

*As the  
Earth Lay  
Dreaming*

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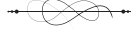
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*For Moana*



# PROLOGUE



Three hundred million years in the future, the world would be practically unrecognizable to us. Due to the gradual process of plate tectonics, all the continents have merged back together into a single supercontinent, called Neopangea. Likewise, there is now only one big global ocean, the Tethys Proxima.

The continents merged together in a formation dubbed “Aurica”.

In this landmass, the center portion comprises what was once the Americas and Australia. Africa and Eurasia are positioned on one side, and India, China, and Antarctica are positioned on the other. But the names and borders of the countries we have today are long gone. The world has more or less begun anew.

But what new life will we find in this future world?

The answer can be described in one word - Evolution.

In this world, humans as we know them don't really exist anymore. Throughout the course of dozens of millions of years, Homo Sapiens began to evolve, branching out into many different subspecies. While these species mainly live with their own kind, it is still very common for different species of humans to coexist, and potentially breed. Anyways, One such species of new humans is the *Homo Fodiendi*, which means “Digging Man”. But they are better known by their common name, the *Excavites*. As the name suggests, a large portion of these human's lifestyle is based around excavation. As a result, they have modified eyes for seeing in the dark, and special hormones in their ears to protect their hearing

from the loud and constant sounds of their drilling machines. Another species of humans are the *Gravis Pondus*, or “Heavy Weight”. They are referred to as *goliaths*. These humans are very tall, averaging well above six feet. Their bones and muscles are extremely hard and dense, allowing them to lift and push large objects with ease. Due to their massive size, goliaths require a much higher calorie intake than other humans to sustain themselves. The goliath’s enlarged lungs also cause them to inhale large amounts of air per breath, and they emit a higher amount of carbon dioxide per exhale. There are many other species of humans in this world, but to go through them all would take forever.

While one would naturally expect these creatures to inhabit the surface of Neopangea, this is unfortunately not the case. You see, a certain cataclysmic event occurred roughly 45 million years before the story’s present, and it is simply referred to as “The Great Destruction”. And long story short, the surface became almost entirely uninhabitable. However, there was still one place where life could continue to exist - *Below*. The Age of the Underground is in full swing.

So now, humanity lives underground, entrenched within the crust of the Earth. And while the world above the surface may be uninhabitable, the world below is a different story. Magma within the core has cooled significantly, allowing humans to dig deeper into the ground, since the heat isn’t as much of a problem as it was hundreds of millions of years ago. However, the underground isn’t completely free from dangers. Although seismic activity has decreased drastically, due to tectonic plates no longer moving much, any earthquakes that do happen can be extremely dangerous.

But what exactly happened during the Great Destruction? No one really knows. The stories told of it have been passed down through thousands of generations, and as such have been all but lost to memory and misinterpretation. And it is still unconfirmed if the events of the Great Destruction are still present. But there have been stories; rumors that not all humans evacuated into the underground during the Great Destruction. Fables that tell of people who continued to inhabit Neopangea. Perhaps



those surface dwellers are still out there, their descendants walking among the surface at this very moment.

Ultimately, the main takeaway is this: The surface became uninhabitable some time ago, so humans live underground now, and there are several different species of humans, all of which have uniquely evolved.

For a while now, Humans have lived deep into the Earth, growing fully accustomed to underground life. But one question remains - What lies beyond? What is there to be found not just above the surface, but above the horizon? What treasure awaits humanity within the little lights in the sky, which we call planets and stars? It is indeed an intriguing mystery, but perhaps only the most daring of adventurers are willing to seek answers . . .



# CHAPTER 1



**T**alcrum crawled through a digging hatch, tugging at crystalline minerals until they broke loose. Sparks flicker in the darkness, briefly illuminating his confined surroundings. He slid himself further down the hatch, yanking more minerals from the rocky walls during his descent. Darkness encompassed him, as he lowered himself deeper into the cave. But Talcrum wasn't afraid of the dark. He was an *Excavite* - A subspecies of humans that specifically evolved to become effective miners and diggers. And with his excavitian pupils, he was able to make out his surroundings well enough. Talcrum yanked again at the wall. Bits of loose rock ripped off, causing chunks of weathered rock to tear open. Dust sprouted from the openings, floating near Talcrum's face. He sputtered and coughed, as the dust particles enveloped him, some of them slipping through the bandana wrapped over his mouth. With one hand tightly gripped on a sturdy rope, Talcrum picked away at the remaining nearby minerals with his other hand, which was equipped with a heavy glove.

This was an old cave, one that might have resided underwater, when the Earth still had multiple oceans. Nowadays, all the water is combined into one ocean, which to his knowledge was named the Tethys Proxima. Supposedly, over seventy percent of the Earth's surface is covered in water, going tens of thousands of meters deep. Apparently, countless creatures swim about in the depths of the seas. The ocean flourishes with life. There are also these giant mountains of water, called glaciers. The water inside the glaciers was so cold that it became a solid substance called "Ice". people may have even lived on the glaciers, maybe even built their homes on the ice. But that was ages ago. In today's world, everyone lives underground. A catastrophe dubbed "The Great Destruction" had all but forced humanity to retreat into the Earth's crust. And humanity soon

grew accustomed to underground life. It has been that way for a very long time now.

As Talcrum rummaged through the cave, he began to wonder what it was like during its prime. When it was home to creatures and life forms he could only imagine. How many years has this cave been vacant? Millions? Tens of millions? When was this cave occupied? In Talcrum's eyes, this cave in of itself was a relic. An anomaly left behind from a time when the Earth was still alive, and when humanity could walk among the surface.

Descending further down the hatch, Talcrum eventually found himself in a tunnel of sorts. Crystalline boulders were running up and down the sides. They were large and bulky, presumably made of extremely tough minerals. But Talcrum wasn't here for those. That would likely be left to the Second Shift, as they would be the ones to tear down the boulders entirely with their heavy equipment. Talcrum has been part of the Second Shift before. Several times, actually. But today, he was assigned to the First Shift, and his job was to collect things of value that were lightweight. Those were things like the rocks, minerals, gems, metals, among other small items that could be scooped up and stuffed inside his satchel, slung onto his back. Once he would finish, he would retrace his steps, until he eventually found himself out through the hatch he entered through, back to the rest of his fellow First Shift members working outside. Talcrum turned to continue down the tunnel, nearly tripping over a large fossil. A reminder that this cave once bustled with life. The noise his foot made when skidding across it made a clanking sound, like a bunch of coins spilling onto a floor. Dust leaped into his face. He started coughing as the particles seeped through his face covering. He coughed again, eyes watering. He wiped his face with his sleeve, and pulled down a pair of goggles that were strapped onto his forehead. It was a hand-me-down, given to him by his parents, who died from a cave-in when he was only a young boy. It pinched ears a little, as it was a bit small for someone of his size, as he was likely outgrowing it. But it was all he had. One of the lenses had a little crack in it. Talcrum always promised himself that he would fix it at some point, but never got around to doing so. He was considering replacing it, but he didn't have another, and new ones were too expensive nowadays. Almost all other crew members had goggles too, but theirs

were in even worse condition than Talcrum's. So he ultimately considered himself lucky, even if the goggles could be annoying sometimes. Max, his sister, made fun of him whenever he wore the goggles, calling him four eyes. But she never meant it in a malicious way. Talcrum and Max were very close, as they were the only members of their family left.

A voice echoed down and through the hallway. "You good down there?"

It was Max. She was calling in from where she waited outside. She was part of the Second shift today. Usually, the two are part of the same shift, but today happened to be one of the exceptions where their shifts were different.

"Yeah, I'm finishing up," Talcrum called, as he scrambled a little farther into the halls, ripping more rocks, hurriedly pulling them loose. The hall's path ended. His job was done. He walked back to the hatch he descended from, and latched himself onto the rope that lowered him down.

"All clear!" he yelled.

Talcrum could hear Max calling out to the other crew members. "Ready!" The rope sharply yanked Talcrum upward, pulling him back to the entrance. To prevent slamming to the wall as he ascended, Talcrum held his hands outward, pushing himself away as neared a wall. Above and outside the cave, Max was pulling the rope, sweat dripping all over as she hurled her brother up. Talcrum took a mini spray paint can from his pocket and drew a symbol over the place where he had stripped the minerals. The symbol was a triangle with a horizontal line through it, and it was the marking of the crew he worked with, and it gave him a right to work the wrecks under the supervision of his boss, Korrar. Currently, no other crews were competing for this portion right now, but it was still important to mark the territory.

Talcrum gathered the rest of his scavenged goods and continued moving upward. Ahead, firefly-like lights showed a glaring brightness. Talcrum squinted as he reached toward the light, thinking that this was what the

Sun must be like for the Surface World. A giant, glowing ball of heat, powerful enough to evaporate a person who got too close. But thankfully enough, the light Talcrum saw wasn't the Sun, so he wasn't evaporated. As he reached the top, Talcrum thrust himself out of the hatch. He ripped off his fastening belt and tore off his mask, breathing heavily for air.

Giant, bright fluorescent lights hung high above the crew, spanning all across their workplace and their nearby city they lived in. In a way, the lights simulated the sky - A shining glow beyond reach, changing, and ever shifting. Cool breezes swept past him from nearby set up fans and air conditioners. Axes slammed against the cave's rocks as nearby groups of other crew members broke it apart, working on their strip of claimed territory.

The crews chipped away the rocky walls with their blades and dozers, and sent them drifting down a set-up slide, where more crews retrieved the loot and hauled it to their workplaces, where they would be weighed, sorted, and eventually sold. Some workers like Talcrum picked away at the cave's smaller assets, stripping trinkets of brass, copper, nickel, aluminum, and iron - Precious metals in the cave. Other groups searched for hidden puddles of oil and freshwater, bottling the fluids as they collected it. With all the workers combined, it was a great beehive of activities, all of which were dedicated to harvesting the "Corpse" of this cave, and molding it into something more practical. In a way, they were continuing the cave's legacy, because although it wouldn't be a "Cave" any longer, it's parts would be recycled into new items, ones that would be of great use to the people of *Aluhoha*, the nearby underground city where all these workers lived, among many others.

And there stood his sister, awaiting his arrival.

"About time you showed up," Max smirked. She dropped the rope in her hands on the floor. She was about a year younger than him, and a bit shorter. Her skin was white, whereas Talcrum's was tanned. Max's skin gleamed in the lights. Sweat streamed down her neck. She had jet black hair just like him, and hers was trimmed into a bob cut, the light gleaming off the sweat in her hair. Talcrum always found his sister

attractive, especially when the light reflected off her sweaty, white skin, making her seemingly glow like a goddess. A divine beauty.

“It’s a big catch,” Talcrum said, panting. “No shortage of trinkets, gonna take a while to get it all.”

Trinkets. It was a commonly used term among crew members. Essentially, it meant anything that was small in size, but of worthy value. Usually collected by First Shift workers.

“How much did you get?” She asked.

“About fourteen pounds worth, give or take. But that’s nowhere near all of it.”

“I reckon we could have got it all if we were both down there”. She noted.

“Probably,” Talcrum replied. “But don’t worry. I got enough for us to make ends meet.”

“I sure hope so,” Max shrugged. “One of our crew members was telling me that Korrar said there was another crew eyeing our slice of the cave.”

Talcrum brushed some dust off his shoulder. “Eh. It was bound to happen at some point.”

“Yeah. Couldn’t expect anything else to happen.” Max turned around and picked up a nearby Ramming Drill. It was a heavy device, held the same way one would hold a minigun. And it was shaped like one too. But instead of having barrels, the device had one giant cone-shaped drill.

“Gonna carve another opening,” She said. “Watch out . . .”

Max started up the Ramming Drill. As with most excavation equipment, it was quite loud. In particular, the Ramming Drill (Nicknamed the “Rammer”) clocked in at about 130 decibels. A sound of this volume would cause instant pain to other species of Underground humans.

However, the Excavites have evolved to gain special hormones in their ears, which allow them to work with their extremely noisy equipment for extended periods of time, even without hearing protection.

Max's drill whirrs up. She pierces it into a rock wall, carving a hole into it. This process takes about thirty seconds, and when she is done, she turns off the drill, and wipes her forehead. She turns to Talcrum.

"Wanna give it a whirl?" She asks him.

"Nah. I'm good," Talcrum replies.

Max smiles.

"Aw, c'mon. You know you want to. Drilling's one of your favorites!"

Max was right. Talcrum did numerous tasks as an excavator. But working a drill was among his favorite tasks. It could sometimes be challenging, but the payoff was beyond satisfying.

Talcrum couldn't help but grin. He sighed.

"Alright . . . Fine".

Max giggles. "See? I knew you had it in ya!"

"Yeah, yeah," He responds. "Now, lemme see that Rammer."

Max gently places the drilling device on the ground, and Talcrum picks it up. Turning on the Rammer, he finishes the opening that Max had created. Upon completion, Talcrum sets the drill back down, stretching his arms and cracking his knuckles.

"And that's how it's done." He crows playfully.

From the height of the cave's peak, the city of Aluhoah spread out over the distance. Buildings and houses were scattered all across, with little lights



shining out from them. Giant pillars of rock held up the ceiling of the Earth above, keeping it from collapsing upon the city. Outside of the city lay a beach of sorts. Sandy shores spread about, as ocean water bathed the beach with its tides. Beaches like this supposedly existed on the Surface World, where the waters of the fabled Tethys ocean would wash upon the sand, leaving behind the shells from tiny critters - Like trinkets in a cave. As for the water, it was the result of continental drift over hundreds of millions of years. The movement of tectonic plates gradually shifted the landmasses on the Surface, combining them into one supercontinent. Throughout this process, water from the oceans was dragged down into the Earth's crust, forming reservoirs. During the Earth's prime, this water would be brought back up to the surface by erupting volcanoes. But as the Earth aged, seismic activity reduced drastically. Tectonic plates don't move anywhere near as much as they used to, meaning that earthquakes and eruptions were much less frequent. As such, the cycle of water through the Earth came to a deadlock, resulting in pockets of water to be contained within the underground. This was how Aluhoah was born. Countless generations ago, a group of people, presumably excavites, discovered the subterranean water body, and colonized the surrounding area. Over time, the society there grew, until it eventually became what it was now. The beach itself was filled with people, some setting up shops and barter stations, others dragging their salvaged cargo along the sand. And above it all lay massive, fluorescent lights, simulating the sunlight of the Surface World.

Talcrum paused for a moment, staring at the cityscape. The water of the ocean lay white, reflecting the fluorescent lights above. From what Talcrum knew, the oceans of the Surface world were blue, as they reflected the blue tint of the sky. Far out on the horizon, aquatic vessels sailed across the sea. His eyes locked on to a particular boat, as it dashed across the waters, smoothly and elegantly. From what he could make out, it was a little cargo boat. Boats like those would carry materials out of the city, to be traded at distant locations. A lot of the materials on Aluhoah's cargo boats came primarily from excavators like himself. In fact, there was a chance that some of the materials that he scavenged himself would eventually sail away on a ship like that, and it would be carried to faraway places. Sometimes, Talcrum liked to imagine himself as a piece of cargo,

embarking on such a ship, and being taken to wondrous towns and cities, and being picked up by people he could only imagine. For nearly his whole life, Talcrum grew up inside Alluhoah. Almost everything he ever experienced was within the city's domain. His slice of life was so small, it was hardly a slice. What he saw was like a drop of water. What he hadn't seen was an entire ocean. And that was only within the Earth. Rumor has it that above the Surface, beyond Talcrum's unexplored ocean, there is an infinite world beyond the planet's sky. What lied there, Talcrum couldn't even comprehend. No one probably could.

“You lads”

Talcrum snapped out of his daydreaming. Max quickly began brushing dust off herself. In front of them stood their boss, Korrar.

“Oh! Uh, hi there, Mister”, Max stuttered. She always got nervous when around the boss. He was quite tall for an excavite, and was presumably either in his late sixties or early sixties. He was fair-skinned, like Max, but not as white as her. He had a square jaw, and with a black mullet and thick mustache. streaks of white in his hair ran down along his sideburns, a sign of his advanced age.

“How's it been so far?” He inquired.

“Went through one of the caves in our sector,” Talcrum began. “Got plenty of trinkets”

Korrar's eyes darted to Talcrum. The eyes of excavates were not too dissimilar to the eyes of their ancestor, the *Homo Sapien*. The main differences were that excavitian pupils were mainly adapted for maintaining clear vision in dark environments - Ideal for their mining and digging based lifestyle. While an excavite's “Dark Vision ” would slowly fade by aging, one could tell that Korrar's eyes were still quite sharp despite his age. Perhaps keeping constant watch over his workers, looking for the slackers, was what kept his timeworn eyes in such good shape.

“And the amount?” He asked Talcrum.

“I’d say around fourteen pounds,” he told Korrar. “There’s still quite a bit more though.”

Korrar nodded. “And what about you, Maxine?”

Max awkwardly brushes her hair with one of her hands. She seemed to be trying to avoid eye contact with Korrar.

“Yeah, I was just, you know, drilling a new opening into the tunnel. I just had to, uh, let the device cool down for a minute”. She then laughs nervously, still avoiding Korrars gaze. He quickly glances at the Rammer, then back at the pair.

“Hm. I see.” Korrar says. For a moment, a silence broke out between the three of them, and Talcrum could feel a growing tension. Korrar clapped his hands together, ending the silence.

“Very well, then” he exclaimed. “Back to work you go.”

On that note, Korrar walks away from the two. Max sighs in relief.

“What’s your deal with him, anyway?” Talcrum asked. “How come you’re always so tense every time you see him?”

Max shifts awkwardly in the spot she stood. Although outgoing, she was never exactly adept at socializing. In fact, she was rather oblivious to social cues, resulting in her coming off as quite awkward to some. Perhaps some people found her oddness annoying, and many times, Talcrum had to remind her about “Reading the room”. But admittedly, Talcrum found it kind of adorable. She was just so sweet and innocent.

“I dunno, really,” She states. “There’s just something about him . . .”

“It’s how he looks, ain’t it?” Talcrum snickers. Max first looks confused, but then gets defensive.

“What? No! Why would you even think that?” She shot back. Talcrum smirks, a smug look on his face.

“Admit it. Chiseled jaw, tall figure, big bushy mustache, you like how he looks, don’t ya?”

Max blushes. “Absolutely not! I would never!”

She turns away from Talcrum, her face reddening.

“Um, well, maybe just a little . . .” She mutters. Talcrum grins.

“Well let me ask you,” he starts. “Who’s looks do you like better, Korrar’s, or your big bro?”

Max’s blush quickly fades. Her lips curl into a smile.

“I think you know the answer to that one.” She tells him.

“Then say it,” Talcrum exclaims, puffing his chest. Max giggles.

“Of course I would choose you. Every single time”.

Talcrum laughs. “Good answer. You’ve got keen eyes.”

“And you’ve got keen looks,” She replies.

Talcrum shrugs. “Actually, between the two of us, I bet you’re the prettier one,” he says. Max chuckles, and gently punches him in the rib, in an affectionate way.

“Aw, shut up!” she chortles.

“Make me,” Talcrum whispers in reply. The two hold each other in their hands, gazing into one another’s eyes. Talcrum admired his sister’s eyes. They were a deep bright blue, as opposed to his yellowish-beige. Her eyes glowed like diamonds - A sign that she was happy. He loved the look of

her eyes when she was happy. It reminded him of the trinkets he would collect. Except Max's pupils were even more beautiful. As elegant as they were, trinkets could ultimately be assigned a price associated with their value. With their beauty. But Max's eyes were priceless. No amount of money or salvage or resources could ever equate to the glamor of her happy eyes.

"I love you, Talcrum." Max murmurs, moving in to hug him.

"Yeah. Love you too" Talcrum whispers in reply, hugging back.

So there they stood, on the cliff of the cave, which overlooked the city. Hand in hand, the two embraced one another. His arms wrapped around her, her arms wrapped around him. Sharing the warmth of their bodies as they held each other close, and as the cool ventilation air swooped around them. They might have not had much, but they had each other. Life was indeed harsh as an excavator, but since their loving bond was so strong, they were more than capable of withstanding whatever life could throw at them. And that was all that truly mattered.