

The Essence of Mars

by

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Chapter 1

Elise Boyer woke early and touched the Oracle, which was sitting on her bedside table. Her living quarters on the Moon were very small and simple, but she didn't mind. She quickly showered, jumped into her overalls, picked up the Oracle and left the room.

A small woman with dark hair, Elise was thirty-three and Australian. She had a dynamic and wise personality.

It had been a couple of weeks since the Shadow Lord tried to reclaim the Earth. But thanks to Sean and the Keepers, this calamity was prevented.

Now, she was the Guardian.

What that meant she was not entirely certain, but Arden said she would receive knowledge from the Oracle as she required it. He also said there would be several tests she would receive in the "Essence" of the realm of innocence. The Essence was the underlying reality of the physical manifestation. It would be very challenging and very gruelling to bring her up to the standard of a Guardian. This was very important, as the Essence could be compromised by the Shadows to gain access to other realms.

She walked down the tunnel past the living area, through the amenities area and toward Moondome. She saw a long electric jack-truck coming from the dome's double doors, carrying a capsule. A capsule leaving Moondome?

She was almost at the door when a man in a hard hat motioned for her to move aside. Another jack-truck was following the last one.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"A lot of the plants are dying," he replied. "We're also removing some of the soil."

She was about to query him further when she noticed Sean poking his

head out of his office across the other side of the tunnel. She moon-walked her way toward him.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning,” replied the cheerful Moon Director.

“Why are they removing the plants?” asked Elise, looking toward the dome.

“Well, my dear,” said Sean, “it appears our Shadow friend made his mark on the only bit of nature on the Moon.”

“He’s infected it?” asked Elise. She immediately understood her wrong choice of words. “The negativity corrupted the dome?”

“That’s right,” said Sean. “That’s our piece of Mother Earth on the Moon, and the Shadow has done its job. Unfortunately, the portal closed before all the bad stuff was removed.”

“He was a bigger threat that we originally thought, wasn’t he?” said Elise.

“A potential Shadow Angel, perhaps? I thought the same thing. Come inside for a moment,” said Sean, closing the door. He suddenly pulled out a medallion suspended on a chain.

“That looks like a mini Oracle,” said Elise. “Where did you get it?”

“It’s a talisman. It’s used to protect potential Guardians and to help them progress a little more quickly if necessary,” said Sean. “Arden gave it to me before I acquired the Oracle, but now it’s yours.” He paused. “But before I pass it on to you, I’d like to borrow it for a while. It’s for a project I’m working on. I require it’s powerful vibrations.”

“What’s the project?” asked Elise, feeling that Sean was being a bit secretive.

“Let’s say I’d like to keep it as a surprise,” said Sean.

“Such a mysterious man you are, sir,” said Elise. “I see why Arden chose you as a Guardian.”

“Maybe I’m a mystery to a Shadow, but I’m sure you can now read me like an open book,” said Sean.

Elise pulled out the Oracle and put her attention on Sean’s secret.

“You require it to bring the dome back in line with Mother Earth.”

“See what I mean?” said Sean. “There are no secrets with the Oracle. It knows all. ”

“Hey! You’re also working on another dome or something similar. Something to do with a spaceship,” said Elise.

“Yes, there are tests being done on whether the concept of the dome can be put inside spaceships,” said Sean, not elaborating further. “This is the reason I need to keep the talisman for a while.”

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“The Moondome has gone beyond its original expectations, and the same concept has been proposed for further applications,” said Sean.

“The spaceship with a dome,” said Elise.

“Yes, it is expected that the same concept will be used as in the Moondome,” announced Sean. “Soon, a small stream will run through the centre. This, with the help of some special water filters, will enhance the neutralisation effect.”

He was standing in the Moonbase meeting room talking to Elise and Steven Withers about the future upgrade to the dome.

Steve was thirty-one. Born in Russia, he moved to Australia when he was a boy. He had a likeable, witty personality and was an experienced Lunar Cargo Lander (or LCL) pilot.

Sean extended his hand toward a huge touch-screen display, opening a web page from one of the icons at the bottom. He cut and expanded a photo on the touch-screen. It was an example of the dome with a stream running through the centre.

“It would look better with a bridge,” said Elise. “That would be a nice touch.”

“That could be arranged.”

Sean pressed his finger on the screen again, and another window appeared. It was a picture of a bridge. With his finger he cut that image, dragged it across the glass-panelled display and dropped it onto the image of the dome. He scaled and moved it, so as to align it over the stream.

“Impressive,” said Steve. Sean grinned.

“How about this?” Sean opened another window, and an image of a bride and groom appeared.

Elise gasped. Steve gently hugged her.

Sean dragged the bride and groom over to the image he was designing and placed them on the bridge.

“Even more impressive,” replied Elise, looking at Steve, and then back at Sean. “When can we do it?”

“Unless you want to marry this young man soon, it may take another year or so to get our dome upgraded.”

“Well,” said Elise excitedly, “by the look of this, it might be worth the wait.”

“That’s for sure,” said Steve.

“Indeed,” said Sean. “Also...”

“Something better than a wedding in the dome?” asked Elise.

“I mean, the dome isn’t just being upgraded for your wedding.”

“Oh, I thought it was,” said Elise with a mischievous grin. Sean grinned.

“As you’ve probably heard through social media, the dome will be tested to see how long it can sustain life.”

“You mean you’re getting people to live in there?” asked Elise.

“Yes, we need to know if seven astronauts can survive in there for three months.”

“You mean the Keepers and I will be locked up in there for three months?” asked Elise.

“That’s right,” said Sean. “Now the big secret is out. There is a new ship being built...”

“To go to Mars,” said Elise, looking at Sean with a funny look. “You know, the Oracle tells me everything.”

“You knew all along, didn’t you?” asked Sean. Elise grinned.

“And it will have a dome inside it?” asked Steve.

“The Tube,” said Sean, “because the ship will be cylindrical.”

“We’re expecting the Shadows to compromise the portal at Mars,” stated Elise.

“Arden said we may have transformed the Earth by ridding her of the Shadows, but this solar system also needs to be transformed,” said Sean.

“That’s the reason we need to prepare for the three-month journey,” said Steve. “OK, so that’s six Keepers and a Guardian journeying to Mars on this new ship that’s being built. We run across the Shadows. What about weapons?”

“The only weapons you need are the Oracle and the Keeper rings,” said Sean. “We’ve gone beyond guns and missiles – those silly ego-orientated extensions. In terms of protection, we must keep our faith in the Oracle. After all, it’s a reflection of the God and the Goddess.”

“So what do you think. Love it?” said Steve, standing on the little bridge inside the dome. The work for the dome’s upgrade had finally been completed.

“I do,” said Elise walking up the other side of the bridge.

“Is this a rehearsal?” asked Steve, holding Elise’s hand.

“Might as well. No one else here at the moment,” said Elise.

“Perhaps we should have waited until next week,” said Steve.

“Oh, yeah, we’ll be locked up in here for three months! We’ll have plenty of time to dream about a wedding then,” said Elise.

Steve looked down at the stream below. Goldfish were swimming around gracefully in the clear water.

“You know, If you told me before we came to the Moon we were going to fight Shadows for a living, I wouldn’t have believed it!” he said.

“I know. Once you get the Oracle or the ring, your whole life changes,” said Elise.

“Which ring are you referring to?” asked Steve.

Elise grinned. “I think that’s the case for both type of rings.”

“Oh, brother! What am I getting myself into?” murmured Steve.

Elise admired the nature around her: the grassy parkland, the wide variety of trees, shrubs, flowers, the new bridge and the stream. She savoured the air, which was abuzz with nature’s sounds. Butterflies, insects and small birds were flitting around. It was truly invigorating after coming in from the Moon’s sterile environment. But that was the whole point of the dome: to have somewhere for the Keepers to enjoy nature.

They had been sealed in there for three months. The test was to see how they could survive in the Tube on their maiden voyage to Mars.

She looked up through the transparent domed roof to the magnificent view of space. Apparently, the Tube didn't have that view, but had some new technology that would project the Sun and the sky in a very realistic way.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Steve, coming out of his tent and sneaking up behind her. Seven tents were dotted around the parkland for the future crew of the Martian Voyager.

"Actually, I wasn't thinking anything," said Elise. "It's so peaceful in here."

"You don't feel as locked-in as you first thought?" asked Steve.

"No, it's a very special place," said Elise.

"Almost like a Temple," said Steve.

"Yes. The Moon's the Temple of the left way, you could say," said Elise. "It's the left way which Arden and Sean used to bring down the Shadows on Earth. It dragged them away from the right way."

"But Garos was destroyed with the right way in the end," said Steve.

"Sean had to strengthen the Guardians' left way first to prepare for the powers of the right way," said Elise. "New Gurus were trained to use the same method."

"What about Mars? It's the power of innocence, isn't it?" asked Steve.

"Innocence is the most powerful quality, and if it's not properly established, it can be compromised by the Shadows," said Elise. "There's a realm on Mars that lies within the Temple that's called the Essence. The Essence is the powers of the left, central and right ways and can be used to either balance the universe or destroy it. It's the past, present and future all at the same time. It's much more subtle than our perception of time in this reality and can manifest a person's thoughts in a visually stunning way."

"You mean like some kind of virtual time travel or something?" asked Steve.

"I've been taken via the Essence through the Oracle to help fight in past wars as well as wars in the future. It's really mind-blowing!" said Elise. "I don't

physically go there, just in spirit. Mostly, it's all about learning how to strategise and fight, but sometimes you might talk to some wise Gurus."

"Wow!" said Steve. "Do you think we'll all be taken into the Essence on Mars?"

"I think so," said Elise. "If we can collectively master the powers of the Essence, we can transform the Temple."

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"Commander Mason," said Steve, looking up from the electronic newspaper he was reading. "Long time no see."

"It's been a while," said Bryan Mason, sitting down in the chair across from Steve. "I've been down to Earth, helping with the new space venture that Sean has been pushing these last couple of years, and I'm glad to announce that it's completed."

Bryan was fifty-two. Although he sometimes spoke in a very strong, authoritative voice, the American still tended to soothe others with his subtle diplomacy.

"The ship's completed!" exclaimed Steve.

"Come out to the Spaceport and take a look," said Bryan. "The Tube has worked out really well. Bring Elise with you."

Steve raised his left wrist toward his face, and a holographic arm-band computer came to life. He motioned his right hand to select a comm's program and selected Elise's avatar. Directly, a holographic image of her face appeared on top of his arm.

"Elise, meet you out at the Spaceport. Bryan Mason wants to show us something."

“Whoa!” said Steve. “This is big.”

Steve compared the LCL that flew him here and this new spacecraft that stood beside it.

“It’s taking up half the spaceport,” noted Elise, beating Steve to the observation. “It’s similar in shape to the old ship, but much larger. It’s cylindrical, with an aircraft-shaped nose, but the landing legs are a lot shorter in comparison.”

“That’s only a perception,” said Bryan. “Actually, they’re larger. The legs on the Voyager have a lot more suspension and they retract at different lengths, depending on how uneven the surface is.”

Sean made his way over to the three, shaking Bryan’s hand.

“Hello, my old friend. What a fine machine you’ve landed here today.”

“Yes, she is,” said Bryan. “The Martian Voyager, the most advanced spacecraft ever made by human hands.”

“Well, I don’t know about everyone else, but I’d like to see what’s inside,” said Steve.

Steve stared at the flight deck, astounded.

“I love this ship!”

The flight deck comprised a large wrap-around console and two high-back command chairs. Huge touch-screens filled the console, which was alight with navigation controls and ship-system functions.

“Boys with their new toys,” said Elise watching her fiance talking to Bryan. She looked at Sean. “I bet you’re happy this is finally completed.”

“I am. This has been many years in the planning and making,” said Sean. “Finally, we’re in a position to protect Mars.”

“The Temple there,” said Elise.

“Or Planetary Oracle, as they’re called universally,” said Sean.

“So Mars is the Planetary Oracle, the base realm in all of the nine realms in this solar system, which are represented in the rest of the planets,” said Elise.

“Like the realm of innocence in our own subtle system, if it’s compromised, it will bring down all the rest,” said Sean.

“So why don’t the Shadows just go out there and claim it before we get there?” asked Elise.

“That’s because they can’t. Not while the Goddess has her powers over the Earth,” said Sean. “We have to activate it first.”

“Through the Essence,” said Elise.

“Yes.”

“So, once Earth is transformed the Shadows won’t be able to come into our realms anymore,” said Elise.

“Yes. At that point we will begin travelling to other worlds, joining the rest of our family in the fight against the Shadows.”

“So, this is the Tube,” said Steve as they all walked through from the back of the flight deck.

The Tube was similar to the Dome, as they each had a small stream that ran through the middle. However, the Tube was shaped so that it would fit inside the Voyager, whereas the Dome was circular.

As she walked in, Elise admired the beauty of the nature around her. It looked really unbelievable; even the rays of the sun were projected, and there were clouds in the sky!

“Oh, it’s similar to the Dome in that it feels like we’re going camping,” said Elise. “At least now we can sleep in nice cabins and not tents – not that I have had any problem sleeping on an air mattress for three months.”

Elise walked into the closest cabin and jumped on the bed.

“The bed’s comfortable,” she called from inside.

Steve followed, smiled at Elise on the bed and then checked the kitchenette.

“Fancy a capsule coffee?”

“Oh, that would be lovely,” she said.

“Anyone else for coffee?” called Steve to Sean and Bryan. They were sitting on director chairs on the front verandah.

“Yes, please,” they both said.

“Perhaps we can have our honeymoon in here,” said Steve.

Elise laughed. “Wedding in the Dome, our honeymoon. That would be nice.”

“But the Oracle is recommending Uluru for our honeymoon,” said Steve.

“The Oracle requires me to go to Uluru to connect to all the realms on a much higher level,” replied Elise. “In the same way that Uluru stands for the centre of the realm of innocence on Earth, the Cydonia region on Mars also has a rock that stands for the realm of innocence.”

“You mean the rock with the face?” asked Steve.

Sean who’d just walked in and overheard their conversation said, “Are you talking about the Face on Mars?”

“Yes, what do you know about it?” asked Elise.

“Let me show you something on this terminal here,” said Sean.

“Remember this photo that NASA took on Mars in 1976 during the Viking missions?” asked Sean. “This one.” He pointed to the large LCD on the side of the cabin wall in the living area. It showed a blurred image of a face that looked a lot like an Egyptian Pharaoh. “I checked with the Oracle and found out that this face represents the face of the Incarnation of the realm of

innocence. That was his warrior face when he first began his offensive on the Shadows. It was the time when he formed the Guardians.”

“You mean that’s Ardesh! And the first Guardians came from Caldon. He still sits there today as if guarding the Temple,” said Elise. She paused in thought. “So, this rock is the one connected to our Uluru, but Uluru doesn’t look like an ancient Pharaoh from space.”

“No, it looks more like an elephant,” said Sean. “Ardesh took many forms, and the elephant-head God was his original form.”

“What about NASA’s photos after the Viking mission?” asked Bryan. “The Global Surveyor probe twenty years later showed a different image.”

“You see, in the early seventies the Goddess had only just started her work, but so had the Shadow Master. He did all he could to distort the truths, innocence being the main one. Unfortunately, Ardesh was one of the Incarnations who had to endure a lot of negativity, and when I mean a lot – it’s beyond our comprehension. Luckily for them, he is also the Incarnation of the realm of forgiveness.”

“So what about now?” asked Steve. “What does the face look like now?”

“Here’s an image of the Mars Seeker probe taken about five years ago,” said Sean. “Her mission was to give us new data to prepare for our landing in Cydonia.”

Everyone stared at the new image.

“It’s half-shadowed,” said Steve.

“It looks like a Shadow on one half, and the other half is probably Ardesh,” said Elise.

“That might be you and your Shadow nemesis,” said Steve.

“No, I’m not that significant,” said Elise. “The Shadow half is probably the Shadow Master’s face.”

Sean magnified the image and stared at it.

“The Shadow side is female. Look! You can see long hair.”

“Look at the top of the Ardesh’s head. It looks like he’s still wearing his

Pharaoh head gear,” said Elise.

“So Ardesh is still there,” said Sean.

“Magnify the ear of the Shadow,” said Bryan, “to check whether the Shadow is a female. She may be wearing ear-rings or something.”

Sean zoomed in on the ear of the Shadow. There weren’t any ear-rings, but the shape of the face was more defined.

“I know what this means,” said Elise. “Half of the face on Mars is still Ardesh, and the other half is over-shadowed by the Shadow Queen. Whoever ends up ruling this solar system will depend on what happens at Mars. If we don’t transform the Temple, the face on Mars will fall under darkness – and so will Earth.”

Chapter 2

Nelth, the Shadow Master of Udicia, journeyed to the Thal mountains along with a small group of foot soldiers. Overhead, three winged-creatures kept a vigil for any potential enemies.

He wore a long dark cloak over the top of a dark, tight-fitting uniform. His face was smugly confident and calm, but he had the personality of a snake and was known to turn brutal in a second.

After a few hours' journey, he stood on his chariot in apprehension, waiting for the Queen's arrival. He didn't understand why she had to come here. She knew his every move, his every thought, even if she was on the other side of the galaxy. It had been seven years since he had spoken directly to the Queen, and suddenly she had insisted on his presence.

The three winged-beasts landed on the ground behind him with a thud.

"This area is secure, sire," said the leading beast.

The winged beasts transformed into human form, their wings disappearing.

Suddenly, a crude dark portal opened out between the Thal mountains, spinning in an anti-clockwise motion, before a dark female form emerged.

"Nelth, let's talk," she said.

The Queen stayed in her shadowed form, with large red eyes leering at Nelth. She was wearing a high-collared dress with long dark hair flowing down to her midriff, but her image was distorted.

"Now, let's..." she paused, and her leering stare turned toward one of Nelth's Centurions. "Who's this charming young soldier?"

Nelth was furious, but forced himself not to show it. It was commonly

known that the Queen had her way with many of her minions.

“That’s Gylith. He’s very new – and very young.” He wanted to get this over with. He hated that she was flirting with one of his men. He wished he’d left that insubordinate brat behind, but he had promoted Gylith to one of his Centurions because of his ruthless nature.

A long dark tentacle came out of the dark distortion and started stroking Gylith on the face. Just as Nelth was about to explode with anger, the Queen retracted her tentacle and turned her attention back to him.

“It’s come to my attention that the Guardians are preparing to seal the portal at Earth’s realm,” said the Queen.

Forcing himself to regain his composure, Nelth said, “If that was to happen it would mean we would be the only part of the Empire left in this sector.”

“That’s why I can’t let it happen,” said the Queen firmly. She paused, glaring at Gylith for a while, before skimming over the other two Centurions and looking at Nelth again. “Send the old one there.”

Nelth looked at his older Centurion. “Resh is the most powerful of the three. I need him here!”

The Queen glared at Nelth as if she was about to fry him on the spot.

“You will do as I say,” she seethed. “I have all the powers, not you. I’m the one who can see across the entire galaxy. Your senses are limited to this pathetic realm!”

Nelth lowered his head as if in respect, but said nothing initially so as to not show any weakness in front of his men.

“Very well. Have it your way, your highness,” he suddenly snapped. “Is that all?” He was feeling very impatient and angry.

“There’s a new Earth Guardian,” said the Queen. “It’s a female.”

Nelth was about to say this would give them a tactical advantage, but bit his lip.

“Very well,” he murmured.

“Show a bit more respect next time!” she roared. As she was about to

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