

L.A. IMMANUEL

TROY
ZANDER
AND THE
SIGN OF THE
UNSEEN

ONLY WHEN YOU DIE TO YOUR FEARS
WILL YOU RISE WITH YOUR TRUE
POWER

TROY ZANDER
AND THE SIGN OF THE UNSEEN

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For my Everything

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1 THE FOUR COLONIES

In the vastness of the ever expanding universe, lies a galaxy named the Milky Way. In a distinct corner of this breathtaking galaxy is a planetary system revolving around a yellow star and among those planets is a tiny planet brimming with organic life, called earth. A long time back, it had been lovingly referred to as the blue planet and also had been the home to one of the most intelligent life forms in the universe, *Homo sapiens*, a tiring nomenclature referring to the humans, devised by an extremely bored scientist, who with nothing else to do, created names for every living thing that sounded like awfully bad magical spells.

Homo sapiens had come forth as the most advanced life form on the earth after the fifth mass extinction, which had wiped out the then dominant species, dinosaurs, (may they RIP!) from the face of the earth and ruled the planet for nearly twelve thousand and five hundred years, before our story starts.

Starting out as simple hunters, then to take up farming, various other skills and then go on to acquire a never ending understanding of the sciences, the humans had made most of their short time on the planet (the size of the human population would also vouch for this fact.) Human culture and traditions evolved over time and were highly diverse in terms of color, newer ways of discrimination and every other possible way of separating humans among themselves. Originating from Africa, with time humans spread out to the ends of the globe, stamping their mark on every landmass and their authority over every living creature on the planet.

Human technology had become very powerful as the 21st century A.D. had come to an end but at the same time, the humans began facing another problem. A problem they had to solve quickly. The problem of dwindling space and diminishing resources. The human race was rapidly outgrowing the earth's ability to accommodate and feed it.

The humans were however prepared for this scenario. Their advanced understanding of the universe and their ever evolving technology allowed them to contemplate setting up colonies in so called "potentially habitable" planets, while a significant chunk of the society took the perfect liberty of going onto the streets predicting the end of the world with giant signboards that read, "Hell or

heaven? Choose now! Before it's too late!"

This also resulted in the geek community taking off to the streets, with their share of giant signboards that simply read, "Sod off!"

"Eff yourselves!"

"I choose earth!"

However, these new mission plans weren't cheap. Government resources weren't enough to fund the colonization research and in order to be continued it had to be funded by private parties, which were none other than the richest people on the planet.

Soon, work began on the moon, followed by on the Mars to create human colonies. However, because of the political foul play, very few made it to those colonies, leaving the majority of the human population to die on earth.

Protests soon followed on the blue planet, demanding equal rights to the space colonies. It wasn't long before governments started falling and chaos started spreading everywhere (naturally!) Diseases which would have been better controlled if the governments had been still functioning spread like wildfire, due to lack of order and structure on earth.

Power hungry men with false moustaches and women with really bad cosmetic enhancements, took advantage of the situation, in their home countries and introduced false hope along with dictatorship, which lasted as long as an ice cube under the hot sun before being replaced by another, giving rise to a never ending hopeless cyclic process, blah, blah, blah.

Militias rose and fell, fighting against the gross injustice they faced but to no avail. The unrest over the violation of their right to survive provoked countless revolutions among the humans to fight for their place in the Moon and Mars Colonies. Unfortunately, the human race as such, was left to die to a slow painful death on the earth.

This restless period in the human history didn't last long as the Moon and Mars colonies soon collapsed. According to the popular cult belief of that time, those men and women on those colonies were destroyed by just sentient extraterrestrials or by 'gods' as believed in some societies, who intervened when they had seen their evil and the suffering, the rich had imposed on the people of earth. The truth, however, to this day remains a mystery.

In the following centuries, normality returned again to earth and a democratic world government sprouted up, to deal with the same problems, dwindling resources and the rising population and this time around, seventeen astronaut teams consisting of three hundred and thirty members each, were chosen to colonize seventeen different potentially habitable planets. With advanced nuclear fusion technology, that allowed them to travel at one- third of the speed of light, humans were ready to explore the universe, like never before.

Each team had been carefully selected according to the scientists' criteria, which they thought would be best to establish a seeder human colony, on a new planet, in order to ensure the continuity of the human race.

With that a new odyssey began, the mission was to set up colonies and transport the entire human population to the seventeen colonies over a period of five hundred and forty years (at least that was what was proposed to the people to calm them down and give them a sense of hope, nobody can tell what governments think!) Radio contact was the only contact that could be maintained between earth and any of the space ships till they reached their targets, which meant years between each message, to and fro. It was agreed that once the space ship reached their targets, messages would be relayed continuously, using the small superfast spaceships that travelled at the one-third of the speed of light, thus reducing the time delay.

Tragedy struck from the very beginning as the many of the astronaut team ships started going missing in the eerie darkness of space, early in the journey. In the end, only four teams made to their target planets and successfully established human colonies.

Those four planets were Kepler-298d, Gliese 832c, Kapteyn b and HD 40307 g. The phase I which consisted of building a colony was completed in around one hundred years in three of the four colonies, which made them eligible to carry out the next phase. Phase II was to relocate the human population on earth little by little to these colonies in 3 one hundred and eighty year cycles.

The human colonies were getting ready to send their carrier space ships to earth, waiting for the 'GO' command from the earth which never really came in the end. There was blackout for nearly a century, before the four colonies finally received a message from earth, which read,

“Earth has fallen. If you are receiving this message, it means that the planet has experienced a natural disaster, large enough to destroy all life on land. This is a computerized backup message, sent from an underground facility, in case of the worst happening to the earth. It is therefore commanded that no rescue mission is be carried out and phase II is to be aborted. Good luck for your future.”

It was a surprising moment for everyone on the four colonies. The men and women who had grown up in these colonies had never seen earth for real, they had only heard about their true home planet told by their parents but still they felt a great loss, as having lost a piece of themselves though they had never experienced it in their lifetimes.

Life carried on at these colonies, each of the colonies could maintain only minimum contact with each other due to the great distance between them, taking several human generations to send and receive a single message. However, to prevent future communication barriers which were bound to happen, taking the fact that languages evolve over time, the four colonies decided to maintain language homogeneity and implemented Standard Order English, controlling and directing the evolution of the English language on their planets harmoniously.

However, human life thrived on the colonies and did so for the next fifty thousand years. Slowly, the humans on these colonies adapted to the local environmental conditions of their new home planet and steadily co-evolved with it.

Over the course of time, the planet Kepler-298d was renamed as Kepler by its inhabitants, who consequently evolved into a new species, *Homo keplis*.

Kepler was a large ocean planet, with the only landmass being a large supercontinent. By the time, the humans had reached the planet, Kepler had been already filled with life. Dangerous ravenous creatures existed on Kepler and threatened the human colonization efforts. The humans had to protect themselves against the new threats quickly and in a new way as they neither had the manpower nor the firepower to continually protect themselves.

The ocean itself was a big no-no, it was literally infested with every kind of barbarous fish and invertebrate, that didn't wait even a second to rip anything to nothing but bits and pieces. Most of the marine species were documented to be voracious pack hunters, comparable to the piranha back on earth.

More importantly, deadly bacteria and viruses also started infecting the humans, which made the early colonizers take a drastic step- genetic engineering. The first generation of humans to be born on Kepler was genetically engineered. Men and women who were selected by scientists, donated their sperm and ova to be genetically modified and fertilized via in vitro fertilization and later implanted into the female's body or a specialized bionic womb machine, depending on whatever the scientists thought was fancy. This resulted in better progeny that would transmit the standardized modifications down the line. The initial standardized modification, was an alteration to their immune system, making it strong enough to evade the deadly pathogens on Kepler.

Later, more standardized modifications were introduced in the population, that included increased muscle density, higher hearing ability on par with bats, night vision, smelling sense as good as an earth dog's and titanium bones. Over the course of fifty thousand years, their blood developed healing properties and was virtually resistant to everything. The Keplers also institutionalized a license, for young adults, for pushing their physical and mental abilities to the limit, by using a recombinant DNA drug. They called that program as the *Infiniti* and it became hugely popular among the Kepler boys and girls.

The Keplers were governed by the Kepler Federation, which overlooked every aspect of the Keplers and maintained friendly relations with the other human colonies.

Speaking of the Keplers itself, they were a fascinating people. They literally came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. If you were looking for noses of every kind and eyes of every color, you were bound to find them among the Keplers. Though this might suggest comic chaos to you, the Keplers were pretty serious people, with a serious sense of seriousness. Following the early years of extensive genetic engineering to make themselves formidable to their trying environment, they later stopped all sorts of further modifications to themselves and allowed nature to take its course, without any future interference from the Keplers themselves. So, men who came with all sorts of noses, pretty and ugly fell in love with women, who too came in all sorts of shapes and sizes, without any hindrances on the part of their society, pressurizing the couples to engineer "dream" children.

Thus, love blossomed on Kepler throughout the ages. The Keplers married (and often remarried) and had a great deal of children, with varying degrees of funny noses and ears, continuing to this day.

The planet Gliese 832c was rechristened as Elveden, by its inhabitants who evolved into a new

species, *Homo elvis*. The Elveden people faced little challenge on their planet, which was comparable to earth, with a lot of green vegetation and small furry animals that posed no threat to the newcomers. As time flowed by, evolution gave the Elveden people, the power of Extra Sensory Perception, a power that was even more trained to be used to its greatest potential by the people. They soon could control lesser intelligent life forms with their minds and also control the growth of plants around them. The Elveden Eleven, a group of the wisest Elveden appointed by the people, were the caretakers of the people. In the Elveden society, the women were greatly respected, in particular for their wisdom and splendid beauty.

The Elveden were generous, pure and to cut off the long description short, they were pretty nice and beautiful but were also capable of extreme jealousy and sometimes, pride. The only flaw in their legendary beauty, one would say is that when their faces got contorted with anger, they usually resembled big pink-faced macaws. Other than that, they were just too beautiful, making any verbal or written effort futile in explaining their beauty.

Kapteyn b was home to the *Homo albeins*, who named their planet as Albein. Being the most habitable planet of the four colonies, Albein had its own biodiversity that the human colonizers had to get accustomed to. This challenging environment promoted further evolution of their brains and at the end of fifty thousand years their brains were heavier by three hundred grams compared to the average brain size of the other three Homo species.

They also arose to become the most technologically advanced of the four colonies but they weren't that inclined into genetic engineering as somehow their bigger brains had also developed bigger guilt centers, forcing them to put ethical restrictions on their genetic engineering research. So, when they had heard news of the Keplers modifying themselves, they developed a genuine distaste for them and maintained merely polite relations with them.

Their ruling government came to be called The Albein Senate, the most organized and complex government that only the Albeins could come up with. The Albeins took almost take too much pride in their knowledge and in their large brains and yes, as you may have guessed right, they were irritating narcissists.

The Albeins generally had broader foreheads than any of the other human races, a clear indicator of their bigger brains. Though the Albeins had their share of funny noses and ears, they cared absolutely nothing for external appearances but rather focused on the size of foreheads when it came to making new friends or potential life-mates. Similar forehead-sized Albeins got along with each other than with dissimilarly sized ones. If anything suggestive of any sort of discrimination existed on Albein, it was purely based on the size of foreheads. The bigger they were, the better, the smaller, well, I leave it to your splendid imagination.

Finally, we come to the planet HD 40307 g, a planet characterized by extreme cold all year round. However, the early human colonizers managed to build a settlement for themselves amidst the harsh climate.

This planet experienced great snowstorms, storms as big as the Great Red Spot on the Jupiter, which is spectacular to look at, safely far away on a telescope but a nightmare worse than death to experience personally on a daily basis. These violent snowstorms destroyed the human spaceships within months of their landing, cutting their contact from the rest of the other colonies.

The Albeins were the only people interested in them, that too, purely for research purposes, a kind word for evil curiosity. They put satellites on their planet, which they named as Aura and tried to get a glimpse of the lost humans. However, they never got any conclusive evidence for the existence of those humans. Whatever they thought was proof, failed to impress others and the whole project was shelved, the final conclusion being that the planet Aura had no live humans left but there continued to be rumors that the Aureans might have evolved into something sinister and dangerous, living underground. No evidence existed for that story, and it remains as it was, a rumor to this day.

With the exception of Aura, of which no one knew anything, life on the other three colonies went on quite smoothly. The evolved humans still were comparable to their ancestors on earth in many ways. They still had no idea about the ‘meaning of life’, spawning endless thousands of philosophers lost in thought and a huge fog of cigar smoke and drug stashes around them. There was still the clear demarcation between the rich and the poor. The rich still got fatter while the poor fancied themselves lucky if they managed to have their skeletons with them when they woke up. The ‘tall and lean’ fad still continued after fifty thousand years and men still continued to be visual creatures making no attempts to look at the ‘inner beauty’ of women, except in a ‘pun’ way.

The most important similarity, however, was that the evolved humans still were unsuccessful with contacting extraterrestrials or simply remained clueless to the fact, that they were being watched all the time.

2 THE SIGN

“Wake up, son!” cried Amanda, for the umpteenth time.

“Waaaaaaaargh!” said Troy, in his sleep, turning around cozily in his bed.

“Do you know what day it is?” said Amanda, excitedly.

“Susie!” said the honey blond haired boy in his dream.

“WHO? Who’s Susie, Troy?” cried Amanda, shaking her son.

“Mum!” hollered Troy and woke up with a start.

“Who’s Susie, Troy?” asked Amanda, her face looking very serious.

“It’s no one, Mum!” replied Troy and wiped his drool with the edge of his pajama shirt.

His mother glared at him in return.

“If you have a girlfriend, let me know, son,” said Amanda softly.

Troy looked at his mother, doubtfully.

What is she trying to get at?

He maintained silence, not knowing what to do.

“You know you can trust me,” said Amanda reassuringly.

Troy started thinking. His mother wasn’t like the others. She was the *most* possessive mum anyone could have.

She neither liked him having any girlfriends nor had allowed anyone in their family to get close to him, whom she thought, would separate her son from her. She always seemed to have the fear of losing her son, whom she considered her only treasure in the whole universe. She hadn’t always been outrageously possessive like this. Only after a particular incident, Amanda had changed completely.

Is it okay to tell her? She seems to be fine with the whole “girlfriend” thing now, judging by the way she is speaking. Or is it a trap?

Troy, however, decided to tell Amanda,

“Well, Mum.....”

“Yes, son,” said Amanda and smiled at him.

Being reassured by his mum’s smile, Troy splattered out without having any second thoughts, “Well, Mum, it wasn’t much. It was just a kiss, I honestly don’t know what to do next. I mean I think I am in love with her. I mean she’s so gorgeous that no boy in his right mind would say no to her. Seriously, mum, can I bring her home to.....”

Troy looked up at Amanda, who now stood over like a towering giant over him, her nostrils flaring red.

“You, Troy Dylan Zander are in big, big trouble. You are grounded for the whole month!” said Amanda, stressing each word so hard.

“But, Mum, I thought you were being.....”

“I am your mother, for God’s sake, Troy. How do you expect me to deal with this? Get up from your bed and brush your teeth, right now,” commanded Amanda and walked out of Troy’s bedroom, muttering that he was just like his father.

“Well, that went well,” muttered Troy.

“Good morning, Troy!” said Max, the Zander home’s AI, the voice booming off the in-built speakers in the walls.

“Good morning, Max,” replied Troy unenthusiastically.

“You seem unhappy, Troy,” said the young cheerful female voice.

“Now, did you get that from me being flushed red here?” scoffed Troy.

“I got that from your voice, it’s unnaturally low and sounds sad,” replied Max.

“Oh, go away, Max, if you only could change my mother, instead of proving to me how smart you really are!” said Troy and buried his head on the soft red jelly bed.

“As you wish, Troy, I’ll let your mother know how unhappy you really are.”

“Oh, don’t do that, Max!”

“I am sorry, Troy, your mother has requested every conversation that we have.”

“Since when did she say that?” cried Troy, in disbelief.

“On the way out from your room, Troy!” replied Max, irritatingly calm.

Troy suppressed all his anger and bit his red jelly pillow.

“Is there anything else, you need, Troy?”

“Nothing at all, Max, thank you!” replied Troy, clenching his teeth.

“Right then, Troy,” said Max.

Stupid machine, thought Troy, and Mum, totally unbelievable, she had asked Max to spy on me. I had no privacy, no life of my own. Damn it all.

Later, when Troy came downstairs into the living room, wearing a light blue tee, a button less shirt over it and dark brown pants. He looked around for his mother but there was no sign of his mom anywhere.

“Where’s Mum, Max?” asked Troy.

“She’s gone to the Federation Headquarters to meet Mr. Hugo Falcon, Troy.”

“What? I was supposed to go with her today, this was once in a lifetime chance to meet my hero!” cried Troy.

“She did mention one thing, before leaving,” said Max.

“And what was that?” asked Troy, disgruntled.

“She told me to convey you the message that this was your punishment, Troy,” replied Max.

“For kissing a girl?” asked Troy, with his eyes popping out in disbelief.

“It’s most probable.”

Totally pissed off, Troy sank on the leather couch and let his mind wander, to distract himself from the

sucky reality that he faced.

His mind hit on Hugo Falcon, more popularly known as The Falcon on his planet. He was the greatest adventurer, the Keplers had ever seen. Since, Kepler was essentially an ocean planet all of Falcon's adventures had been underwater. His triumphs included facing the darkest and the most dangerous of all the sea creatures known as the mythical Osiris that lived only in the deepest pockets of the ocean. The Osiris are described as demons, as almost the size of a medium sized space ship, with an armor that is impenetrable to all the Kepler guns and lasers and the worst part, was that they hunted in herds, not in ten or twenty but hundreds of large-sized monsters that came at you, giving you not even a fighting chance and before you realized anything, you would end up in the Osiris' stomachs in pieces.

Falcon's footage of his team being hounded by the Osiris pack and him successfully killing an Osiris, by shooting right through its eye, had become all the rage on Kepler and the most viewed video clip on Hooloo, the planet's most famous video sharing website.

Troy had first heard of Hugo Falcon, from his father, who read him Falcon's adventures at night, before tucking Troy into his bed. It seemed like a long time ago, when everything had been perfect and Troy missed him now. Just to think of the way, he had died was too horrible. Troy shifted his glistening eyes to look at his home. He tried to break his focus on his dad but the memories were just too painful and there had been someone else too. He turned around uncomfortably on the couch. As he turned, he felt the soft rich leather skin of the couch and remembered the other night with Susie, her soft skin and the taste of her lips. Troy smiled. He definitely wanted to meet her again. He didn't want to miss out on a girl like that.

Somehow, he felt that the grounding was worth it. Troy put his hands beneath his head and turned to face the ceiling. Max was playing a romantic number "You shall always be mine!" by Barbara Swing.

Troy made a funny face, and wondered whether Max had started playing the song in reaction to reading his feelings. Troy was tempted to ask but decided not to, remembering his mom and his stomach. He was hungry.

"Max?"

"Yes! Troy!"

"Hungry!"

"One minute!"

In less than a minute, a tray full of food whizzed out of the kitchen and hovered in front of Troy, before settling down on the glass table.

Almost, everything in the Zander home was controlled by Max, as it was in all the other Kepler homes by other customized AIs. All these AIs were in turn connected to each other, kind of making a global network. Everything in the home was connected to the AI and controlled, and if needed, along with a propellant system.

"Fresh green salads, bread and mermaid egg frittata, Troy," announced Max.

“I love mermaid eggs!” said Troy excitedly and launched onto the frittata. “Entertainment, Max!”

The white wall and the space in front of Troy suddenly came alive in response. A giant ten limbed blue lizard monster came running towards him being chased by men in spacesuits. With great ferocity, the monster lunged towards Troy, freezing his every nerve and letting the frittata fall from his mouth. As he watched on, spellbound, a shower of rockets shot off the movie, blasting the monster into a thousand simmering pieces that disappeared on reaching within an inch of Troy’s eyes.

“This reality render tech never stops amazing me!” said Troy, gorging on his salad happily, referring to the technology that allowed him to watch his entertainment as if it were happening right before him.

“Troy!” said Max suddenly, in an alarmed tone.

“Not now, Max!” said Troy, actively filling his mouth with frittata.

“Bad news, Troy, You got to see this!” insisted Max.

“Oh! Shut up Max!” replied Troy. “I am trying to eat here!”

Max didn’t reply. Instead, she stopped playing the movie and started displaying another video where buildings were being blown apart without any apparent attackers.

“Why did you change the movie, Max?” asked Troy, irritated.

“Kepler is under attack, Troy, The capital is being demolished. This is a live feed.”

“Holy Mermaids! What’re you sayin’?” shrieked Troy, dropping his salad bowl onto the floor.

“The attack began about fifteen minutes ago,” said Max.

“Mum!” yelled Troy, jumping from the couch.

“She is safe for now, the Headquarters has been demolished. She has instructed you to stay here, until she comes.”

“God no! Max, where is she? Show me where she is, right now.”

“She is within a two mile radius from the Headquarters, Troy.”

“Get out the Warswagger now!”

“No way, Troy, the instructions are clear. You are to stay put, until she comes.”

“God, I hate arguing with you!”

“I am sorry, Troy.”

Troy didn’t reply and remained silent.

“You are up to something, aren’t you?” asked Max, suspiciously.

“Activate Whizzling Whizzler, the magic words being, shut up Max!” said Troy, to which Max shut

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