

Jeri cursed to herself for losing her temper. Her father had said that Jeri was a cross between a Texas king snake and a Tasmanian devil, and when she got mad her eyes glowed red. Apologies were hard. Being wrong was being weak. She let her fist drop to her side. "I didn't mean to yell. Just keep the damn window closed."

Cake didn't understand the world beyond their cabin. How could she? Since birth she had rarely been let outside. The bedrooms, family room, and kitchen were Cake's world. They'd play hide and seek under the tables and build forts out of the couch, but that did not take the place of feeling the sun on your face and the earth between your toes. It wasn't easy to be the big sister at the end of the world.

"You didn't have to kill it," Cake whined as she nudged the crushed invader with her foot.

Not in the mood to argue, Jeri headed out the door and said, "The Jeep is packed. We got time for breakfast and then *adios.*"

The world Jeri had known was gone, buried under the alien filth that lay beyond their electrified fence: nightmares armed with sharpened tooth and claw. When the invasion started, three thousand refugees fled to Big Bear with enough food to last several years, but then the cryptos had scabbled up the mountain and devoured everything. No one knew if they were

invaders from a distant world or the product of a genetic experiment gone wrong. Not that it mattered. Only a few people were alive to care.

Jeri wandered through the living room. All the essentials were packed, everything else left behind: the Christmas ornaments she'd made in third grade; her father's medal for valor; a shelf filled with sea shells gathered from a beach; remnants of a bygone day, fossils of a lost world. On a shelf above the fireplace was a series of journals written by her father. Early in the invasion he'd decided to catalog every crypto that crossed his path. James had called the series of journals "*A Bestiary of Future Earth*". The catalog ran hundreds of pages as more creatures had appeared and her father had added to the menagerie. His meticulous drawings were carefully annotated with observations and commentary. He'd believed that the information in his books might hold the key to defeating the invaders. He'd always told her, "Know your enemy better than you know yourself." She couldn't understand her father's fascination for the cryptos. And in the end, they'd killed him. The journals were all that was left of her father and they were too precious to leave behind.