

Chapter 1

Earth and Its Non-Existent Children

“The place, which is classified and unknown to us, is somewhere in North America. The time (which was also classified) was sometime at night after dark.

“On Earth, a government agency was trying to prove, among other things, that humans were the only intelligent life forms in the universe. A group of aliens, outraged by the humans’ assumptions, attacked the agency’s facility. The aliens then moved on to attack the families of the workers from the agency; they kidnapped one hundred fifty children, some were not yet born and some who had only been out of the fetal stage for only a few months. A few of the children were only slightly older than three Earth years.

“However, to the majority of Earth’s civilians, the agency and its facility were nonexistent. This means that even though its workers existed, no one outside of the government knew they existed. The Aruk kidnapped one hundred fifty children, and no one even knew they were gone.”

“Where did the aliens take them?” a young boy nine years of age asked.

Five children sat in beanbag chairs around their history teacher. They were in a circular room whose walls were covered in various charts and pictures. Some of the pictures would be recognized by any normal human as scenes and events from Earth’s interesting history. Yet the rest were things that any normal human would not recognize. They showed the history of an alien race; a different and strange language captioned the pictures.

Yet the children did not seem bothered by what the pictures portrayed, just as others would care less about a poster of an apple in a classroom. In fact, they already knew what the pictures said and portrayed, having recently added a picture to the wall corresponding to the lesson they had just finished. Yes—neither the

room nor its contents concerned the children. They were busy paying rapt attention to their alien teacher.

Like his parents and ancestors before him, the alien was highly intelligent. Individuals in his race each had a special gift that enabled them to make good use of their intelligence. He had the gift to remember history. His students would often say that he only had to read something once; if it had to do with history, he remembered it.

He, Ankh, was an elderly teacher of history. His body, although it had form, was not entirely there. He told very few where or when he was. Like the rest of his people, he had three long legs and arms. He was thinly built and tall, with a light purple tinge to his skin. Like the rest of his people, his bald, tattooed head seemed unnaturally large for this gangly alien's neck. The tattoos, which were forest green and encircled his head and base of his neck, were given to him once he came of age. They described his talents and unique abilities; because each individual is unique, each Aunantet's set of tattoos are different. Yet the children could not care any less about this elderly alien's appearance.

To them he was not strange, for the human children had known him all of their life. The children listened because they wanted to learn. They not only wanted to learn history, they also wanted to learn how to use more of their minds. This history teacher was only one of many teachers who were schooling these young Earth children how to use their whole brain capacity, how to think in more than three dimensions, and how to think outside the "hypercube."

"Where did the aliens take the children?" the young boy asked his history teacher a second time.

"Please remember to raise your cube," Ankh prompted gently.

The young boy closed his eyes and grimaced as he concentrated hard on the cube in his hand. For only a few seconds, and with a great deal of difficulty, the boy managed to use his mind to change the molecules in his cube until it was constituted by an element lighter than the air around it. This caused the cube to float a few inches above his hand before he lost control of it, and it dropped back down. The young boy slowly opened his eyes and looked askance from his teacher.

"That's all right, you are getting better at it," Ankh stated reassuringly. "Now, regarding what happened to the one hundred fifty children . . . you must have all memorized the story by now. Must we go over it again?"

A fourteen year-old girl by the name of Rivinaig Nejnigns smiled, as she already knew and understood the young boy's reasoning.

"It is more fun hearing you tell the story." She answered, grinning.

Ankh's normally purple face deepened in color, blushing as he pretended to concede to finishing a story he had already planned on finishing in the first place.

"Very well," he answered with a smile. "The alien kidnappers were from a species called Aunantet. The kidnappers were members of the Aruk, a faction that had separated from the main government who knew nothing about their actions towards the humans. Had they known, the government would have been furious. However, it would be some time before they found out.

Meanwhile, the Aruk brought the children back to their secret base on the planet Aun, home of the Aunantet species. They tested the children repeatedly, trying to find every weakness the children had. The Aruk put starvation, pain, and confusion upon these young ones in order to find the breaking points of their species. Many tests were performed in order for the Aruk to gather the information they needed so they could fulfill their master plan against the humans."

Rivinaig, the oldest, remembered many of the tests and punishments unlike the younger children. She shut her eyes against the flow of scenes and memories of pain streaming past her mind's eye. Ankh paused and glanced at her in sympathy knowing the other children were too young at the time and their memories would not have endured as long and as vivid as Rivi's.

After a second or two, Rivi opened her eyes and nodded at old Ankh, who was not only her teacher but her assigned guardian as well. She knew he would understand her feelings. They would probably discuss how she felt later that night over the evening meal. Ankh, Rivi knew, was thinking the same and would now continue the story.

"Anyway, the Aruk would not have time to fulfill their objective because one year later the Aunantet government had discovered their hidden facility and stormed the place. They freed the children and captured a few of the Aruk . . . but most got away.

The Aunantet tried to contact the people of Earth, but Earth apparently cannot respond or can't understand the message when it reaches them. However, the children were assigned to Aunantet parents, and a facility has been established to teach and house the children. The Aunantet government has decreed that they shall be taught everything they can from the collected knowledge of both worlds.

"These children soon began not only to learn the history, science, literature, math, and geography of both Earth and Aun; they also began to learn to use more of their brain capacity than any other normal human. They began to learn to use their minds more efficiently."

"Like the Aunantet!" a young girl stated.

"Yes," answered Ankh, "Now who can tell me who the one hundred fifty children are?"

"Us!" another child stated.

"Yes, very good. You know the story well," Ankh answered with a chuckle that made his robes ripple like water in a pond. "Now then, I believe that's the end of class for today. It's time for you to go. But don't forget—over the weekend I'd like you to write a report on what we've learned this week on freedom and how it influenced changes throughout history."

A hole then materialized in the wall of the circular history class and 14 of the 15 students filed through the hole. Rivi stayed behind.

"Something troubling you, Rivi?" Ankh asked, standing and stretching his three arms over his head.

"I was just wondering why over all these years, no matter how many times I've heard the story, no one tells us what happened to the Earth Parents."

“Well, as far as I know, the parents did not fare well from the ordeal. Quite a few of them are more than likely gone. Nevertheless, those who still live have probably been sent to an asylum because of the effects from the encounter. But like I said, no one’s supposed to know those employees even existed.”

“So how would you find someone who doesn’t exist?”

“Exactly,” Ankh answered, as he patted her shoulder. “But that doesn’t mean that you children will never be able to go back to Earth. . . .”

“Though I doubt we’d fit in well. Oh, here’s the computer I’ve been working on,” Rivi stated, walking over to her beanbag chair to get it and hand it to Ankh.

“Hmm, this seems quite complicated,” Ankh stated.

He closed his eyes to probe the handheld computer with his mind. “I’ll show this to Anit in the Communications sector and see what he thinks.”

“Thank you, Ani. Is Eni cooking dinner tonight?”

“Of course. You know she cooks on Fridays. She doesn’t want you to forget how to eat like a normal Earth Human!” Ankh answered with a laugh. “Don’t worry—I fixed the food preparation generator system, just in case.”

“Uh, Ani, please don’t be mean . . . Eni has only degenerated one meal down to the molecular level this month—*one meal!*” Rivi shook her head and laughed jokingly.

“Okay, okay, you should get along now go on,” Ankh laughed as he herded Rivi towards the hole, which sealed itself as she left.

Rivi returned to her family’s quarters later than normal that day. She had stopped by the complex’s library to investigate some irregularities she was sensing. After a moment, she had learned that it was one of the library’s computers. She went down to the library to offer to fix the problem. Now that she could tell that everything was all right with the complex, at least electronically, Rivi’s mind would relax and leave her alone until it noticed another anomaly in the functions of the computer systems in the human residence complex.

Yes, she was late, but Eni would understand. They had always encouraged her gift. Just like the Aunantet, the Earth children had noticed that once they began to increase their intelligence beyond normal human standards, they also became aware of special gifts they each possessed. The children were being trained to combine their abilities along with their advanced intellect and use the resulting phenomenon constructively.

For Rivi her gift involved computers—she was a Comp Amalgamator. Combined with her advanced intellect and using specific areas of her brain that go unused by most humans, the resulting phenomenon was that she could link her mind into that of a computer’s and work directly with the system without needing to use the common input devices like touch screens or keyboards. She could get right into all the information constantly being processed and tell the computer what to do just by thinking it. Lately she was beginning to learn how to form computers out of normal matter. She could form a seemingly useless piece of metal into a full computer system. The downside was that it still took a lot of energy for

her to complete the task. She would often do it in small stages and segments at a time over a few days.

“But I am starting to get better at it,” Rivi stated encouragingly to herself, then laughed as she realized that she had actually said it aloud.

Rivi entered her family’s quarters to find her Eni in the kitchen area, hand-preparing a salad. Enuet looked up at her daughter and smiled as Rivi came over to help.

“How were your classes today?” Enuet asked.

“Interesting as usual, Eni,” Rivi answered with a laugh. “Where’s Ani? Normally, he’s home by now.”

“I don’t know, but he should be home soon. Here, let’s sit down and we’ll eat dinner; he wouldn’t want us to wait.”

Rivi carried their dinner over to the kitchen table. Enuet joined her daughter as she sat down to eat.

“You were a bit late coming home,” Enuet stated mischievously.

“Yes, there was a problem with the library’s computers,” Rivi answered.

“Nothing serious, I hope?”

“No, not really. It was. . . .”

Suddenly, Ankh came in the door. Enuet got up to get his food as he entered the kitchen.

“I don’t have time to eat. Rivi, you’ll need to come with me. Go and get a few things from your room to take with you because you’ll have to leave now!” Ankh stated hurriedly.

“What’s wrong, dear?” Enuet asked Ankh, as Rivi got up from the table to go and get her things from her room.

“I really don’t have time to explain,” he said.

“Okay, I’ll go and help Rivi.”

“That’s all right—I’m finished, Eni,” Rivi stated, reemerging into the kitchen holding a shoebox-sized black container.

“All right—we need to go. . . . Enuet, are you coming with us?” Ankh asked.

“Yes, just let me get my shoes,” she replied.

Ankh, Enuet, and Rivi walked down the hall and headed toward the central common room. This large circular room could seat almost three hundred. As Rivi and her guardian parents entered the room, Rivi was certain the room was almost filled to capacity. She instantly used her mind and queried the complex’s central computer as to the agenda of the gathering. What she learned worried her.

“You know, don’t you, Rivi?” Ankh asked.

“Yes, sir,” Rivi answered stiffly like a bird finally realizing it was restricted to the confines of a metal cage.

“Don’t worry, we have a plan. Let’s go take a seat.”

As they found their seats, an Aunantet male stood up in front of a podium in the exact center of the room. He addressed the children and their guardians.

“Most of you have all received the news in some form or another. For those of you who haven’t, I do not have time to explain the full details. I can simply say that

the Aruk have finally found our hidden complex that the Aun government has tried to keep secret from them for almost ten years. The Aruk are planning to attack soon and take the children again. The children must be sent away to a safer location.”

An eerie silence filled the room as the children and the Aunantet’s worst fears were finally coming true.

“We still have not been able to contact Planet Earth. The children will have to be relocated to the planet Ata, where we have created a safe haven in preparation for this type of scenario. The ships are standing by—you all know what has to be done. We do not have much time.”

The complex evacuation was implemented with great speed and efficiency. The children were sent to pack a few of their belongings. Then, organized into groups, the children were led out into the bottom of a large crater that served as the complex’s launch arena. Groups of guardians hurried about, preparing the oddly shaped ships for space flight, while the rest of the guardians loaded the ships and got the children onboard.

As Rivi headed toward the ships, she watched the scene of ordered chaos and began to hesitate. Noticing an irregularity in the plan unfolding before her eyes, Rivi turned towards Ankh, who, followed by Enuet, was coming up behind her.

“Ani, how many ships are available?”

“Just these ten,” Ankh answered flatly, already knowing where Rivi was going with her question.

“And their capacity?”

“Twenty,” Ankh stated with a slight sigh.

Rivi’s eyes swept the launch crater to watch the hundreds of Aunantet and human children bustling around the ships.

“We’re not all going, are we?” Rivi asked knowingly, as her voice began to catch involuntarily in her throat.

“No, dear,” Ankh answered consolingly. “Just you children and about fifty pre-selected Aunantet. The rest of us will stay. This is our home planet; we’ll be fine.”

“Is something wrong?” a senior administrator asked as he made his way over to Ankh.

“Not really,” Ankh answered, turning back to Rivi. “Rivi, you should probably get on your ship now, with the others. The Aruk are supposed to begin their attack soon.”

Rivi nodded and then suddenly frowned, putting her hand to the side of her head as if she had a headache.

“Wait Administrator!” Rivi exclaimed, as worry became etched across her face. “Does the main computer have the ability to shut down launches?”

“I think so, but. . . .”

Rivi paled.

“What is wrong, Rivi?” Ankh prompted.

“Call as many Comp Amalgamators as you can gather and meet me in the central computer room,” Rivi stated, then ran off toward the double doors in the side of the crater that led back into the complex.

She ignored all other questions that came her way. Rivi ran down corridor after corridor and through a few door-walls until she reached the complex’s main computer. Not far behind, Ankh and Enuet entered, followed by the administrator and another Aunantet.

“Rivinaig, I could only find Enast,” the administrator replied as he came through the wall.

“What’s going on?” Enast asked.

“We’ve got to work fast to keep the Aruk out of this system as long as possible so the ships can leave,” Rivi stated.

“Rivi, you’ve got to go get on your ship with the other children,” Ankh exclaimed. “We’ll take care of this.”

“I can’t leave, Ani. . . . If I go, the ships will not be able to leave. Enast may be a full-grown Aunantet, but she cannot keep the Aruk out on her own. If you try to do it manually, it will be too slow. I can already feel the Aruk hacking into the system.”

Enast nodded in agreement, as she too began to feel the problem.

“All right go ahead,” Ankh responded.

Rivi closed her eyes and allowed her mind to merge (or amalgamate) into the computer. Sensing Enast’s presence, Rivi began to coordinate her defensive attack with hers. With Enast’s help, they closed down and repaired every attempt the Aruk Comp Amalgamators made at shutting down the launches. Rivi could tell that she and Enast were outnumbered when it came to defending the complex’s computer systems. There were quite a few Comp Amalgamators on the Aruk’s side, trying to break into the computer. Rivi strained her mind to keep ahead of each attempt made to sabotage the launch.

The complex began to shake and rattle as the Aruk began their attack on the complex; it became even harder for Rivi to concentrate. She struggled mentally to maintain her concentration and stay united to the computer’s systems. Suddenly, Rivi felt Enast reluctantly, but exhaustedly, break away from the computer system and retreat into the safety of her own mind. Rivi, even more determined not to give up, sat down slowly on the cool floor, careful not to break her connection.

Rivi tapped into the computer’s launch system to see how much longer it would be until all of the children’s ships were launched. She made a silent decree to herself that she would not let them down, although even as she did, it became even harder for her to do. The Aruk Comp Amalgamators were increasing their fight to hack into the systems. Rivi shuddered slightly as the Amalgamators unethically resorted to trying to attack her mind with computer viruses as well, while she fought to protect the computer systems.

Then at last, a particularly large blast shook the complex, forcing Rivi to break her concentration and pull out of the computer. As she retreated to her own mind, Ankh put a steadying hand on her shoulder and pointed to the statistic screen above her head, hanging on the wall.

"You did it! All of the ships have left. They are safe now!" Ankh stated, as Rivi smiled slightly.

Rivi stood and rolled the cramp out of her neck. She shook hands with Enast, who looked a bit exhausted.

"I'm sorry I couldn't stay in longer to help. Sudden noises have always created problems with my concentration," Enast stated apologetically.

"That's all right; without your help, I wouldn't have had enough strength to hold out in the end." Rivi replied with a gratified smile.

"We have no way to get Rivinaig out of here though; the Aruk will surely try and capture her again," the Administrator exclaimed.

"What about the tessier cubes?" Ankh suggested.

"If you're implying hyper-dimensional travel, the place where the children are rendezvousing before they head to the safe haven on Planet Ata, it is designed to constantly change its position. It would be extremely difficult to reach it using the tessier cubes."

Another Aunantet entered the main computer room looking in quite a hurry. Even through his harried expression, Rivi recognized him as Ankh's Comp Amalgamator friend, Anit.

"I think you all need to hear this," he stated, as he laid his hands on the large computer console in front of them.

A mesh of static, high, and low pitched sounds emanated from the computer's speakers and filled the group's ears. Rivi's eyes glassed over as she realized she had heard pieces of the aggravating noise before, a long time ago, only . . . it was a bit different. She also realized that she had heard the full mix of the noise while she was joined with the computer, trying to keep the Aruk from preventing the children's ships from launching. Just moments ago, she had only regarded it as interference, not having the time to concentrate on it.

"Do you feel this is entirely necessary, Anit? We don't have much time until the Aruk have taken over," the Administrator queried.

"Perhaps it is," Rivi stated, coming to a conclusion after a brief retrospection.

"You've heard it before?" Ankh asked quietly.

"Yes, Ani," Rivi answered, as she then turned to face Anit standing by the wall in the small room. "It's from Earth."

"Yes," Anit answered sadly. "Any other day I would probably try to sort out this mess. However, with all of the Aruk Comp Amalgamators no doubt creating havoc in the computer system, it would be complicating and dangerous right now for any Amalgamator to attempt to filter out that message from all of the interference."

Realizing that they were back where they started, everyone nodded solemnly. Everyone, that is, besides Rivi. Thinking for only a second, she then fixed her eyes determinedly on the computer and concentrated on the noise.

Ankh turned to look at Rivi standing beside him. Then, his purple skin paled as he tried to say something to stop her. However, it was too late. Rivi's head slumped to her chest and she fell limp to the cold floor. Instantly, both Ankh and Enuet altered the atoms of the floor beneath Rivi to soften her fall and absorb the impact. They then allowed the floor to go back to its original constitution.

“What happened?” the Administrator asked.

“Listen,” Enast stated in awe.

Rivi woke up lying wrapped in a blanket in a hallway. She sat up, and Enuet immediately confronted her.

“Are you all right Rivi?” Enuet asked in concern.

Rivi thought for a moment, accessing both her physical and mental condition while still noticing that the complex was apparently still under attack. The hallway shook and rumbled around her, and dust was raining down from the ceiling.

“I think so, Eni,” Rivi answered.

“Good,” Ankh interjected, as he, Anit, and the Administrator exited the computer room through the wall across from them.

“We’ve talked to an agency on Earth that has agreed to prepare accommodations for you,” the Administrator stated.

“How long was I out?” Rivi asked.

“A few moments, perhaps. What you did was very brave, Rivi,” Enuet replied.

“Everything has been set. You should get going. It will not be long now before the Aruk break through our outer defenses,” the Administrator said, as another rather harsh blast rattled the complex.

“Here is your personal computer,” Anit stated, handing Rivi her black triangular laptop. “I found its configuration quite interesting and complex; you did some fine work on it.”

“Thank you,” Rivi replied, then turned to look at Ankh. “But how am I supposed to get to Earth?”

“I’ll take you. We’ll use the tesser cubes,” Ankh stated.

“Will the children join us now that Earth has responded?” Rivi asked.

“I’m afraid not. It is such a long way to Planet Earth; the only reasonable way is to travel hyper-dimensionally. Most of the other children are far too young intellectually and physically to make the journey,” the Administrator replied.

Rivi nodded, and then, standing to her feet, she picked up the box she had packed from her room and gave Enuet a hug. Ankh said farewell and hugged his wife as well.

“Stay safe,” Ankh said.

“Always,” Enuet replied with a mischievous smile.

Rivi took one last look around what had been her home on Aun, and then she followed Ankh out to the launch crater.

“We don’t have much time.” Ankh stated, as he led Rivi out into the center of the launch crater. “I’m going to have to give you a shortened lesson on tesser traveling.”

“I’ll do my best to learn,” Rivi answered.

Ankh pulled a piece of black, thin rope out of one of his hidden pockets in his long vest-like robe. Hanging in the middle was a clear sphere. Inside the sphere was a silver cube. Ankh held his hand under the sphere and changed the atoms in the walls of the hollow sphere in order to let the cube drop out into his hand. He

took the cube out of his second hand and placed it on the ground in front of him with his third hand.

“Can you expand the cube?” Ankh asked, handing Rivi the now empty sphere hanging on the necklace.

Rivi looked at the small cube sitting in the green sand by their feet and frowned slightly in concentration. Suddenly, the small silver cube began expanding itself into a larger cube.

“Now, manipulate the atoms and make the cube hollow and the sides pliable enough to walk through.”

Rivi did as asked and then gingerly touched the side of the cube. It gave way to her hand and allowed both her and Ankh to step through as it sealed itself solidly behind them. Rivi felt for the sides of the now solid cube as they were now in total darkness.

Suddenly, “In the darkness was light”. Ankh had produced a small, thin cylinder to which both ends had a string attached. After he turned on the one on his wrist, he gave a second one to Rivi, who similarly tied it to her own wrist.

“Now, then, while keeping the walls solid, change their elements so that the cube is lighter than the air outside.”

“This will cause us to float into the sky,” Rivi added.

“Precisely. . . .”

Rivi did as she was told; she began to feel a slight upward momentum as the cube began to rise through the atmosphere. Once they began experiencing weightlessness, Rivi looked toward Ankh, who was floating above her head beside the black box that held the only personal belongings she had left. Ankh nodded, and Rivi returned the walls to their original composition, although they had already escaped planet Aun’s gravity and were well away from its influence. They were now floating through space; they did not fall back to the planet but continued to travel away from the planet, although they did slow down a bit.

Two of Newton’s laws of motion: 1) an object maintains a constant velocity unless acted upon by an outside force. 2) Force= objects mass x acceleration (or force/objects mass = acceleration)

Changing the cube into a ship and spreading his hands downward, Ankh allowed his feet to alight on the floor. Rivi kicked off the ship’s wall nearest to her and grabbed her black box and her triangular computer. She then proceeded by doing as Ankh had and brought herself down to the floor.

“Rivi, you’ll need to configure this plane or change it into a new one so that you can control it. Configure it as you would one of your computers. You’ll need to control it upon our Earth entry.”

Rivi thought for a moment, and then nodded toward Ankh to show she understood the directions. Her eyes had already closed as she struggled to visualize a ship. Around her, Ankh’s ship morphed and molded into a new ship. She then ran circuits all throughout the ship, connecting the ship’s wings, minor controls,

viewscreens, and other various components, all of which ran into a port she designed especially for her computer.

Rivi half-floated, half-walked over to a chair in front of this new ship and plugged in her computer. After she sat down, she immediately began trying to access every part of her ship's systems. After she made the necessary adjustments to the ship and her system, Ankh sat in the chair beside her and explained what they had to do next.

Rivi and Ankh turned the ship from a three-dimensional object into an unfolded four-dimensional object. Creating a simultaneous energy explosion at key points all around the ship, they were able to collapse, and they folded their unfolded four-dimensional ship into a full four-dimensional ship.

Rivi got up and walked over to one of the ship's side windows, only to find that she was looking out and into the opposite window behind her. She could see the back of her own self, staring out of the far window. Rivi turned her head and looked over her shoulder toward the opposite window. She saw that the "other" Rivi had turned her head as well. As Rivi looked out the window behind her, she could now see the front of her body, but still only the back of her head.

Amazed, Rivi smiled and went to sit back down. Rivi and Ankh concentrated on their intended destination and arrived just outside of a multi-colored planet of mostly blues, greens, and browns. By bringing in the ship by the planet's gravitational pull, they slowly (although soon began picking up speed) began to approach the blue-green sphere hanging in space. Rivi began feeling a bit tentative about setting foot on this "planet Earth" which she barely even remembered.

Ankh smiled and nodded in reassurance toward Rivi, who, after deciding to concentrate on the "task at hand", began to prepare the ship for entry into Earth's atmosphere. She made double-sure that the composition of the hull of the ship was heat resistant in all areas, and then reaching out with her mind to the circuits that controlled the wing flaps on the wings, she glided the ship down through the atmosphere. Ankh gave her a set of coordinates and in a blink of an eye, literally, Rivi had turned on the viewscreens on her laptop so she could steer towards their preset landing site. As she touched the ship down, she noticed that because of the dark sky, she could barely see a flat, sandy plain that looked as if it were painted a dark red. Off in the distance she could see the lights of a strange town.

Without a word, she and Ankh exited the ship after she had collected her few belongings: her computer and her black box containing the few items she had brought from her old room. As her feet touched the soft ground, Rivi breathed in the cool, sweet, night air. She saw the lights of a few Earth vehicles coming toward her and Ankh from the small town in the distance.

"I must leave you now. You will be safe with these people," Ankh stated, pointing toward the nearing vehicles.

Rivi gave Ankh a short hug, and he received it with all three arms. As the vehicles got closer, Ankh stepped back and drew out the silver cube from the sphere hanging from the rope, that hung around his own neck, set the cube on the sand, and expanded it. After he gave a short wave to Rivi, he entered the cube and it floated up and away.

The Earth vehicles came to a stop about five yards away from Rivi. Turning away from the glare of their headlights, Rivi reversed her ship back into a small silver cube and dropped it back inside the clear sphere hanging on the rope chain around her neck.

As she adjusted the chain around her neck, a man and a woman dressed in khaki pants, blue Polo shirts, and dark glasses, approached Rivi.

“Greetings,” the man stated in a slightly louder than normal voice, while he raised his hands in peace.

“I am affluent in most dialects of Earth, including English,” The weary, fourteen-year old Rivi stated incredulously, shaking her head with a slight smile.

“Good. Then my name is Ed, and this would be Alice, an associate of mine,” the man replied, slightly taken by surprise.

“Was that a friend of yours?” the woman asked, looking into the night sky curiously.

“Yes, ma’am,” Rivi replied, suddenly feeling small and alone as she stared after the silver cube that was almost out of her sight.

“We’ve arranged for you to stay with one of our fellow employees. If you’ll come with us. . . .” The man stated pulling off his glasses as if he suddenly noticed Rivi’s change in behavior.

Rivi nodded and let them assist her into their Jeep. As the vehicles headed into the town, Rivi stared out over the dark horizon. Although she knew that this place would be her new home, she felt as separated from it as much as the houses in the town were separated from each other.

Once they entered into the town where they were heading, Rivi noticed that the dirt road from the desert valley turned into a hard, black surface that made the ride a lot smoother. The vehicles turned down a few streets before they came to a stop on the side of a road in front of a blue-sided house. The man got out of the front seat and walked around the Jeep to help Rivi out.

Rivi looked up at the house as they walked toward it; however, her gaze soon drifted back toward the starry sky. They stepped up unto the front steps, and the man politely knocked on the front door. A light went on in the house and a woman opened the door with a smile.

“This is Miss Tate; she will be your caretaker,” Ed stated. “Miss Tate, this is Sarah Ernestine.”

“Please . . . I am much more accustomed to being called ‘Rivinaig Nejnigns’,” Rivi stated with closed eyes thinking of painful memories that were stirred by the mention of her past.

“Sure, come on inside then, Rivinaig. You look like you are tired,” Miss Tate replied with a warm smile as she stepped back a few steps, welcoming Rivi into her home.

Rivi looked up at her and then Ed, who gestured toward the door with his hand. Rivi entered into the house as Miss Tate shut the door behind her. Rivi followed Miss Tate up a flight of stairs and into another hallway.

“The bathroom is here on your right, and your room is at the end of the hall to your right as well. If you need anything, I’ll be in the room to the left.”

“Okay,” Rivi stated quietly.

She walked down to her room and realized that she was still carrying her black box and her palmtop under her left arm. She walked over across the room and set the box on the windowsill. Feeling overcome with the past events of the day, she walked over and laid down on the twin bed along the opposite wall. Within moments, Rivi was sound asleep. . . .

Not for long, though, . . . Two hours later, a nightmare encroached on her peaceful sleep. Miss Tate ran into the room to find a lamp, a few books, Rivi’s black box, and a pair of shoes floating around the room. Shocked, Miss Tate looked toward Rivi, who was flinching and wreathing on her bed.

Quite suddenly, Rivi woke, throwing her eyes wide open. She sat up trying to figure out where she was-she obviously was not on Aun. After a second, she looked toward the door to see Miss Tate looking from her to the objects floating in the room, as light from the hallway spilled into the room behind her to light the dark bedroom dimly.

“Sorry. . . . Nightmare,” Rivi stated, realizing where she was. She looked at each floating object and lowered them softly to their places.

“Does this happen often?” Miss Tate asked while very disturbed but still curious.

Rivi shrugged and closed her eyes.

“Most nights, yes,” she stated, as she relaxed and laid back down.

“Would you like to talk about it?”

“Not really. I was able to tell some of it to my guardian father, Ankh, on Aun, but I was never able to tell him all of it. The dreams just keep coming back.”

“Perhaps it would help if you would share all of it?”

“Maybe someday I’ll be able to share all of it with someone. . . . But for now, I just live with the dreams,” Rivi answered, trying to close the horrible dream from her mind.

“Does the ‘floating objects’ thing happen often?” Miss Tate asked, worriedly.

“Oh, that. . . . That’s nothing.” Rivi looked over at a book and made it float over to her new caretaker.

Miss Tate gasped and waved her hand around the book to try to figure out how it was floating.

“It won’t bite back,” Rivi answered, turning her head on the pillow to smile at Miss Tate.

Miss Tate gingerly plucked the book from the air.

“Goodnight, then, if you’re sure you’re okay,” Miss Tate stated, still a bit unsettled.

“Yes, goodnight,” Rivi answered, rolling over as Miss Tate left and shut the door behind her.

At five o’clock in the morning, Miss Tate woke Rivi up gently. Rivi sat up in her bed already alert.

"I have to leave early to go to work. You have two and a half hours before you will need to start out for school. I've set directions to the school on the kitchen table; it's not far, so you will be able to walk to the school."

"Okay, thank you. What time will you be home?" Rivi asked.

"I'm afraid that it'll be sometime after dinner, but there is plenty of food in the kitchen. You can call me if you need help; just press the "star" key on the phone downstairs."

"I'm sure I'll manage."

"All right," Miss Tate replied, then turned and left the room.

Rivi got out of bed, and realizing that she was still dressed in her clothes from Aun, she decided that she should change. Walking around her room, she opened drawer after drawer and then finally looked in the closet where fifteen different shirts and pants hung, neatly pressed. There were other smaller articles, like socks, arranged neatly in their own cubbyholes. Rivi shrugged and chose a set of each, remembering that Ankh had taught them how the citizens of Earth normally dressed during each particular season. She removed her own articles of clothing and proceeded to dress herself accordingly.

Rivi then went downstairs and found the kitchen. She noticed the set of directions to the school on the table, along with a set of books and a backpack. Not having anything else better to do, Rivi looked through the schoolbooks only to discover that she had learned the material before. She put the books into the backpack and then went to look around the rest of the house.

Rivi found a room with a large table and another room that had two machines in it. Rivi recognized the machines from Ankh's classes: a washer and a dryer. She then found a room with a couch and an armchair facing a large black box with a blank screen. Frowning slightly, Rivi sat down on the couch and turned the TV on with her mind.

As pictures and words began to reach her, Rivi began looking more and more bored. She closed her eyes, shook her head to get rid of the pictures, and shut the television off.

"Mind-numbing," she stated simply, as she then went to continue her tour.

She found, to her surprise, a computer sitting in the next room in which she looked. Rivi turned on and accessed the computer through her mind and instantly found and destroyed five viruses, one of which would have soon become capable of attacking the boot sector. After she repaired the damage the viruses had caused, she found the computer to be a lot more primitive than the ones to which she was accustomed. She decided to leave it alone for now and left the room.

"Earth needs to get beyond single pairs of gateways and the binary language of ones and zeroes before it will make any vast improvement in technology," Rivi said to herself, as she walked out the back door into the fence-enclosed backyard.

She found a ladder leading up to the kitchen roof and decided to investigate. She found a newly shingled, shallowly slopped roof. Walking out onto the roof, she found that she was outside of her bedroom and sat down on the wooden window ledge. Looking up into the stars, which were growing dimmer with the approaching sunrise, she found where Planet Aun would be if it were bright

enough to be seen at this distance. Gazing at that one spot, she began to wonder how the rest of the children were faring.

An hour later, as the sun had just begun to brighten the early morning sky, her computer that she had put into her pants pocket fought for her mind's attention, just as she had taught it. Giving it a second's attention, she found out that it was time for her to leave. Rivi got down off the roof and went back into the kitchen in the house. She picked up her backpack, read the directions a few times to memorize them, and then set off toward the school.

Rivi arrived early, which is how she preferred it, however she was surprised to see that there were already quite a few students at the school—even though only a handful were seen going into the building. Most of the students seemed to prefer “hanging out” outside the building. Rivi entered through the main door of the two-story building and located the main office right inside and to the left of the door.

Rivi entered the office and told the secretary that she was new to the school. Miss Tate had already given the secretary Rivi's paperwork earlier this morning. She promptly gave Rivi her class schedule and directions to her first class.

With her schedule memorized and tucked into her backpack, Rivi proceeded to try to find her class.

“There is definitely a more efficient way of arranging these classes,” Rivi was thinking to herself when suddenly, four figures at the far end of the hall caught her attention. As she approached, she realized that the four figures were three boys bullying the fourth one.

“I thought we told you to stay off of our street ‘Danny Boy?’” the oldest bully jeered as he pushed the fourth boy.

“My. . . . My house is at th . . . the end of the street next to yours. . . . It's the fastest way to school,” the boy answered struggling to keep a hold on the stack of books and papers he was carrying.

“So what?” the bigger boy commanded, shrugging.

“You need to teach him, Bill!” one of the other two bullies suggested.

“You know. . . . I think I will,” the taller “Bill” character stated, sneering meanly at the fourth boy and proceeded by knocking the stack of books out of the boy's hands and onto the floor.

“Bill” then went to push the boy, but Rivi had seen enough. As the fourth boy's head made contact with the wall behind him, Rivi manipulated the concrete atoms to soften the impact.

“Hey!” Rivi called as she approached, stepping over a few of the books on the floor. “Is there a reason why you are bothering this boy?”

“Yeah-we feel like it,” Bill challenged. “You think you can do somethin' about it?”

“It is ‘something,’ and I can do quite a bit, so I wouldn't bother irritating me,” Rivi answered with a smile.

“Ya' hear that, boys? This little girl doesn't want to be irritated! I bet she's new and scared!” Bill jeered, mockingly.

Rivi narrowed her eyes, smiled, and nodded.

“Yes, I am new,” she answered which seemed to make the bullies smirk. “But no, I’m not scared at all,” Rivi continued, as her smile melted into a scowl.

The bully shrugged, then signaled to his two friends, and they all sauntered off.

Rivi bent down to help the fourth boy pick up his books. She then handed him the stack she had collected and asked politely if he was all right.

“I’ll be fine . . . but you shouldn’t have helped. Now they’ll only make it worse on me for being defended by a girl,” the boy answered with remorse.

Rivi raised her eyebrows and took one of his schoolbooks off the top of the stack in his arms. She opened the front cover and found a name written, assigning the book to that person.

“Your name is Daniel Peterson?” Rivi asked, giving the book back as Daniel answered with a nod. “Well Dan, at what point in time in the history of the United States of America did its citizens go back to being ruled and pushed around by bullies?” she asked, looking at him meaningfully before she walked off toward her class.

Rivi couldn’t help wishing she was back in the well-ordered society on Aun.