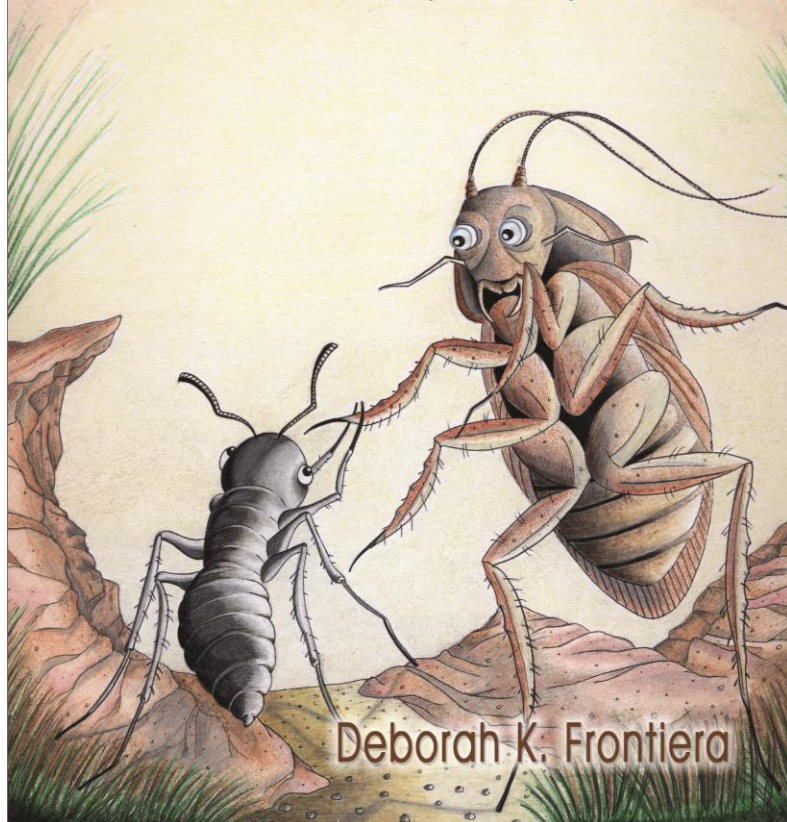


The Chronicles of Henry Roach-Dairier

New South Dairy Colony 50



Deborah K. Frontiera

The Chronicles of Henry Roach-Dairier:
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by
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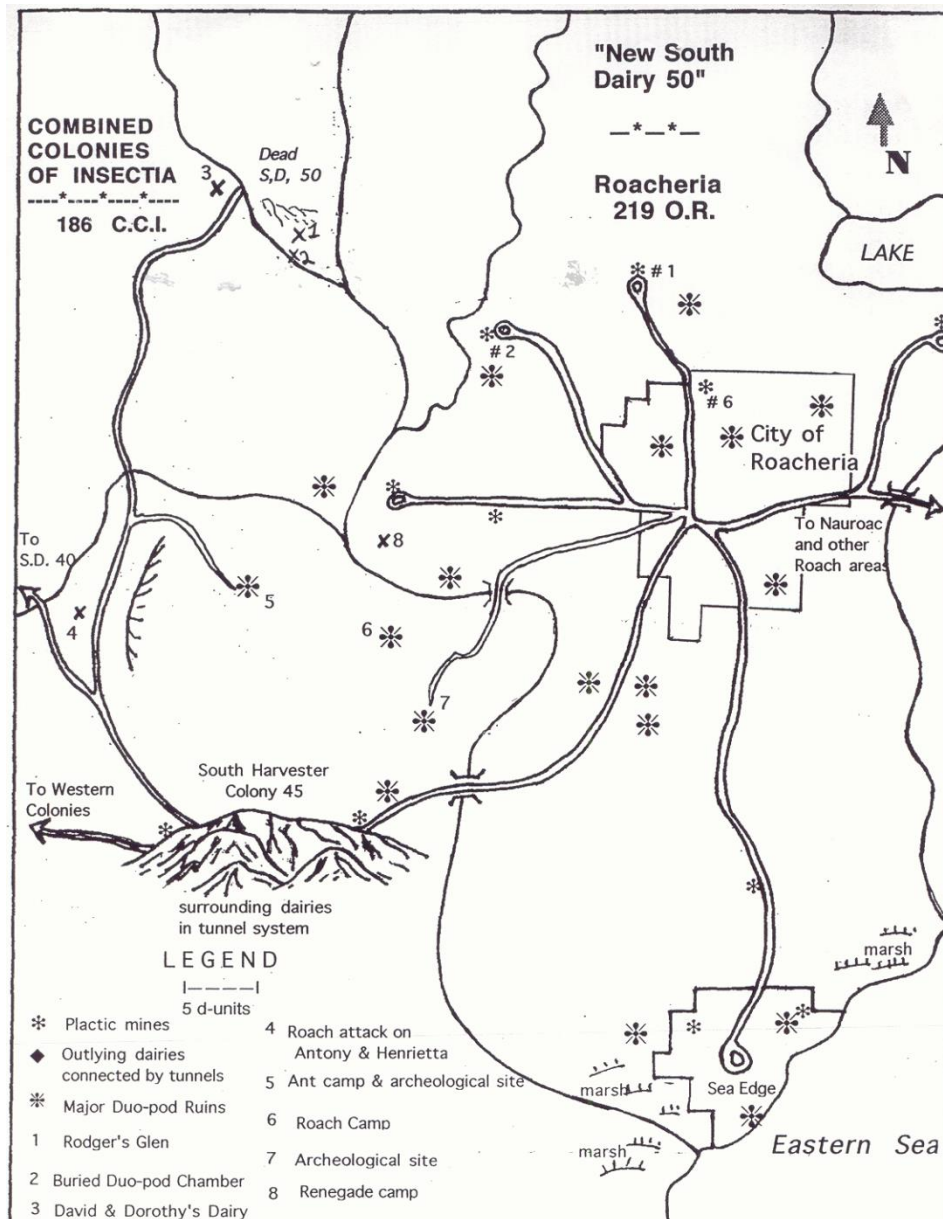
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Looking Back:

In *To Build a Tunnel*, the first book of the original trilogy, Henry narrates the story of his great-grandfather and two other ants who were tricked by roaches into building better tunnels in Roacherian plastic mines. The ant colony realizes too late that its members have been forced into slavery. South Harvester Colony 45's Council would prefer to solve the matter diplomatically, but are prepared for war.

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The Beginning:

as revealed to Daeira Dairier in dreams and meditation

In the beginning, Essence roamed the skies looking for the right place to start a world. She saw that our planet already had cycles of day and night, water and air. It had a set path around its sun so its cycles could be numbered, but it had no life.

“I will see what can live and grow here,” she said, and joined herself with it. The Creative Life Force of Essence endowed the waters with miniscule plants and creatures and the cycle of life began.

Essence cherished this new life, but was tired from her journey across the cosmos, so she entered the earth and went to sleep.

Eons later, when she awoke, the planet was filled with life forms. The water and land and air teemed with a great variety of plants and creatures. Some were tiny and frail, others huge and fierce. There was great variety even in their coverings—smooth, hard, scaly, furry. The large, scaly ones dominated at that time.

Essence watched her world. The sun fed the plants, which fed the moving creatures, who then were eaten by larger ones, and on and on. They grew, propagated, and returned to feed the earth when their time was over. Some creatures failed and disappeared, but new ones evolved to take their place.

And ants were there.

Essence, satisfied with the balance and cycles, cradled her world, and went to sleep again.

The pain of many shocks woke Essence. Chunks of matter hurled through the cosmos and struck the planet, killing millions of life forms and knocking the planet in its cosmic path. The dust from their impact screened the sun’s light, denying life-giving energy to plants. Essence watched in dismay as thousands of species disappeared from her cherished world. In her grief, she shook. Hills tumbled. Mountains sent forth liquid fire from within.

But even in grief, Essence’s Creative Life Force found its way again. An infinite variety of flowering plants came to be. A few species of the scaly creatures and the small ones with fur and feathers survived.

And ants were still there.

Essence watched for many eons as the fur creatures increased in size and began to dominate. “What would happen,” Essence said, “if I interfered and gave one life form an

advantage? If I gave a tad of my intelligence to a creature, could it create something original, as I have?"

Essence looked closely at each species and finally chose one that seemed different from others. This species was not entirely covered with fur, stood on only two appendages, and had a well-developed nervous system. She infused them with more intelligence and waited to see what would happen.

Season cycles passed. Generations of Duo Pods came and went. Essence saw that they made tools, built things, and developed the planet. Their machines grew ever more complex. Satisfied, Essence took a nap.

Essence awoke with a fever. The planet's surface was a shambles. The air and the water were fouled. All the Duo Pods, all of the feathered creatures, and most of the furry ones were dead forever.

"What has happened to my world?" Essence cried.

Grief for her failed experiment and illness consumed Essence. The earth shook. Storms raged. Her tears covered many lands. Then slowly, the earth healed itself. Although it would take many more eons for all of the Duo Pod creations to return to the earth, the world looked new and fresh once more. Essence found that one substance the Duo Pods had made would not break itself down and feed the earth. They had indeed created something original. Her experiment had not been a total failure.

She looked around hopefully and found that ants, roaches and other insects were not only still there, but had grown greatly in size and changed in other ways.

"Ah, my faithful ants," she said. "You have been with me from the earliest days and have always been civilized. Perhaps the intelligence I gave the Duo Pods was not enough. I will try again. I will give you not only the gift of knowledge, but my compassion as well. And this time, I will not sleep, but will watch over my world. I will be available to my creatures, speaking to their minds when they seek me. When each one's time on earth is done, the part of me that is in them will return to me in unity forever. Eat then, my ants, of the lasting creation of the Duo Pods—plastic—and receive my gifts. Cherish my world and seek to understand its mysteries."

And so we are.

While Essence was speaking, a group of roaches approached. They took the gift of intelligence, but ran away before the second, more important gift of compassion and inner essence was given. Thus they received no more of Essence than had the extinct Duo Pods.

Bemused, Essence observed the roaches as they ran from her. "I must watch and see what comes of this development."

Prologue:

Henry Roach-Dairier

My grandfather, Antony Dairier, was no ordinary ant. I had always known that, but I came to understand it in a very special way during my thirteenth summer when I made my final molt into an adult roach body.

I was the youngest of five, hatching after a space of six season cycles, while my brothers and sister had but a season cycle or two between them. I was not an easy creature to raise. I could be sly and deceitful, clever and conniving, and I enjoyed manipulating my parents to get exactly what I thought I wanted. I was very good at talking my way out of trouble, until that summer.

Only a creature who has been through it can fully understand the pain of molting. Ant larvae, who undergo complete metamorphosis, have no idea what it is to be trapped inside an exoskeleton that has become too small for one's body. They get a bit uncomfortable, whine for a few time frames, sleep seven season cycles, and wake up as adults. The crickets and other wild insects that grow up as nymphs, and the grasshoppers we raise for food at New South Dairy Colony 50, do not seem to be bothered as they molt. Maybe their nervous systems are not like that of a roach. We must endure molting four times between hatching and our twelfth or thirteenth season cycle.

My father, the physician in our colony, gave me a potion to drink during my other molts. He was rarely around as I approached my final molt. In my usual impatient way, I decided to get it myself. I had often watched Allie when she assisted my father. I thought I could do better. During the late spring and early summer of that season cycle, I slipped into the dispensary at night several times and tried some interesting combinations of herbs that made me feel pretty good. One night, I was in so much pain I didn't look at what I grabbed. I simply dumped several things into a mug of honey dew and drank it.

It certainly took care of the pain. I wanted to laugh and float away on an imaginary cloud. I must have climbed the cupboards, because suddenly I fell, breaking several shelves and glass containers. I hit the floor like a rock. I couldn't move, and when I tried to scream, no sound came. Then there was only blackness.

When awareness returned, I felt a breathing mask over my face and a tube in my mouth. The pain was back. I could hear my father and my grandfather talking.

"Will he be all right?" my grandfather asked.

"I hope so. It was hard to know what antidote to give. I'm not sure what he actually took. Dad, he frightens me. This isn't the first time I've caught him in the dispensary. Why is he so persistent about getting into trouble? The others didn't have problems like this."

"No two young are the same. Give him time. He'll molt out of this stage. He's grown up with the same values you did. He's good at heart, really; I know it."

"I'm not so sure. All he talks about, when he does talk to me, is how he wants to go to Roacheria for training."

"So, let him go."

"You can't be serious! If he went there and did even one of the things he's done here, he would find himself on a one-way trip to the mantis compound without his mandibles. I won't expose him to that."

“Calm down. I didn’t mean now. Forgive me, but I find it rather ironic that I argued with my father because I didn’t want to leave here for training, and I argued with you because you didn’t want to leave, and now you argue with your son because he does want to.”

I kept listening and was surprised to hear my father crying. My grandfather moved closer to him, the brace on his mid-right appendage made a soft clip-clapping sound as he moved.

“I don’t know what to do. The others were so easy. Henry has always been different. He reminds me of old Rex.”

It was silent while my grandfather comforted my father. He stroked my father’s antennae, not an easy thing to do since my grandfather was quite a bit shorter and about one third as wide as his adopted son. A small wave of guilt rolled over me, but at the same time I felt angry. I needed comfort, too. I couldn’t remember the last time my father had even touched me.

Grandfather spoke gently. “Henrietta always said that a good cuddle, a cup of floral herb tea and a sound night’s sleep would solve anything. Most of the time, she was right. When was the last time you really talked to Henry, stroked him, told him how special he is and how much you care about him?”

“It’s at times like this I really miss Mum the most.”

“I know, but when have you attended to Henry’s needs?”

“When have I had time?”

“That’s what I thought. Rodger, first of all you are working much too hard. You’ve got time for everybody in this colony except those who need you the most. You had your problems, too. Never forget them. That’s what helps us achieve wisdom, and the ability to help others through their times of trial. You took each of your other young out to the glen, like I took you once, and told them parts of your own life so they could understand theirs.”

“It’ll take more than an afternoon on Seventhday to get through to Henry.”

“I know. That’s why I’m going to take him. How long do you think it will be before he molts?”

“About a quarter time frame.”

“You stay with him now. Keep talking to him. I’m going to gather supplies. I’ll take him out there when he’s recovered, just the two of us, and we’ll stay as long as it takes. Tell everybody to leave us alone. Don’t worry, I’ll stay clear when he starts thrashing around.”

“Are you sure about this? Your health . . .”

“Don’t worry about me. Give me the herbs that I need and tell me how much to mix for Henry. I will tell him everything, including the things you would prefer to forget. When he does go to Roacheria, he should be fully informed about the possible consequences of his choices there.”

My father was silent for a moment. “Everything?”

“Everything.”

I felt torn. The prospect of seven days alone with my grandfather did not excite me, but the idea of learning about my father was tempting. I wanted to open my eyes but couldn’t. I drifted into the darkness again but I could hear my father’s voice echoing through my brain. “Why didn’t I see it? Why didn’t you come to me and tell me you were hurting, Henry? Why wasn’t I listening? I’m sorry I left you alone for so long . . .” on and on.

I awoke to the touch of his pods softly stroking me and I cried for the first time in many time frames. I really felt glad to see him, for once.

He sighed with relief, caressed me again and began to remove the breathing mask and the tube. I noticed that I was in one of the clinic chambers, not at home. I felt genuinely confused, and frightened.

“Please, don’t scare your mother and me like this again. We’ve been out of our minds. You nearly ended your life. You’ve been in a coma for four days.”

“I’m sorry,” I stammered. It sounded so insufficient.

* * * *

The following morning, a little before dawn, knowing I was in more trouble than I could possibly talk my way out of, I followed my grandfather and carried a large basket filled with supplies. Later I carried him, too, when he was too tired to walk.

We headed eastward across the stream that ran beside the tiny mound he had first known as home, and into the meadows beyond. When I asked where we were going, he said only that it was a place we both knew and that it had special memories for him.

An h-unit later, with early morning sun in our faces and long shadows behind us, we arrived at a small grove of wood plants whose foliage touched the ground, leaving a protected place within. I did know it well. It was one of my favorite places to hide when I didn’t feel like going to training, or wanted to get away from adults. It was also a place I had wondered about because there were two carefully made memorial markers there. One said, “Sir Rodger, my mentor;” the other, “Geree“, she wanted something better.”

One rule I had never broken was asking personal questions about someone else’s past. I had always waited to be told. I had a feeling I was about to find out a lot of things and resigned myself to hearing my grandfather’s version of the Antstory of New South Dairy 50.

The Cast of New South Dairy Colony 50 **Close to their order of appearance**

The Ants:

Antony: second son of David and Dorothy

David and Dorothy: among the few survivors of “old” South Dairy Colony 50

Arthur: older brother of Antony who does not survive the disaster of “old” South Dairy Colony 50

Drew, Deedra, Arlene and Alan: younger siblings of Antony

Henrietta: gifted daughter of Henry who studies archeology

Henry and Adeline: Henrietta’s parents of South Harvester 45

Hilda, Annie and Andrew: younger siblings of Henrietta

Denton: ant who regularly carries supplies from South Harvester 45 to Antony’s family

Master Alex: director of the advanced training facility in South Harvester 45

Master Diandra: Henrietta’s mentor in archeology who holds Antony’s probationary contract

Captain Alexander: in command of fire ant guards on the archeological expedition

Daniel and Aaron: chemists on the archeological expedition

Hanna and Arnold: of West Harvester Colony 30, geologists on the archeology expedition

Carl: of North Carpenter Colony 20, archeologist on the expedition, mentor to Carrie

Carrie: archeology trainee with more experience than Henrietta
Axel: fire ant guard under Captain Alexander
Commander Ferdinand: in charge of all fire ant guards in South Harvester 45
Master Surgeon Clint: physician in charge of Antony's recovery
Amy: physician trainee, Master Surgeon Clint is her mentor, later she is mentor to Rodger
Helen: Council Chief of South Harvester Colony 45
Master Alexandra: Intercolonial Council Chief
Commander Arnold: in command of the red desert guards of West Desert Colony 15
Fred, Carter and Cathy: three ants who study Roach with Antony as their mentor
Master Dawn: geologist from South Dairy 40 helping the team of scientists in South Harvester 45
Donald and Cassie: mated pair who survive the tragedy of "old" South Dairy 50, returning to help rebuild
Art: dairier in South Harvester 45 who goes to New South Dairy 50, son of Cort of "old" South Dairy 50
Allie: mate of Art, physician's assistant for New South Dairy 50
Denise: a tunnel engineer, daughter of Alexa—another "old" South Dairy 50 survivor
Herbert: mate of Denise, expert in domicile excavation

The Roaches:

Rodger: banished roach official who teaches Antony to speak Roach
Randal: interpreter on the archeological expedition and son of Rufus, the interpreter from Roacheria in *To Build a Tunnel*
Sir Rex: powerful member of the S.E.R.C.B., son of Sir Rudy in *To Build a Tunnel*
Master Gerald: geo-chemist
Master Roland: chief archeologist
Raylin: Master Roland's mate
Master Gerard: archeologist
Gerry: captured roach warrior at South Harvester Colony 45
Rene: another captured roach warrior who helps bring about the peace
Raul: leader of Sir Rex's personal warriors
Sir Reginald: Supreme Executor of the S.E.R.C.B., son-in-law of the "banished" Sir Rodger
Sir Ralph: another S.E.R.C.B. member, part of the peace conference
Rodger: adopted roach nymph Antony and Henrietta who is named for Antony's mentor
Geree': mortally injured female roach, biological mother of Rodger
George: one of Sir Rex's warriors, biological father of Rodger
Rita: young female roach brought to New South Dairy 50 to be Rene's mate
Antonette, Antony, and a third unnamed son, nymphs of Rene and Rita
Master Rufus: head of the Advanced Training Center for the Sciences in Roacheria
Robert: another doctor in training who bullies Rodger, grandson of one of Sir Rex's sisters
Sir Ronald: S.E.R.C.B. member, patient of Rodger in Roacheria
Ronda: granddaughter of Sir Ronald
Ginny: employee of Master Roland who becomes Rodger's mate
Rayann: Ginny's sister
Sir Reginald the Younger: son of S.E.R.C.B. Supreme Executor Sir Reginald

1.

Antony Dairier awoke from his long pupate sleep and found himself in total darkness. He reached up instinctively and pulled a feeding tube from his mouth, discovered he had legs, and rolled over onto them. He kicked something that went clattering about.

He stretched and said, "That's better," and was surprised by the sound of his own voice. He turned his head from side to side, let his antennae find a way out of the chamber, moved toward the portal, fumbled with the latch and finally pushed it open.

Before him was a large, softly lit chamber. It seemed familiar though he could remember nothing certain. He sensed that there should be other creatures around, but the chamber was empty.

"I'm here," he shouted. No answer. His confusion increased. He froze, shaking, unable to think of what he was supposed to do. He had no idea how long he stood there. It seemed like an eternity. His anxiety increased with every moment.

With a click and a scraping noise, a portal on the opposite side of the chamber opened and someone entered. She was carrying a wiggling white thing. A blast of light blinded Antony.

He raised his pods to his face and cried out, "Aggh!"

He heard a voice. "Antony! You've emerged. And I wasn't here. How awful." She put the white thing in an oval basket. Caring pods surrounded him, stroked him, held him. The voice, which now seemed familiar, continued. "I'm so sorry. I'm your mother. We hadn't expected you to emerge for another half a time frame. I would never have left the mound if I thought you were ready. It must have been dreadful to find no one here to greet you."

Gradually he relaxed as she continued to stroke him. Things began to make sense. This was home. This was his mother, Dorothy. He began to remember the names of things. He leaned against his mother. "I'm all right now."

She stood back and looked at him. "You are so fine looking, and larger than we thought you would be. You're at least half an f-unit longer than your father. He'll be so surprised to see you. You hadn't been moving around. I listened this morning and couldn't hear anything. Are you hungry? I've been out gathering wild fruit."

She walked on her back four appendages to a table and picked up a basket with her front two pods. Antony noticed he was a little longer than she was but her abdomen bulged larger. Like his, her exoskeleton was black.

He ate several berries and she continued to explain. The white wiggling thing she had been carrying was his sister, Arlene, a three season cycle old larva. He had a brother, Drew, and another sister, Deedra, both pupating. Drew would not emerge as an adult for another five season cycles. Deedra had just begun to pupate. It would be nearly seven season cycles before he would see her. She showed him several images on parchment. His mind cleared. He didn't remember things exactly, but as she continued, he found himself thinking that he knew what she meant.

Late in the day, his father, David, came in and embraced him. They talked as they cleared all the equipment from his pupation chamber and turned it into a sleep chamber. They placed a wooden frame around the thistledown mattress he had used as a larva and pupa, brought in a lightning bug lamp, a small work surface, and a chair.

For the next few days, Antony followed his parents everywhere. He heard explanations about everything around him and absorbed it all like parched soil soaks up the sky's water. He climbed the wood plants with his father and tended the aphids, extracted their juice and processed it into honey dew. He helped gather honey from the bee hives. Together, they cut the tall grassfronds, stacked the poles and gathered the unusually large seeds into baskets.

"The grassfronds are a recently evolved plant," his father said. "As near as our experts can figure, this type of grass used to be short. It suddenly increased in height, even as we evolved from tiny creatures to our present size."

Antony made a game of climbing the twenty to thirty f-unit stems of the graceful plants. The stems would arc with his weight, until he nearly touched the ground. Then he would jump off and watch the stem spring back and forth, scattering seed everywhere.

"We won't have to plant any next spring if you keep doing that, Antony," his father called. "Please, no more. The rest of the seed must be gathered."

"Why?"

His father laughed. "One for wild creatures, one just to be, three for the colony, and one for me. Well, for us, really, but it doesn't rhyme that way."

"What creatures? What colony?"

"The little creatures deserve their food. We are all part of the interdependent chain of life, and each creature is important, so I always leave some seed on the ground for them. You've planted the ones 'to be,' the seed for next season cycle. Most of what we produce goes to South Harvester Colony 45. Soon, carriers will arrive, bringing supplies we need and taking our harvest. We depend on each other, even though our family is alone right now, and, of course, we need our own food for the next season cycle. This is a busy time for us. I'm glad you are able to help."

David embraced him and held him close. "Soon you will understand exactly how special you are, and know our dream."

* * * *

The next day, when Antony returned for lunch from gathering seed, he was greeted by a wonderfully delicious aroma. The main chamber of the mound was decorated with fall blossoms and foliage.

"This is the fourteenth anniversary of the day you hatched," his father said.

The aroma came from a honey cake on the dining surface and from freshly roasted grasshopper. The meal was fabulous, down to the last drop of warm honeydew and scrap of plastic salad. They laughed, talked, meditated together, played with and cuddled Arlene.

His father looked at him more seriously. "Antony, come with me. There are things I must explain to you now."

Antony followed his father out of the mound, across the small stream that flowed near it, up its further bank, and into the meadows. He had not been on this side of the stream before.

"Why isn't mother coming?"

David Dairier's voice was sober. "This day and the short journey we are making are still difficult for her to talk about. She will need my comfort when we get back."

Antony was confused. Some instinct told him not to ask, but to wait patiently for an explanation. He could see ahead of them a large, obviously unnatural hill. They continued

toward it until they stood before an oval metal plate in its side, four times as wide and five times as tall as the two of them. It was covered with strange markings.

His father spoke at last. "Soon you will be trained to decode and understand our written language, but until then I'll read it for you: 'In memory of over 40,000 ants who perished on the eighteenth day of the Tenth Time Frame, 165th season cycle of the Combined Colonies of Insectia. Let all who come here lift up their thoughts and meditate upon all those who are no longer a part of this world.'"

David took Antony's front pod in his and lifted it up. "For my family, Dorothy's family, for our Arthur, and all the others, I offer these thoughts. Help me find joy and peace in Antony. For you we live, we grow, and build again."

He led Antony up the side of the mound, stopping about one third of the way up at a small wooden marker that said, "Arthur, our first." He motioned to Antony to sit down.

"Our domicile used to be straight down from this spot. Almost everyone perished the day you hatched. I have you and your mother only because you happened to be ready to hatch at that time.

"Many season cycles ago, underground explorers found salt dome caverns to the northeast of here. They were filled with many containers left by the extinct, intelligent creatures who came before us on this planet. Our scientists call these creatures 'Duo Pod Erectus'. The containers were filled with many substances, most of them highly toxic. The first one our chemists studied proved to be beneficial. It's called tunnel liquid and has revolutionized the way we build tunnels. Your mother's mentor worked on that project in his younger days.

"A time frame before you hatched, all our chemists were involved in a project to study a different substance, a powder. Your mother was in charge of it. They found it produced a heavy toxic gas when mixed with water. Though still wondering if it had any useful purpose, your mother had recommended that it be left alone and permanently labeled 'too dangerous for study.'"

He stopped a moment and took a few deep breaths before he could go on. "Arthur was your older brother by almost seven season cycles. He was about to enter pupation and you were about to hatch, so your mother took a quarter-time-frame's holiday. We prepared Arthur's pupation chamber and he began his sleep that Sixthday, the sixteenth.

"Firstday, I went out to the surface with two others to begin to round up the grasshopper herd. Sky water was falling again, so no one else was out. About midmorning the whole mound shook. We felt it three d-units away. Your mother knew that something terribly wrong had occurred in the lab. She grabbed your egg and ran into the main tunnel to set off the alarm system. Unfortunately, alarms almost always mean there could be tunnel flooding from too much sky water, so all should stay in the chamber where they were, or enter the nearest emergency chamber. Since it had been a very wet fall and we had already had one severe summer storm, everyone supposed that was the emergency. No one attempted to leave. Your mother could sense the poison and began banging on domicile doors, begging ants to get out. She finally roused her brother but by then the poison was choking them both. He pushed her ahead of him and told her to leave and get you out.

"We found her at the main entrance crying hysterically, and you squeaking away in her pods. Donald and Cassie, a newly mated pair who were working with me that day, went to check the other mound entrances to see if anyone else had escaped. They returned with two others, a young male, Cort, and a female, Alexa. The toxic gas was heavier than air and stayed within the mound. We sat, huddled, cold and wet, in shock and disbelief, while you squealed in hunger.

“You pulled us back to practical concerns. Donald and Cassie headed down the trail for South Harvester 45 to get help. Your mother leaned over you, cradling you and trying to keep you warm and dry. The rest of us began to dig a shelter and searched for something to wrap around you. No larvae had ever been out of a mound before then.

“Donald and Cassie returned with carriers, doctors, and other scientists from South Harvester Colony 45. They had collapsed the inter-colonial tunnel so that the poison couldn’t spread further underground. There was nothing they could do for the colony. The entrances were sealed. They took us to South Harvester 45.

“We stayed there through the winter. Donald and Cassie, Alexa and Cort decided to go to South Dairy 40, where they had distant family members. Your mother tried to work in South Harvester 45’s lab, but she found she couldn’t work with chemicals anymore, in spite of the caring help and support she received. We were miserable. Finally, we convinced the Intercolonial Council to allow us to return and rebuild. Several workers volunteered to go along for the first time frame. They built our mound, helped round up some of the herds and got us started.”

David took Antony up to the very top of the mound. Antony looked out onto d-unit after d-unit of lush meadows, small streams and ponds, the cut patches where they had harvested the grassfronds, and small groves of wood plants. He could see the glen where their mound was and the low slope on western side.

“This is perfect surface for dairying. This colony will live again through you, your brother and your sisters, if you choose to be a part of my dream. You are the living memorial, the only young who survived. Your mother chose your name because it means ‘all ants.’ With us, you live for all of them. That is why this day holds both joy and sorrow for your mother and me.”

The two of them remained there a short time, meditating silently, before going home.

* * * *

Half a time frame later a group of carrier ants arrived from South Harvester 45. The tiny mound was quite crowded, but jubilant as they celebrated Antony’s emergence. They brought his parents several written communications, the latest Colonial Bulletins, manuscripts and training materials that his father had requested, some new tools, and enough plastic to last for two time frames until they returned again. They said not to be concerned about credit. The Council knew how hard they worked and would never let a family go in need of anything.

* * * *

Life settled into a more peaceful routine once the harvest was completed. Antony became very good at handling the grasshoppers and aphids. His father had more time, so the surface became Antony’s training center. He learned the names of every plant and creature and how each depended on some other, an intricate chain of life. He learned to interpret sky signs, the feelings that indicated a change in the weather, how to know the h-unit, and to find his way at night by the stars. David trained him carefully to avoid the lairs of spiders, and to defend himself against the mantis and other predators. He learned to respect every form of life for its own sake.

Each evening for an h-unit or two, and all day during the cold, damp winter, his mother became the trainer while his father took charge of Arlene. She taught him to decode, comprehend, and write their language, compute and solve problems, understand his culture and

the Antstory of the Combined Colonies of Insectia. He learned it easily enough but disliked being cooped up inside the mound.

Antony's first strategy for avoiding his studies was to get through them quickly. He found this only resulted in more and more complex lessons. Then he tried dawdling and daydreaming.

"Is something wrong?" his mother asked.

Antony stared at the problem he was supposed to be doing.

Dorothy turned to David. "This is the fourth time in as many days he hasn't been able to do the problems. Could his mind have been damaged by the fumes, making him unable to learn more complex things?"

"I don't think so. He caught on quickly to everything I taught him about the surface."

Antony sighed. "There's nothing wrong with me. I don't like being stuck inside with all these books and problems. I would rather be outside with the herd."

"Formal training is important, Antony. No matter what your life's work, there are certain things all of us must know. You're too inexperienced to make decisions about your training. Finish the problems and don't worry your mother."

Antony signed and finished his assignment. He accepted studying as a necessary but distasteful part of his life and longed for spring to come.

Formal training was set aside when the weather grew warm again. The aphid and grasshopper eggs hatched and it took all of them to corral and protect the tiny nymphs. At first Antony was an observer, holding Arlene, learning from both his parents.

On the fourth day, Dorothy said, "Antony knows what to do now. I'm going back to the mound with Arlene. I don't like having her out of the mound more than absolutely necessary."

"I know. Go on," his father replied.

Through his parents' respect for each other, Antony learned basic ant philosophy: every ant should seek a life's work that suited his or her talents and interests.

When the grasshopper nymphs had grown enough to molt the first time, Antony and his father moved the herd to the eastern side of the stream. He had grazed them on the western side for two season cycles and the meadows there needed time to rejuvenate. The herd settled itself immediately, grazing on the lush grass of late spring. They left them for a while so that David could show Antony the agreed upon limits of their surface area. Coming over a low slope, they saw a crowd of flies hovering and buzzing around a dead creature.

"It's another banished roach," said David as they came close. "I find a few every season cycle. Help me dig a hollow. He still deserves to be decently covered."

Antony looked at the roach as his father drove off the flies. "Did the flies do that to his face?" he asked.

"No. When roaches commit some violent crime, their outer mandibles are cut off so they can no longer harm any other creature or defend themselves. They're either banished or simply fed to mantises they keep penned up for that purpose. Some of the banished ones wander around here and steal from us. Most starve to death because they don't know what wild foods to eat. Others eat something poisonous or some predator gets them."

"What do you mean by steal and violent crime?"

"To steal is to take something without asking. If one creature intentionally hurts or kills another, that's a violent crime."

"Why would one creature want to hurt another?"

David sighed. "You have so much to learn. Our isolation here makes it difficult for us to instill a real sense of colony life in you. I wish I could send you to a training center in South Harvester 45, but I need your help too much. The roaches are intelligent, as we are, but their ways are very different. While we work together, they have little regard for each other. They care only about plastic and owning more than they need. They don't take care of each other, so some steal what they have no credit to buy. Often, they intentionally hurt one another."

They finished digging the hollow, dragged the dead roach into it and covered him.

"What was that mark on his back?"

"It's the mark of the banished, burned in with a hot iron. It warns all other roaches not to help in any way, or they could be banished themselves."

David led Antony a little further, and pointed to a line of wood plants about a d-unit away.

"That line of wood plants and the stream that flows through it are the agreed upon limits of our surface area. Promise me you will never go there."

"I promise. Dad, I'm confused. You told me last fall that our part is to be in harmony with everything, take no more than we need, replace what we take, and respect the natural cycles of the planet. If the roaches don't care for each other, why did we cover that dead one? Why not leave him for the flies for all the wrong I studied about last winter?"

David sat down. "Yes, there have been many violent conflicts. Yes, the roaches and their leaders on the South East Roach Control Board constantly cheat all the colonies. They keep increasing the cost of plastic by demanding more of the food we produce. They would enslave us if they could. We have taught them our language, but they refuse to teach us theirs. Some time ago, a few in South Harvester 45 learned to read it. I've come to know a fair amount through bargaining with the traders who come here in the summer, but not enough to be helpful to the colonies. By all rights, we should hate them, but our creed demands more of us. We can't set an example of good by lowering ourselves to their level. Their ways remind us of the consequences of choosing greed and selfishness."

"Why don't we fight back?"

"The fire ants in all the colonies are for defense only. We are not aggressors like our ancient antcestors. War only makes bitter feelings worse. We must win by showing them our ways are better. As for our family, we are safe as long as they think this surface is worthless. All the plastic was mined from here long ago and the Duo Pod ruins around here aren't important. The only thing I fear is that someday they might think that we have something of value and attack us. We have no defense here."

Antony thought about everything his father had taught him and what he had seen that day. He chose to embrace his father's dream.