape-men drank water. Others ate the last remains of a wild boar. The group of X ape-men led by X arrived at the lagoon, thirsty for water.

The cannibal ape-man screamed threateningly. The adult male X ape-men pounded their clubs on the ground. The cannibal ape-men retreated. The X ape-men attacked, chasing their enemies away. X returned and drank from the lagoon. Others joined him.

Moments later, the X ape-men rested on the ground. Wes came out of the forest, approaching X. "For the second time I thought you were dead. Everything is gone."

Wes stuck his head in the lagoon. "Water! Nothing like water." He laid on the ground exhausted. X sat next to him.

"Crazy planet, this one of yours... Heaven and hell... I miss my home... in Urizen the sky isn't as beautiful as this one... But there's always a soft breeze and the smell of Kawi trees..."

X poked ants with his club, not paying attention to his homesick friend.

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All of a sudden the X ape-men got excited. A saber tooth lion came out of the forest roaring. The X ape-men ran in the opposite direction. The adult males, holding their clubs, retreated slowly.

The saber tooth lion walked to the lagoon, interested only in water.

Wes was not fast enough to get out of its way because of his wooden leg, stumbling to the ground. The saber tooth lion bit his wooden leg.

X attacked with the club. He retreated as the lion turns to him. Other X ape-men returned to help, threatening and screaming.

X struck the lion. Wes reached for his spear dragging himself on the ground. The X ape-men attacked with their clubs. The lion ran away.

The X ape-men screamed, pounding their clubs on the ground. Wes smiled, proud of his gang. “And don’t come back, you ugly big tooth bastard!” Wes stood with difficulty. “We better get out of here.”

X joined the rest of the X ape-men group, walking into the forest, in the opposite direction of the volcano which still smoked in the horizon. Wes picked up his spear and followed the X ape-men. He followed the X ape-men through the forest, far behind.

CHAPTER 25

Wes walked out of the forest. A “new” green paradise was in front of him: a valley cut by a river, surrounded by mountains.

The X ape-men had already reached the bottom of the hill. Tired, Wes sat at the top of the hill, watching the X ape-men disappear into the forest below.

A young deer emerged from the forest. Wes grabbed his spear. They exchanged looks. Wes let the animal go, watching it run down the hill. Wes’ hand released the tight grip on his spear.

Twenty years later, a hand showing the wrinkles of aging held on to a spear. It was Wes, now in his seventies, with white hair and a wrinkled tanned face. He stared at the same unchanged valley. Putting down the spear, he grabbed a thin piece of tree bark laying on the ground.

Sharpening a piece of coal, Wes started drawing the valley on the white inside of the tree bark.

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An eagle glided in front of him. He added the bird to his drawing. A soft breeze blew his white hair. The sun was shining on his face.

Carrying his drawing, Wes walked, using his spear as a cane, through a sparse forest.

A group of X ape-men, males, females and youngsters sat under a tree, resting. X, the oldest of the group, was among them.

The youngsters playfully approached Wes. “I have a surprise for you.” The youngsters followed Wes, pushing and shoving each other.

Wes reached a huge tree with a house built between its huge branches. He pulled down a wood ladder with the end of his spear and climbed up. One young X ape-man tried to follow him. “No way. You stay down there. I’m not wasting my time cleaning the mess you make.”

Wes tried to pull up the ladder, but the young X ape-man held on to it as if it was a game. Pulling the ladder, Wes managed to lift the youngster off the ground. He released the ladder and the X ape-man fell to the ground. Wes pulled the ladder up. The youngster was soon on his feet, wanting to do it again. “I’m getting too old for this.”

The house had drawings on the walls, wood furniture, clay containers and baskets of fruit. Grabbing a flute made of bamboo and a wood cup sitting on a wood table, Wes drank water from a clay container and returned to the playful youngsters.

Outside, Wes played a simple tune, catching the youngsters’ attention. They were mesmerized with the sound.

Wes sat and played a playful song. The youngsters moved and jumped around, fascinated. “My grandfather used to play this song when I was your age.”

Wes continued to play. Adult X ape-men slowly approached the tree house, attracted by the joyful sound they've never heard before.

Later that night, the stars and the moon gave some light to the valley. A single fire burned in the darkness. A torch burned outside Wes' tree house. He was staring at the stars.

In the X ape men's cave, a group of X ape-men slept in the darkness. X found a spot among them. A fire burned in a corner near the entrance. An X ape-man stood guard next to the fire, feeding it wood.

The next afternoon, at a forest clearing, a saber tooth lion jumped over a deer and dragged it to the ground, biting its neck.

X ape-men carrying wood clubs, emerged from the forest, screaming and stomping their clubs on the ground.

The lion stood its ground to secure its prey. The deer was still alive. An X ape-man threw a rock at the tooth saber lion. Releasing the deer's neck, the lion roared, threateningly. The injured deer, under the lion's paws, tried to escape. More rocks hit the lion.

The X ape-men carefully approached, screaming, swinging and stomping their clubs. An ape-man threw his club at the lion which finally gave up its prey and fled into the forest.

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The injured deer also tried to escape but the X
ape-men club it to death. They dragged the dead
deer into the forest.

CHAPTER 26

At a river, sitting on a rock, fishing with a thin plant fiber rope, Wes patiently waited. He felt the fish bite. Another time and the fish was hooked. Wes struggled to get it out of the water. The pull was too strong. The rope broke. “Come back here! I’ll get you next time.”

Grabbing a stick holding a couple of smaller fish by their gills, he walked down the river to a canoe, staring down the river which extended to the horizon.

Wes slowly paddled down the river, enjoying the view at several different points.

The river waters flowed into the immense ocean. Wes' canoe slowly reached the sea. He stood staring at the immensity ahead of him. The sun was setting.

An ocean wave made Wes lose his balance. The canoe over turned. He tried to turn the canoe back but another wave made it sink.

Swimming with difficulty, Wes reached the beach. He lied on the white sands, resting. Seagulls glided above him. Relaxed, he had all the time in

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the world. A reflection of the sun off metal on the other side of the river gulf grabbed his attention.

Wes swam to the other side. On the river gulf bank, he found the shuttle, buried in mud. A small part of the fuselage was uncovered and reflected the rays of the sun.

Wes stared at the “relic” of his own world for a moment. He kneeled next to it and dug into the mud, uncovering part of the shuttle.

Moments later, covered in mud, Wes continued to dig with his bare hands, but it was getting tougher. He used a piece of wood to break hard chunks of mud, uncovering the door. A sharp pain halted his effort to open the door.

Wes rested, he was too old for this kind of work. Throwing water from the river, he partially cleaned the uncovered fuselage.

Wes touched the letters written on the shuttle as if they symbolized the precious memory of his origins.

Exhausted, he sat, staring at the partially uncovered shuttle. The sun set in the horizon. Tired, Wes cleaned himself in the river. The mud dissolved, revealing his old skin and physique.

That night, Wes sat next to a fire, listening to the waves breaking on the beach.

The next morning, a crab crawled towards Wes who was sleeping on the sand next to the extinguished fire. He woke up and playfully covered the crab with sand, but it found its way out.

On the river gulf bank, the waters had covered almost all of the shuttle again. Wes stared for a

moment and walked away. He walked back “home”, following the river.

Wes was walking through the forest when the pain in his chest stopped him again.

The wind blew his white hair as Wes walked up a green hill. He sat, admiring the beautiful valley. The sun was setting again. Wes lied on the grass.

At night, still lying in the same place, Wes stared at the immense sky, covered with millions of stars. One was his home. His eyes closed.

The next day, the sun was rising and Wes was still in the same place, eyes closed. A deer grazed nearby.

A young X ape-man slowly approached. He touched Wes’ peaceful face. Wes didn’t wake up. The young X ape-man sat beside him, playing with a stick.

Moments later, X and other X ape-men, surrounded Wes. X pushed his head gently. Wes was dead.

The X ape-men waited for their friend to wake up. The sun was rising over the valley. A new day had just begun.

From the sky, Wes and the ape-men were just dots in the mountain. Above in the high atmosphere, the mountain was just a dot on Earth. Far in space, the planet was just a dot in the universe.

The End.

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