

REFUGE CROSS

The Exiles



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**REFUGE CROSS:
THE EXILES**



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REFUGE CROSS: BEAR COAST

Refuge Cross: The Exiles

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in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
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prior permission of the publishers.

To my lovely wife, whose tolerance and encouragement of my passion for writing and drawing played a significant part in helping me to complete these works.

“It is not a good sign of mental health to be well adjusted to a sick society.”

J. Krishnamurti

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- CHAPTER ONE -

Memories of a distant beginning

(The tale of Trex and Sara)

A cloaked figure stood alone in an isolated alpine-meadow. It was early morning and a light mist hung over the grass as it swayed in the breeze.

Around this patch of wild grass, mighty trees stood like a solid black wall in the last of the night's darkness. The tips of snow-capped mountains could be seen above them, framed against a slowly brightening blue sky.

Through the mist, two figures could be seen approaching the lone-cloaked individual. As they drew nearer a large bird-like creature flew overhead, its loud cry piercing the silence. The animal had a wingspan of almost two metres, but the solitary figure was not worried. She knew that most wild animals were not dangerous at all – they were actually quite predictable. She only had to fear the unpredictable ones, the so-called *intelligent* ones of her world, the ones they called Anthros, like her.

The two approaching Anthros were also wearing full-body cloaks. Both had the large hoods of their cloaks up, hiding their faces.

'Morning Mr Thorntreck,' said the lone figure, she had been able to recognise one of the traveller's robes with its elaborate, elegant patterns of gold stitching and precious stones.

'Good morning Sage Filfia,' replied Mr Thorntreck, bowing respectfully. His elegant voice seemed out of place in the wild surroundings. 'May I introduce Senator Argenta Kirtaris,' he continued, indicating his companion with a grandiose sweep of his arm.

'A pleasure Ms Filfia,' greeted Senator Argenta, addressing Filfia without using her formal title of Sage.

Senator Argenta's extended her hand in typical formal greeting. What emerged from the expensive-looking cloak was something that looked very much like an animal paw. The

Senator's hand was covered in short grey fur, the only exception being the leathery pads on the palm and the base of her long fingers and thumb.

Sage Filfia extended her own hand/paw, it was similar to that of the Senator's, except that Sage Filfia's fur was brown instead of grey.

'It is quite unusual for a Senator to come all this way for a simple vote collection. I am honoured,' said Sage Filfia, shaking the hand of the Senator.

Filfia's voice was clear and direct, with none of the overly refined aspects of Mr Thorntreck's. Releasing the hand of Senator Argenta, Sage Filfia lowered the hood of her basic-looking, green travelling cloak.

From the darkness of the hood emerged a face that looked very much like that of a wolf's face here on Earth. Short brown fur covered Sage Filfia's entire face, giving it a soft, smooth appearance. Her longer jaw and cheeks made a type of snout, tipped with a small leathery oval nose. On the crown of her head Sage Filfia had longer black hair, which was worn in a similar way to that of humans. But unlike humans, she also had pointy wolf-like ears which emerged from the sea of longer black hair.

Sage Filfia had a sharp look about her, still beautiful, but with eyes that had seen a lot in their time.

Senator Argenta also removed her hood, revealing a similar wolf-like facial structure. She was obviously younger than Sage Filfia. Her rounder face showed a life lived more easily than that of the older female.

'This is no ordinary vote, as you know,' said Senator Argenta calmly. She pulled her hair free of her cloak and let it fall against her back.

'I am aware of its seriousness, but I have already made up my mind,' replied Sage Filfia.

'And which way have you voted? If you don't mind me asking,' enquired Mr Thorntreck respectfully. His posture was stiff and tall.

Mr Thorntreck was the last to remove the hood of his cloak, revealing a handsome older wolf-like face. He had short grey fur and neat, brown, longer hair on the top of his head. Unlike the females, Mr Thorntreck also had a tuft of longer hair on his top lip under his small oval nose. It was the same colour as the hair on his head and looked like a brown moustache against the otherwise shorter grey fur on his face.

'I have voted against change, and against the so-called patriots,' stated Sage Filfia with a sense of pride, 'I will not support any measure that could lead to another bloody war with the Lion Empire.'

With a sweep of her hand, Sage Filfia produced a completed scroll from within her cloak, handing it towards Mr Thorntreck.

'That is what I was afraid of,' said Senator Argenta smoothly, 'I have come to try and persuade you to change your vote before you submit it.'

Mr Thorntreck hesitated in taking the scroll, as if trying to give the Senator a chance to speak her mind.

'I am afraid you have wasted your time,' Filfia stated coldly. 'I won't encourage any changes that could make a new war more likely.'

Senator Argenta's confident expression did not show the slightest surprise.

'I have come a long way, surely you could spare me a few hours. These changes are just in case there is another war, not to help to start a new one from our side,' said the Senator.

She was speaking in the perfect politician's tone.

Sage Filfia did not look convinced.

Mr Thorntreck finally took the parchment from the outstretched hand of the Sage. He kept a steady gaze, awaiting the next move.

'Unfortunately, I cannot spare the time, I have more important things to attend to,' said Sage Filfia abruptly. To show that she too could play the politician's game, she continued with a slick voice, equal to that of the Senator's: 'And I would not want to waste any more time of a fellow Senator.'

Senator Argenta was momentarily taken aback. Her large triangular ears dropped in shock. They then flattened against her head in anger.

Sage Filfia continued before Senator Argenta could reply. 'I am sorry to hear about your recent loss, Mr Thorntreck.' She bowed slightly to the older male wolf, 'I held Mrs Thorntreck in high regard, and will naturally come by later this week to pay my respects.'

'Thank you,' replied Mr Thorntreck. He had not been surprised by the Sage's response to Senator Argenta, even if he was still disappointed by it.

'I have taken over my wife's affairs, and I aim to carry them on as she would have wanted it,' he continued.

'There is no one more able,' added Sage Filfia, though there was little joy in her voice.

'I must go,' she said suddenly, 'I bid you farewell.'

Sage Filfia nodded respectfully and turned to walk away, her long cloak swishing through the tall grass around her.

The two could only watch as the Sage began to disappear into the distance.

'I am sorry Senator Argenta,' said Mr Thorntreck in a conciliatory voice, 'but I did warn you that it would be a waste of time.'

Without any further hesitation he placed the scroll safely away in his cloak, it was his responsibility after all.

'That's quite okay,' said Senator Argenta. Her stern gaze followed the Sage as she walked away. There was a brief twitch underneath her long cloak.

Like all Anthro wolves, the Senator had a long bushy tail, and hers was currently flicking in irritation. 'There are other ways of getting the system to change for the better,' she said.

'Won't Sage Filfia's vote delay the issue until the next term?'

'It won't matter, we have things in motion back in the capital. It is only a matter of time. After all, the change is for the good of the kingdom.'

Mr Thorntreck gave the Senator a questioning look, raising one of his bushy eyebrows. The Wolf Kingdom's government was not well known for change, it was one of the most traditional institutions in the known world, and he, for one, preferred it that way.

'I wasn't expecting to change Sage Filfia's mind,' said Senator Argenta, 'but I had to come and see her arrogance for myself.' Her voice took a lighter tone, her anger quickly forgotten.

The two walked the way they had come. Senator Argenta even began to smile to herself.

'Things are in motion,' Senator Argenta continued confidently. 'It will take a few years, but I hope that I can count on your continued support.'

'Certainly,' reassured Mr Thorntreck. His tone was steady and proud. It was as if he were walking a little taller.

'Like my wife, I will work for what the society deems correct,' he continued.

'I am glad to hear it.' Argenta flipped up her decorated hood to protect against the morning chill. She was not used to being in such uncomfortable surroundings.

‘After all,’ she said, ‘lions and wolves simply can’t live near each other in peace. We all know that.’

They disappeared into the lingering mist.

*

Only a few hundred kilometres away on that very same summers’ day, two young Anthros were proving, even then, that the Senator’s comments could be wrong.

These youngsters had no idea that they would be so much trouble to the Senator’s long-term plans in only a few years’ time. For now, however, they had other things to worry about...

Sara, at that time, was still a wolf cub. Compared to her small body, her large hands, feet and long bushy tail made her a little clumsy and ungainly, but incredibly cute. Sara had short dark-brown fur that covered most of her body. This contrasted nicely with her lighter brown, wavy hair, which fell just below her shoulders. She also had a wild fringe that would occasionally fall in front of her large, shining eyes.

Even at this tender age, Sara’s golden eyes had remarkable intensity. Moving with purpose, she scanned her surroundings for her current prey... an Anthro lion!

The stalking cub was wearing a baggy cut T-shirt and a green skirt; both were hand-me-downs from her older sister and were far too large for the wolf cub.

Creeping through the long grass near a small creek, Sara slowly put one, large, furry foot in front of the other in an attempt to remain silent.

‘Crack!’

A twig broke under her padded foot. Stopping suddenly, she looked extra carefully at the dried yellow grass around her. Sara’s light brown bushy tail flicked back and forth as she concentrated.

The lion she was hunting had already ambushed her twice that morning. He was a lion cub called Trex, and he was currently in the one place she wasn’t looking – up.

Trex crawled a little along the old branch he was on, silently positioning himself above the wolf cub.

Trex was the same age as Sara and had the same human-like body shape. But unlike Sara, his snout was a little shorter and he had a larger triangular leathery nose instead of a small oval one. The thick furry ears that sat on top of his head were also round, so his face more resembled that of a lion cub on our Earth. Trex’s tail, like all other Anthro lions, was smooth. It was covered

by the same short pale orange fur as the rest of his body. Only a small tuft of longer hair at the end of his tail matched the same reddish-brown colour of the trim longer hair on top of his head.

The lion cub positioned himself better to strike. Unlike Anthro wolves, Anthro lions could retract their claws, which made them very good climbers.

The lion cub leapt from his perch. His baggy half pant's fluttered in the breeze as he sailed through the air, his long tail following behind.

Sara's ears flattened as a reflex to the unusual sound above. A split second later she was driven into the ground by the weight of the lion cub.

'Oomph!'

Trex tried to wrestle the stunned Sara into submission, but the wolf cub was able to get her legs underneath her and she pushed upwards with them. The two flipped over in the air, and Trex suddenly found himself on his back with Sara on top of him. Throwing the wolf off, the lion cub rolled away before standing up.

'You little sneak!' yelled Sara in protest. She wiped the dirt from her face, getting back onto her feet quickly.

The two cubs began to circle each other.

'Got you again,' said Trex teasingly, a large toothy grin on his face.

'Not yet!' A dangerous smile appeared on Sara's face; she had not officially surrendered.

Trex did not get another chance to comment as the wolf cub attacked.

Wrestling each other to the ground, Trex somehow found himself the wrong way around. Both their tails flicked back and forth, and Trex got a whip of Sara's bushy tail in the face.

'Ouch!'

Sara could see Trex's smooth tail in front of her, and without hesitation, she bit down with her sharp teeth.

'Arrgh!' shouted Trex, struggling to get away.

'Hey, no fair! I can't bite into your tail, it's too fuzzy!'

Sara used the distraction to twist around and pin the lion to the ground.

'I give up, I give up!' cried Trex.

Sara was going to sit on the young lion for a while to enjoy her victory, but Trex started to squirm in protest. Rolling off, Sara sat next to the lion cub, a look of triumph on her face.

Slowly, Trex got into a sitting position, crossing his legs in front of him.

'No fair, no biting,' complained the pouting Trex, rubbing his tail tenderly.

'I still won,' said Sara with a grin, her own tail wagging back and forth behind her.

'That's only one for you, and two for me,' Trex informed her.

'That's ok, I still won one,' Sara said, happy with herself.

Trex gave her a sore look, but he wasn't one to hold a grudge. The two youngsters regained their breath. Looking around with large eyes, they wondered what to do next.

It had become a hot summer's day in the lower foothills of the mountains. The heat shimmered off the surrounding yellowed fields. A rumble from the lion cub's stomach broke the silence.

'Do you think lunch is ready yet?' asked Trex. A large insect-like creature buzzed around his head. The Anthro lion cub swatted at it with his large, orange furry hand.

'No,' replied Sara, 'my sister would come and get us if it was.'

Trex looked around. They were on the border to the only neighbour Sara's family had. The neighbour's property stretched out from the other side of the tree-lined creek near them. Water trickled soothingly between the rocks. It looked like the neighbours were away at the moment, as nothing could be seen through the heat-haze.

Trex loved to visit Sara's family's farm, there was always something exciting to do. Normally, the two young Anthro wolves of the neighbours were there as well. Trex lived with his Uncle and Aunt a few valleys away, and they had no neighbours of any kind.

'If you are hungry, we can get some kaltisa melons from the Satlisons,' suggested Sara. She pointed to a wide flat tree some distance away on the neighbour's property.

'Kaltisa melons,' said Trex in awe. The lion cub's mouth watered. They were delicious, 'Won't your neighbours mind?'

'If they were home I'm sure they'd give us some,' Sara replied. 'Come on' she said.

Trex hesitated for only a second before he followed the young Anthro wolf. The two made their way over the creek-bed towards the neighbour's melon tree.

The world that Sara and Trex lived on was much like Earth. They had snow, rain, mountains, oceans and deserts just like us. So it was not surprising that many of the animals and plants on their world were similar to ours.

There were insect-type creatures, animals with scales, feathers and fur, fish that could breathe underwater and swim,

trees with flowers and fruits, all these things of different shapes and sizes. Life had evolved to fill all the roles as on our world.

A good example of this was that other than the humanoid-like Anthro lion and wolf race, there was nothing like cats or dogs of any kind on the Anthro world. There were other animals to fill the role that felines and canines do here on Earth. And it was one of these other animals that was watching the two young Anthro cubs as they approached the tree it was guarding.

‘Are you sure we’re allowed to be here?’ asked Trex, ‘we don’t have permission.’

Sara ran on, blissfully unaware of why Trex was worried. ‘We’re not breaking in. If no one knows, who’ll care?’ she said, “No harm... no foul.’ Sara happily repeated a line her older sister used often.

Trex was only somewhat convinced, and ran after Sara through the crop field; the long thin stems of the wheat-like plants came up to his neck.

They approached the melon tree. It stood alone in a small grass clearing next to a track. Coming closer, Sara suddenly stopped. Trex ran up beside her. Ahead, a large animal had just raised itself onto its hind legs. Its powerful front paws were tucked up in front of it so as to get a clear view of who was approaching.

The animal could best be described as strange cross between a meerkat and a giant possum here on Earth.

Sara and Trex knew it as an ossum, an animal that weighed up to about thirty kilograms.

The animal’s large, dark eyes looked out from a long wide snout, flanked by large floppy dog-like ears. Other than its face, which had short fur, the ossum was covered with a long shaggy coat. This longer fur went all the way down the length of its large, powerful tail, used for stability as it sat up on its hind legs. This ossum was a older, and was not happy to see Sara.

Trex looked worried. Though Sara had an ossum who was quite friendly, they were still as large as the two cubs, and stood just as high when they sat on their hind legs. This ossum did not look particularly friendly to Trex.

‘Does he know you?’ asked the lion cub.

The ossum sniffed the air, growling a little.

‘Yes, but he’s mean,’ replied Sara, her tone almost as sour as her expression. She had not planned on this.

The wolf cub could see that the ossum was tied to the kaltisa melon tree. He had obviously been put there to guard it. The tree was not that tall, with strong old branches reaching out from a

single point on the massive trunk in a flat ark, making the tree look like a large umbrella with its wide flat leaves.

Trex looked around with growing concern. 'I don't think they want anyone to take the melons.'

'Stupid Rukkt.' Sara referred to the ossum by name, 'Ms Satlisons would give us the melons if she was here. He's only there to stop other animals from taking the melons while they're away.'

Trex did not know what to say.

'I want a melon,' persisted Sara, kicking at the dirt.

Trex scratched the back of his head, unsure of how to respond.

'You can sneak good!' The wolf cub suddenly turned on the lion.

'What?'

'Yeah, I'll distract it and you climb the tree.' Sara clapped her hands with enthusiasm.

Trex backed away a little, his tail showing between his legs as his round furry ears drooped.

'You're not scared, are you?' Sara mocked. She could see the uncertainty in the lion cub's large brown eyes.

'No I'm not,' replied Trex.

'You're a fraidy lion,' Sara teased.

Trex breathed in, puffing out his chest. His ears sprang back to attention.

'Let's go,' he said confidently.

Rukkt the ossum could no longer see the two cubs in the longer grass. They had been down wind, so sniffing the air didn't help. The ossum had about ten metres of rope that tied him to the tree. He prowled the edge of the boundary, occasionally jumping on his hind legs to try and see them.

The ossum suddenly smelt something. Turning, he could see the wolf cub had circled behind. The ossum chased Sara back.

Just out of reach, Sara had a large stick and was teasing the animal, 'Nia nia nia!' she shouted. 'You can't get me!'

The ossum growled and yelped as it strained against the rope. Sara ran back and forth.

'*Spotch.*'

Hearing a strange noise, the ossum suddenly stopped, and turned around.

Trex was in the tree, one of the ripe melons had fallen when he was out on a branch.

'Trex, look out!' shouted Sara in alarm.

Quick as lightning, Rukkt bounded back towards the tree, his long tail bobbing behind like a strange counterweight. Jumping onto the tree's side with all fours, the powerful animal scurried up the thick trunk.

Trex was still out on a limb when he saw the animal cutting off his exit. Panicking, Trex simply threw himself from the branch, jumping the few meters to the ground. The lion cub landed on all fours on instinct, absorbing the impact well.

The ossum raced down the other side of the trunk. Trex backed away as fast as he could from the growling creature

'Hurry, hurry!' yelled Sara, as she came running towards them in concern.

The ossum had unwittingly shortened his lead by running up and down the other side of the tree and Trex was just out of reach.

'Lookout!' yelled Sara again, stopping by the base of the trunk.

Struggling against the tight rope the ossum turned. Sara was now in reach.

Her eyes became as large as saucers and she screamed as the ossum raced towards her.

'Eeeek!'

Sara turned just in time to wave her stick. The ossum growled, snatching it in his jaw. The ossum tore it out of Sara's grasp. Sara lost her balance and fell onto her tail.

Spitting the stick out to one side the ossum advanced on the cub.

Sara scurried backwards hurriedly.

Finding its lead further shortened and unable to advance further, the frustrated ossum ran frantically back and forth around the tree trunk. The angered animal only managed to twist the lead further together until he could only move a short distance. Squirring in defeat, the ossum continued to growl at the Anthro cubs.

Trex made it back to Sara, who still sat frozen in shock.

'That didn't work,' said Trex angrily. He looked over at the melon that had fallen from the tree, squashed on the ground.

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