

A vertical rectangular image with a dark, atmospheric background. At the top, a bright sun or star is partially obscured by dark, swirling clouds, creating a lens flare effect. Below the sun, a mountain peak rises from a misty, forested base. The sky is filled with ethereal, glowing light trails and soft, circular bokeh effects in shades of blue and purple. The overall mood is mysterious and otherworldly.

SKY KINGDOM

WANN FANWAR

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Part 1: Before Beginnings

Wann Fanwar, @ 2022 (2020)



Sky Kingdom

Another day

'Father's home!

Father's home!'

There was genuine excitement in young

Sett's voice. It was the

best time of day for him. He bounded down the stairs towards the front door just as it creaked open.

'Hello there, my boy.'

It was the unmistakable voice of his father.

'Father, I'm so happy you're home.'

Sett jumped up into the arms of his father; his face filled with joyful anticipation. This was a daily drill for father and son.

'Dinner's ready.'

Mother's voice came from the dining room.

'C'mon boys, time to eat.'

As the family settled at the table, young Sett could not contain his eagerness further.

'Father, did you get a new book today? Please, please tell me.'

'Well, you'll just have to wait until we're done eating, won't you?'

Sett tried to gobble up his food as quickly as he could. 'Slow down, Sett,' pleaded mother.

‘We don’t want you choking.’

Sett looked up briefly and smiled sheepishly.

‘Okay.’

He mumbled through a mouth filled with small chunks of fruit.

Finally, the meal was done and Sett prepared for bed and the much-awaited evening activity. Father strolled into the bedroom with a book in his hands.

‘You did get a new book!’ exclaimed Sett.

‘What’s it called?’

‘Well, let’s see,’ mused Father as he turned the book over in his hand. He faced the cover to Sett.

‘What does it say?’

‘Sky Kingdom.’

Sett almost stumbled over the words.

‘I wonder what that means.’

For a second, he was lost in thought.

‘I don’t know,’ responded father.

‘Let’s find out, shall we?’

With that, Sett settled down in his father’s arms, who, opened the book and began to read.



Another day slowly rolled in as citizens of Sky Kingdom gradually emerged into the worlds around them. Expectations were high every

morning. It was difficult to be certain what life in Sky Kingdom would be like with each new day. There was a stir of anticipation as the rising sun bathed the land in ascending shades of brightness. Surely, another surprise awaited them on this particular morning.

The music of the chorale at practice in the City centre drifted through open doorways. The musical notes intermingled with rays of light, weaving a display as captivating as anyone could remember. The smiles on countless faces told their own stories.

Sky Kingdom was truly a magical place. Its borders stretched as far as imagination itself. It contained a variety of places as diverse from each other as creatively possible. Gently rolling hills, verdant valleys, colourful lakes and crystal streams punctuated the landscape. An endless variety of trees covered the land like a blanket. While land and air creatures provided a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds, water creatures cut multi-coloured ribbons on the surfaces of the waters. Despite the vast distances, travel was easy and people could go wherever they wanted. The idea of limits seemed almost foreign in Sky Kingdom.

There were also so many different tribes in the Kingdom.



‘What’s a tribe, father?’ interrupted Sett.

‘That’s like a group of people who live in the same area and share many things in common,’ father responded.

‘Okay.’

Father continued reading.



Every tribe was unique and had its own special place and job, or so it seemed. Up in the Highlands were the Erins. They lived elevated lives and descended into the City only when occasion demanded it. No one knew for sure what they actually did. They would come to the City during fixed occasions and then disappear back into the misty heights. Some people called them ‘mystics’.

In the Lowlands lived the Perrins. There were many of them and they were a very busy lot; always doing something or going somewhere. Every Perrin seemed driven by a personal mission, which generated the appearance of non-stop activity. They travelled in and out of the City almost without stop, day and night. Actually, the City never slept, it was always buzzing, always busy.



‘Father,’ interrupted Sett again, ‘What is the City? Why was it always busy?’

‘I’m not sure, son. I think we should read more before we discover the answer. Shall we?’

‘Sorry, father. Please continue.’

Sett’s mind was already buzzing with thoughts and imagination.



In far-away Xenon province lived the Xenites. They were famous for their music. It was rumoured that their music had a mysterious, almost magical power about it. Many Xenites were employed in the City and it was their music you could hear every morning. Sometimes people would come to the City just to listen to the beautiful music the Xenites produced. They sang in complex harmonies and played just about every imaginable instrument. These gifted musicians also travelled far and wide through Sky Kingdom performing concerts for people everywhere. Those who could not travel much loved the moments when Xenites came to their provinces. It was always great entertainment.

Even farther away, in Helios, lived the Helim who were famous for their ability to manipulate nature. They could bend wind and water. They could lift objects without raising their hands. They could move without actually moving. Some people called them 'magicales' which may mean 'magician' but no one's really sure. Being a Helim was the stuff of dreams for every boy and girl in Sky Kingdom.



'I wish I could be a Helim,' thought Sett.

Father noticed that Sett was slowly drifting off to sleep. 'I guess we shall continue tomorrow.'

Father spoke to himself. He gently kissed his young son's forehead, tucked him in and quietly left the room.

Sett did not realise he had fallen asleep. He drifted into that mysterious world of dreams and thoughts.

'I would like to be . . .'

But sleep got the better of him and he was soon sound asleep.

As dawn broke, Sett sleepily stirred to life. He had had a very good night's sleep and bounded out of bed, ready for another exciting day.

'Father, father. I'm awake.'

He ran down to the dining room, but an eerie silence greeted him. No one was around.

'Where's everybody?' he thought.

At that moment, mother walked in with bags of groceries in her arms.

'Good morning, sleepy head. Good to see you finally awake.'

'Where is father?' queried Sett.

'Sorry, he already left'

Mother busied herself with shelving her latest supplies.

'I suppose I will have to wait till evening for the story to continue,' Sett muttered to himself.

With that he prepared for another day's activities but always thinking about the story of Sky Kingdom.

All too soon, it was story time again.

‘Father, I’ll try to stay awake longer tonight. I want to hear more about Sky Kingdom.’

‘Sure thing, son.’

Father picked up the book, removed the bookmark he had placed the previous night and started reading.

‘Well, let’s get back to the tribes of Sky Kingdom,’ he said.



For people who love animals, Bootes was the place to be. People living in this province were known as Booters and their specialty was animals.



Father had barely completed the sentence when Sett interrupted him.

‘Animals? You mean they were zoo keepers?’

‘Maybe. Let’s find out.’

Father winked as his son.



People believed that Booters could talk with animals. They took care of all kinds of animals—big ones, small ones, fast ones, slow ones. They knew how to look after their animals. Some animals were for work, while others were for play. Every animal was treated like family and every Booter thought of animals as family. There was perfect harmony

between people and animals. Even the most unschooled in animal care could tell that Booter animals were treated with special regard.

Another interesting province in Sky Kingdom was Uran. The Urites were famed makers of intelligent machines. They loved inventing things, especially if it meant they could relax more and let their inventions work for them. There were machines to wash, machines to clean, machines to cook and even machines to rock babies to sleep. People all over the land loved these mechanical inventions and business flourished, making the Urites rather wealthy.



‘That’s so nice.’

Sett thought out loud, but father did not hear and continued reading.



Many claimed that perhaps the most important province in Sky Kingdom was Landesform. The people, who lived there, the Landers, were planters and sowers. They were the farmers of Sky Kingdom. Their land was exceptionally fertile and they grew all sorts of flowers, veggies, grains, nuts and fruit. The quality of their produce was widely spoken of throughout Sky Kingdom and people flocked to the markets to buy the freshest supplies available. The Landers were such excellent farmers that you could expect to find a new veggie or fruit every time you went to the market. Many people also came to the markets to buy

the beautiful flowers, which they used to beautify and fragrance their homes.



‘Did the Landers have some special medicines for their plants?’ asked Sett.

Father shrugged his shoulders.

‘Maybe.’

Father paused for a moment as if in a deep dream.

‘Maybe father is sleepy.’

Sett, had a devilish grin on his face and he dug at his father’s ribs as if to wake him up.

‘Oh, sorry. I was just thinking. . . . I wonder what other tribes we can discover.’

Father continued reading.

‘Here’s an interesting tribe.’



One of the most sought-after tribes was the Talers who apparently lived in Talentine. They were the storytellers, writers and enactors. They wrote lots and lots of books and, like the Xenites, travelled throughout Sky Kingdom sharing their stories. They did not just tell stories; they enacted them to entertain people. Wherever they went, they would set up their portable theatres and people would flock to watch the latest story come alive. With their stories, Talers could make

people cry or laugh. They could even rock babies to sleep. They were, truly gifted.



‘Father, I think you are a Taler,’ teased Sett.

Father and son burst out into a long bout of laughter. Barely able to stop laughing, father continued.



There were so many other tribes in Sky Kingdom. There were the Volans from Volan, the Toscanians from Tuscany, the Normans from Norma and many many more.



‘Wow!’ exclaimed Sett, still partly laughing.

‘Sky Kingdom sounds like a very special place.’

‘I think so too,’ agreed father.

‘If you could visit Sky Kingdom, where would you like to go first?’

‘I would like to go and see animals,’ responded Sett.

‘Well, I think it’s bedtime.’

With that father kissed his son good night.

As Sett drifted off to sleep yet again, he could not help but linger awhile in that halfway world between awake and asleep.

‘I wish I could see Sky Kingdom. Sounds like an awesome place. I wonder where’

Sleep quickly overtook him.

The following morning, Sett woke up to rather disappointing news from mother.

‘Sett, father is very busy right now and he is away on a long trip. He won’t be home for a couple of days.’ Mother volunteered, ‘Would you like me to read for you tonight?’

‘Ummm, I want father to read to me. Can I wait till he returns?’

Immediately Sett worried he might have made his mother sad, but he really wanted his father to continue the story.

‘That’s fine,’ reassured mother.

‘But can you wait till he comes back?’

‘I will. I will.’

That night Sett went to bed wondering what was happening in Sky Kingdom.

‘Sett. Sett. Wake up!’

It was mother calling.

‘I have good news for you.’

Sett jumped out of bed and screamed out his reply.

‘Is father coming home?’

‘Yes,’ said mother. ‘How did you guess?’

‘It’s about time! YEAH!’

Sett was over the moon with anticipation. For the next few hours, his head spun with uncontrolled thoughts of Sky Kingdom. To his young

mind father had been gone for eternity (actually, it had only been two days).

Father's homecoming was met with great joy in the family, especially by Sett. He could barely contain his desire to get back to the story.

Father's face lit up when he saw Sett's intent gaze and broke into a big smile.

'As soon as dinner's over, okay, my boy?' he promised.

'Oh, Sett.'

Mother chuckled at his impatience.

Another hasty dinner followed. A short time later, father and son were back in the bedroom, ready for more story time.

'Sky Kingdom! Sky Kingdom!'

Sett yelled as he jumped up and down on his bed. He had been holding back his excitement for two whole days.

'Settle down,' instructed father.

He picked up the book, opened to the marked page and started to read once more.



At the heart of Sky Kingdom was Royale Ville, a sprawling metropolis like no other. It was a magnificent city, infused with beauty and mystery. Its expansive streets gleamed like polished gold. Its high walls reflected the soft light of transparent gemstones. Blue lagoons criss-crossed the City, lined with tall trees whose branches extended out like

foliage umbrellas. Soft shimmering light reflected off the streets and lagoons producing a permanent glow, which cloaked the City in seemingly permanent light.

The centrepiece of Royale Ville was the magnificent Grand Chambers, the meeting hall of the Supreme Council. Anyone who visited the Grand Chambers experienced the sensation of a gigantic floating crystal structure with finger-like spirals extending upwards into heavenly mists. No one could say for sure whether the Grand Chambers actually floated or simply generated a floating feeling.

Whatever it was, a visit to the Grand Chambers left people breathless.

Everyone in Royale Ville was happy, fulfilled and self-aware. Everyone knew their place in the Kingdom. Everyone did what they had to do.

There was an element of mystique about the city. Great events were celebrated in Royal Ville. Anyone who was anyone would visit the city, mostly to admire its magnificent architecture and of course visit its never-ending collection of museums. Many would come simply to catch a glimpse of the Grand Chambers.

Royal Ville was a masterpiece of design. It was also the pride and joy of every resident lovingly called 'Malkim' (they preferred to call themselves 'cityzens').



'Malkim is a very unusual name,' Sett chimed in.

'I think I like the name Cityzen.'

‘Well, you can call them Cityzen if you wish.’

Father chuckled softly.



All Malkim had special abilities. Some possessed a deep instinct into the nature of things. Some could teleport from place to place, appearing to move purely by the power of their thoughts. Some could make themselves invisible at the toss of a coin. It was also rumoured that some Malkim were shape shifters though no one could really prove this. One thing was true Malkim accepted their special roles and performed their duties without question.



‘I’d like to be a Malkim.’

Sett pronounced his intention.

‘Hmmm. I wonder why.’

Father teased and both burst into laughter.

‘I’d really like to be a shape shifter,’ said Sett.

‘That would be so cool!’

‘My son the shape shifter. Hmmm. A scary thought.’

Father continued reading.



Malkim often travelled to every province in Sky Kingdom and kept an eye on the well-being of the Kingdom and its people. Everyone

acknowledged that Malkim visits were always special (there was a reason for this). They were welcomed, admired and honoured everywhere they went. For many people in Sky Kingdom, meeting with Malkim was like being in the City itself. After all, it was their chance to meet with and talk to a 'Cityzen.' This was considered a special honour.



'Father, what really happened at Royale Ville?'

Sett's curiosity was starting to peak.

'Well, let's find out.'



Royale Ville was not just a magnificent City; it was also the theatre of dreams. Every now and then people from all over Sky Kingdom would gather in Royale Ville to celebrate some memorable event. As far as anyone could remember, this usually happened whenever a new province was formed. Such events were celebrated with great fanfare. A massive parade was held to commemorate the occasion. The birth of a new province generated a festival atmosphere and became part of people's living memory. These were the times when the tribes of Sky Kingdom came together, celebrated new beginnings and played catch up with friends from other provinces. At such moments, Royale Ville would burst into life with the sounds and sights of national pride and joy.

The Kingdom was ruled by a Supreme Council whose members kept pretty much to themselves. Their deliberations were communicated to all people through carefully crafted media. Everyone in Sky Kingdom had their own celloid devices to download the latest communiques or upload reports of their lives and missions. The system, called 'Wy-Sky', was simple but effective.



'You mean like the internet?' asked Sett.

'Maybe,' said father.

'Maybe they had a skynet system. Shall we?'



Everything about Sky Kingdom was magical and mysterious. Perhaps, that was the way it was meant to be. Truly, there was nothing ordinary in Sky Kingdom or Royal Ville. From its most barren outpost, Terra, to its most fertile land, Landesform, Sky Kingdom was a mystical profusion of possibilities.

On this particular day, all signs pointed to another glorious day in Sky Kingdom. Life was truly awesome.



'Time for bed.'

Father announced abruptly.

'Oh no,' protested Sett.

'Not now. Not yet. Please, please, please,' he begged.

'Tomorrow night, okay?'

With a kiss father left the room.

'How can I sleep right now.'

Sett was talking to himself. He tossed around his bed for a few minutes but eventually fell asleep as the house settled into a quiet calm.



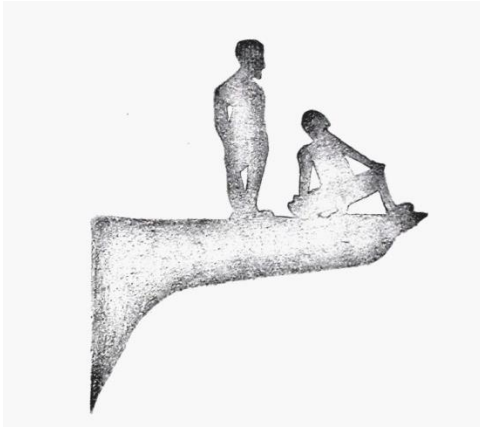
Sky Kingdom

Gaby and Helel

The next evening, Sett did his best to hurry his father along. He just could not wait to get on with the story. His young mind sensed the story was getting more and more interesting.

‘Father, it’s story time.’

Sett spoke with some urgency.



‘Got it,’ responded father.

‘I’ll be up in a jiffy.’

‘I hope he’s not planning to bring peanut butter,’

Sett thought impishly.

‘Okie dokie, impatient one.

Here I come.’

Father picked up the book again

and turned to the bookmarked page.

‘Shall we?’

‘Yes. Please.’

Sett could barely wait. The two settled in and father started reading.



As the rhythm of life picked up speed, the giant doors of the Grand Chambers swung open and Helel emerged. This happened as regularly as clockwork. Helel was a stunning figure. He stood out in any crowd.

He was powerful. He was adored. People loved him. As he exited the Grand Chambers, people turned for a moment to catch sight of his presence. Smiles all around. Helel soaked up the adulation, breathing in the love that floated his way.

‘Sky Kingdom is such a magical place,’ he thought. ‘What can ever compare with this?’

‘How are you this fine morning, good fellow?’

Helel spun around to see his best friend Gaby heading his way.

‘I am great, Gaby. How are you?’

Gaby belted out one of his well-known laughs.

‘I’m fantastic,’ he replied.

‘I love this beautiful morning. I love the tribes of Sky Kingdom. There’s magic in this land, you know.’

The two friends continued conversing as they ambled along towards their duties for the day.

‘I wonder if this glorious magnificence can ever be improved.’

Gaby mused out loud.

‘You’re such a dreamer,’ chimed in Helel.

‘How can any of this be topped? I’d love to see the day that happens. And, by the way, you know you talk funny sometimes.’

‘Ho, ho, ho,’ bellowed Gaby.

He threw his head back and his golden hair shimmered in the morning light.



'Father, that sounds like Santa Claus. Is Gaby Santa Claus?'

Sett's curiosity was quite apparent.

'I don't think so, but you never know.'

Father sounded mysterious. Sett's imagination went into overdrive.

'I think he might be.'

'Ho, ho, ho!'

Father mocked lovingly. Father and son burst out laughing.

'I think we should continue a bit more, don't you?'

'Yes. Yes.'

Sett put on his attentive face.



'Helel, where are you off to today?' queried Gaby.

'I think I will teleport myself to Terra,' replied Helel.

'But there's nothing there! Just a watery clump of rock.'

Gaby's response betrayed the obvious, that Helel was wasting his time.

Helel chuckled.

'I know. I know. But I love to hover over the clump of rock as you call it and imagine the creative possibilities.'

'Look! Who's the dreamer now!'

With that, Gaby bellowed out another deep laugh. He glanced back once more at the fast receding Chamber doors.

'Wow!' he thought to himself.

'Isn't that beautiful?'

He turned around to draw Helel's attention to it, but he was gone.

'How typical!' he said to himself, snapping his fingers.

Gaby threw his head ever so slightly backward, his long golden dreadlocks cutting patterns in the air. Once more he belched out another throaty laugh and went on his way.



'Father, where did Helel go?'

'Not sure. Sounded like he was headed for Terra?' Father was also a bit curious.

'I think this is a good place to stop, don't you agree?'

That night Sett found it hard to sleep. He really wanted to know where Helel went and struggled to figure out what Terra was. Eventually he fell asleep.

The following day rushed by as rapidly as Helel's disappearance. Sett could not wait for story time.

'I hope tonight I can find out where Helel went.'

Helel was in his thoughts as he prepared for another story session with his father.

'I'm ready,' he called out.

'I'm coming,' father called back.

Soon the two settled into their story time space and reading began again.



Helel arrived at his favourite perch overlooking the loneliest place in Sky Kingdom. From this perch, he could catch a view of the entire province of Terra. As he hovered over this unformed land, he began to imagine how things could be like. Soon he was lost in his thoughts as he travelled ever deeper into his imaginary world.

‘I think a garden over there would be fantastic. Perhaps some tall trees over here would be really nice. Maybe a few rivers running in different directions. . . .’

He was so lost in thought he did not hear Gaby creep up behind.

‘Boo!’

Helel jumped up like a startled rabbit, much to the hilarious delight of Gaby.

‘Gaby! Do you have to do that? Yyyou know hhhhow I ffffeel!’

stammered Helel.

‘Ho, ho, ho. And it works every time!’

Gaby laughed almost uncontrollably.

‘You are so easy! By the way, what were you thinking about? Must have been something really important.’

Helel paused before answering.

‘I was just wondering what could be done to Terra.’

‘Why are you so interested in Terra?’ asked Gaby.

'I don't really know why. I just see so many possibilities. Besides, we have not seen a new province formed for quite a while. Have you?'

'Not recently,' admitted Gaby.

The two best friends stood side by side gazing at this unformed piece of Sky Kingdom. For a few minutes, there was stilled silence; they could almost hear each other's thoughts.

Gaby stirred first.

'I have to get going, buddy. Good luck with your daydreams.'

As silently as he had appeared, he was gone.

Helel continued his silent gazing, still lost in his dreams of a new province. He could not help himself. This idea was starting to take root in his heart and he knew he could not just leave it alone. As he prepared to return to Royale Ville, he glanced back once more and smiled as his dreams began to shape his thoughts. Soon he was back in the city.



'Father, why was Helel so interested in Terra?' asked Sett.

'I thought there was nothing there.'

'I'm not sure, son. Maybe Helel was a dreamer, just like some little boy I know.'

'Father, you're teasing me.'

There was a wry smile on his face. Sett was looking as embarrassed as a cat in a pigeon coop.



Back at Royale Ville, Helel met up with Gaby once again. ‘Did you have a good trip?’ asked Gaby.

‘Any new daydreams?’

Once more, he belches out his big throaty laugh as if he already knew about Helel’s trips through imagination alley.

‘Umm. Nothing new really,’ confessed Helel.

‘Same old daydream again and again. I can’t seem to get rid of this one.’

‘I suppose you are right. I’ve never seen you so obsessed. Just be careful, old friend. If your head gets stuck in the clouds, we could all suffer.’

‘Gaby, isn’t that a bit harsh? Why would my daydreams endanger anybody?’

Helel sounded offended.

‘Sorry old boy. Not meaning to offend you, just hoping you don’t lose sight of your primary mission.’

‘I know. I know. You’re right . . .’

There was an awkward pause.

‘Okay. We should get back to work, shouldn’t we?’

With that the two friends went their separate ways.



‘I guess that’s it for today.’

'Okay.'

Sett's slow response indicated he was sleepy

'Nite nite, son.'

Father kissed his son and left the room.



Sky Kingdom

The Announcement

Another evening had arrived. It was story time again. Sett was already in his bed when father entered the room, picked up the book and resumed reading.



As the shadows grew longer in the late afternoon light, there was a sudden flurry of activity in Royal Ville. Helel, who had just returned to the City, went looking for Gaby. His friend was standing near the doors to the Grand Chambers. There was something strangely unfamiliar about his position; he stood as a security guard on duty would. Helel thought this was highly unusual so he called out to his friend.



‘Gaby, what are you doing?’

‘Shhh.’

Gaby’s soft response was barely audible. This was not like Gaby.

‘No ho, ho, ho?’

Helel’s curiosity radar was now reading off the scale.

‘C’mon buddy, what’s going on?’

‘Shhh,’ whispered Gaby.

‘Be patient, will you? Also, be quiet!’

Gaby’s seriousness surprised Helel. Try as he might he could not explain it. Not sure what to do next, he walked up to the doors of the Grand Chambers and stoop beside Gaby.

‘An important announcement is about to be made, on Wy-Sky, I think,’ whispered Gaby.

‘Look around. I think everyone in Royal Ville is here.’

‘What announcement? Why didn’t I receive any text message about this?’

There was the faintest hint of discontent in Helel’s voice, but Gaby was too intent to notice.



‘Father, what is happening?’

Sett too sounded a bit perturbed.

‘Hold on. I think we are about to find out.’

Father was equally curious about the turn in the story.



Helel stood beside Gaby but he was restless and shuffled from one foot to the other impatiently. He desperately wanted to know what the announcement was. While everyone waited patiently for the announcement, Helel began to pace around, at first slowly but, as the minutes flew by, his steps became more and more agitated.

‘Don’t be such a worry wort.’

Gaby was trying to calm his friend down. He knew that Helel could be a handful at times.

‘Speak for yourself,’ retorted Helel.

‘What’s taking so long . . . ?’

Before he could complete his thought, the giant doors of the Grand Chambers slowly swung open.

‘That’s strange,’ thought Helel.

He looked at his celloid device but there were no notifications or messages.

‘This must be important,’ he said to himself.

As the giant doors swung fully open, the members of the Supreme Council emerged from the Grand Chambers on to the terrace, which hung over the main plaza, Crystal Platz, of Royal Ville.

The crowds who had gathered at Crystal Platz initially heaved a collective hush. To see the Supreme Council this way was almost unheard of. However, silence instantly gave way to massive cheers as a roar ascended into the heavens. The love and esteem for the Supreme Council reverberated throughout Royal Ville.

So special was the event, it was telecast live to all provinces and, in every province, people gathered in groups to add their chorus of voices to the adulation.



‘Father, what is adulation?’

Sett did not understand the word.

‘That means people were very happy to see the Council members and wanted to show them how much they honoured them.’

‘I see.’

Sett seemed satisfied.



A Council member stepped forward, slowly lifted his hand and addressed the people.

‘Citizens of Sky Kingdom and Royal Ville, today, we are very pleased to announce the formation of a brand, new province.’

There was something ethereal and majestic about his voice. He did not raise his voice yet it echoed through every street corner. There also was a certain calmness about his words, which enthused the crowds regarding the possibility of another big celebration in the making.

‘About time,’ thought Helel.

‘We have not seen a new province being formed for so long. I wonder which one it would be.’

The Council member continued his announcement.

‘The new province will be Terra.’

‘I knew it!’ exclaimed Helel.

In his excitement, he almost forgot proper protocol and spoke too loudly. Gaby stared him down and he quickly collected himself. Yet,

there was a huge grin on his face, as if to say he knew this day was coming.



‘Wasn’t Terra Helel’s favourite place?’ asked Sett.

‘I believe it was,’ replied father.

‘No wonder he seemed so excited.’

‘That’s true, I guess. Maybe this is a good place to stop,’ suggested father.

‘Alright,’ Sett reluctantly agreed.

‘Good night, father.’

‘Good night, son.’

The following evening there was an air of anticipation around the dinner table. Sett wanted to get back to the story as quickly as possible. He was anxious to know the rest of the announcement. Soon father and son were at it again.



The Council member continued with his announcement.

‘This province will be very special. It will mark the culmination of everything that is good and beautiful about Sky Kingdom.’

There was a palpable air of excitement around the streets as people waited, with bated breath, to learn about this new province.

‘Please check your celloid devices for the detailed plans concerning this project. There also will be regular notifications as to how the plan develops. Enjoy the evening everyone.’

With those words, the Supreme Council members disappeared into the mists of the Grand Chambers.

Everyone quickly turned on their celloid devices and checked for the details of this new plan, which the Council had just announced. People were so excited. For many this would be the first time to experience something like this.



‘Did they have to check their email? Is it like that?’ asked Sett.

‘I suppose so. Somehow I think their system is far better than email.’

Father also wondered how communication really worked in Sky Kingdom.



As people turned on their celloid devices, the attached plan immediately popped up on their screens and everyone could see what it was. The Supreme Council provided a step by step description of the project.

Helel was the most excited Cityzen and he hurriedly opened his celloid and started reading the attachment. Almost instantly, his face began to change, as if a slow dark fog had crept up to shroud his countenance.

Gaby noticed the change in his friend and asked, 'Helel, what's wrong? You don't seem excited like everyone else.'

Helel ignored his friend's question, but Gaby was not put off so easily.

'Tell me, old buddy, what's wrong?'

Helel spun around and stared at his friend. There was a dark glint in his eyes. His jaws had tightened noticeably and Gaby could see the veins around his neck begin to pop. He held up his celloid, almost thrusting it into Gaby's face.

'Look!' He exclaimed. 'Look at this!'

'Yes, I see. That's the plan we just heard about.'

Gaby spoke slowly, uncertain if Helel was looking at the same notification. He peered closely at Helel's celloid and confirmed it was the same message he had received.

'I'm not sure what the problem is,' he spoke cautiously. 'Seems fine to me.'

'C'mon, Gaby. Open your eyes. Here. Look again!'

Helel sounded really crossed and Gaby was beginning to worry. He took hold of Helel's celloid and looked at it carefully, scrolling up and down through the entire message. He could not understand what had lit this fuse under Helel.

'Sorry. I don't see the problem.'

Helel grabbed his celloid from Gaby's hands; he seemed rather angry.

‘Of course, you don’t! You never do! You are always so good, Mr Favourite Malkim!’

‘Wow!’ thought Gaby. ‘This is serious stuff. I never saw this coming.’ He wanted to pacify his friend but did not really know what to do or say. He had never seen this display of emotions before, especially from a Malkim. He felt a cold chill but could not ascertain if the temperature had dropped or something else had happened. He searched for words to use. He wanted to calm Helel down but realised the wrong words could have the opposite effect.

Finally, he simply said, ‘Why don’t we both rest for a few hours and we can come back here to look at the message one more time. What do you say?’

Helel stared at his friend and spat out, ‘Okay. Tomorrow then and I will show you.’

With an angry flutter, he was gone.

‘Show me what?’ wondered Gaby.

Slowly he moved on as well still puzzling over these strange happenings.

‘Maybe a good rest will settle things down and Helel will be calmer when we meet again.’

Somehow, his own words did not reassure him.



‘Father, why was Helel so angry?’

Sett was puzzled. So was father.

'I think we should stop here and continue tomorrow. Try not to think about it too much. Sweet dreams, my boy?'

'What if I have nightmares?'

Sett sounded worried.

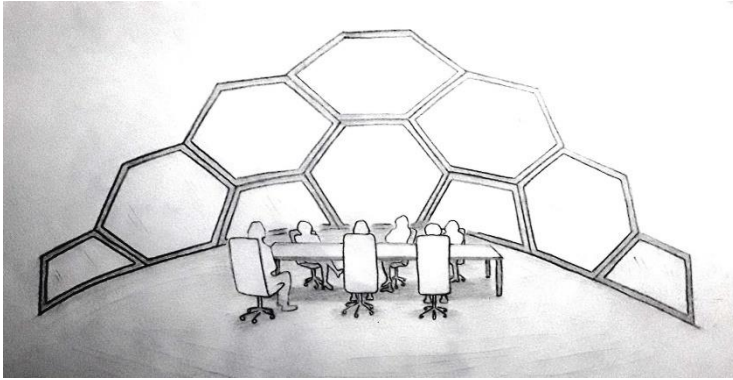
'Well, just call for me and I'll be here. Remember, you are not alone.'

Father kissed his son, turned off the light and left the room. Sett tossed for a while on his bed but soon fell asleep.



Sky Kingdom

The Elementals



It was still dark when Sett woke up. The strange turn in the story about Sky Kingdom had really gotten the better of him. In fact, he had had a very fitful sleep, troubled by many dreams. He trudged down to the breakfast table almost zombie-like.

‘What’s bothering you, Sett?’ asked mother and father almost at the same time.

They could tell he had not slept well.

‘I can’t stop thinking about the story and why Helel was so upset,’ confessed Sett.

Father realised he should help his son get Sky Kingdom off his mind for a bit.

‘Sett, how about you and I go for a fishing trip to the lake? It’s my day off.’

Despite his troubled thoughts, Sett perked up immediately and a big smile broke across his face.

‘Great! Let’s!’

Sett quickly gobbled up his breakfast and in no time at all father and son had buckled into their car seats and off they sped to the lake. At the lake, they rented a canoe and rowed to the middle of the lake. A couple of hours later and a few fish in the basket, they headed back home.

‘I’m so relieved Sett got his mind off the story for a few hours.’

Father thought it may be better to skip the story that night, but Sett had other ideas.

‘Father, can we get back to Sky Kingdom right after dinner?’

‘You mean go to Sky Kingdom?’ teased father.

‘You know what I mean.’

The whole family burst out laughing; everyone thought this was rather funny.

‘Okay, okay,’ promised father.

Then it was story time again.



An important notification appeared on Sky Kingdom’s Wy-Sky:

All provincial chief executives should assemble at the Grand Chambers in 48 hours for a very important briefing.

Because Sky Kingdom was so vast, each province had its own version of Supreme Council. Each of the provincial councils had its own chief executive called Soken who was usually the most elderly person in the province. These Sokens had two primary tasks, attend meetings of the Elementals and manage their own provinces.



‘I wonder what Elementals is?’

Sett spoke out loud.

‘I guess we have to wait and find out.’

Father too was thinking the same thing.

‘Let’s see what it says, shall we?’



Whenever a new province was being formed, the Supreme Council invited Sokens to Royale Ville for consultation and briefings. Such assemblies were called Elementals and the meetings were held at the Grand Chambers.

The communique also released the following list of attendees:

Soken Erinel from the Highlands

Soken Pernel from the Lowlands

Soken Xenel from Xenon

Soken Heliel from Helios

Soken Bootel from Bootes

Soken Urel from Uran

Soken Landel from Landesform

Soken Talel from Talentine

Soken Volel from Volan

Soken Tusel from Toscany

Soken Norel from Norma

There were two representatives from Royale Ville, Gaby and Helel.



Sett did not want to interrupt his father, but he just had to ask.

‘Father, why is every person named something –el? Is there something special about that?’

‘Not sure son. I see no explanation here.’

Father flipped a few pages trying to find an explanation for these strange names but could not.

‘Sorry. I don’t know why they are named that way.’

‘Maybe they all came from the same family,’ suggested Sett

‘Maybe you’re right. Or maybe *el* is short form for Elementals.’

Both of them broke into a soft chuckle when they realised that may not be true. Father decided to continue reading.

‘Where were we?’ he asked. ‘Oh, yes. Here it is.’



When the members of the Elementals were all gathered at the Grand Chambers, the Supreme Council began to elaborate their vision for Terra. The Sokens were told that Terra would be different from all

other provinces in many ways. First, it would be the newest province and its people would be the youngest members of Sky Kingdom.

Second, the people of Terra would be called Territes.



Sett quickly interrupted his father.

‘Father, shouldn’t they be called Terramites?’

Father broke into a prolonged laugh.

‘Why Sett, are you suggesting these new people would be insects?’

‘What do you mean?’ inquired Sett, almost innocently.

‘Son, there are insects called termites. Calling these new people Terramites would cause much confusion.’

Sett grinned sheepishly and admitted, ‘That would be kinda weird, I suppose.’

Still chuckling, father continued reading.



While the Council members were talking, one of the Elementals was sulking and gradually slouching in his chair.

‘Why did they suddenly take an interest in Terra?’ murmured Helel to himself.

‘All these years, I’ve been the only person in the whole of Sky Kingdom to show any interest in Terra. Now they are taking away my dream!’

Gaby, sitting next to Helel, thought he heard his friend say something.

‘Helel, what did you say?’ he asked.

‘Oh, nothing,’ blurted out Helel, ‘Nothing. Nothing.’

The Council members continued outlining their plans. Pulling out a projection image of the unformed Terra, they showed how and where things would be.

‘Terra would be a green-blue province with every conceivable land feature,’ said one Council member.

‘Have they been reading my mind?’

Helel turned to Gaby and tried to share his discovery but Gaby was too focused on the announcements to listen.

‘Hmmm,’ huffed Helel, ‘How typical!’

Another Council member spoke up.

‘Terra will have highlands and lowlands, lots of rivers and water fountains and plenty of land for growing things. Most importantly, there will be lots of animals, birds and fish in Terra. It will be like a garden province.’

There was a collective gasp of surprise from the Elementals.

‘This is extraordinary,’ whispered Gaby.

There was a murmur of agreement reverberating through the Grand Chambers.

Helel was unimpressed.

‘All my ideas! These are not original plans. They are my plans.’

His face sank deeper into darkness as the briefing progressed.



'Is that why Helel was so angry?' asked Sett.

'It looks like that to me,' replied father.

'Remember how he used to go to Terra and daydream for long periods of time?'

'Yeah. Yeah. He did that, didn't he?'

Sett's eyes flickered with some new insight.

'If you felt your dreams were being stolen, would you be upset?' asked father.

'Maybe,' replied Sett. 'But I don't have such big dreams.'

He gazed out through his bedroom window at the tiny flickers of light in the night sky.

'I wonder . . .'

'Look at the time. It's bedtime. We'll continue tomorrow, okay?'

Father sensed Sett was already lost in thought. He kissed him goodnight and left.

That night, both father and son slept fitfully. The revelations of the Council about the forming of Terra troubled them, especially the unexpected response of Helel.

'I guess there really is no perfect place in the universe.' With that thought father finally fell asleep.

Sett twisted and turned all night, disturbed by the anger of Helel.

'I wonder if Helel was angry or sad,' he thought.

The hours of the night flew by and at dawn, Sett rushed to his father's bedside but he was already gone. He shook his mother awake.

'Where is father?' he asked.

Rubbing her eyes, mother peered at her son and said, 'Father had some urgent business to take care of. He should be back in two or three days.'

'Two or three days?'

There was a feel of desperation in Sett's cry. Mother looked at him with no clue as to what this was all about. Sett quickly collected himself.

'It's okay. I just have to wait.'

He left the room wondering how he could ever wait for so long. But wait he did. Three days later, father returned from his trip.

'Father, you're home again!' exclaimed Sett.

With a big smile on his face, father spoke slowly.

'I know. I know. You can't wait to get back to the story about Sky Kingdom.'

'Why father! How did you know?'

Sett grinned as he almost pulled his father off his feet in his rush to get back to the story.

'Dinner first,' reminded father.

Together they proceeded to the dining room.

Dinner went by in a flash and Sett was back in his room waiting for the story. Father entered the room, picked up the book and continued where he left off.



One by one, the Supreme Council members outlined further details about this new project.

‘We are calling this the Terra Project,’ said one council member.

Another added, ‘The people of Terra will be a combination of all the best qualities of Sky Kingdom.’

A hand of one of the Sokens went up.

‘May I ask what that means?’

‘Well,’ spoke a Council member, ‘For instance, the people of Terra will not have the mystical powers of the Erins, but they will have an abundance of thought power. They will produce great ideas and contribute much to our library of knowledge.’

There was an enthusiastic applause.

Another Council member spoke up.

‘They will work hard and keep themselves busy with all manner of projects, just like the Perrins.’

There was a loud applause from Soken Perrel.

The Council member continued, ‘They will be lovers of music and will create wonderful forms of song and music. Just like you Xenites,’

At that a huge grin spread across the face of Xenel, almost like a proud father.

‘They will have the most inquisitive minds and will learn to harness all the laws of nature to their own advantage like the Helim. They will invent science.’

More applause followed; except from Helel. He was sulking almost audibly.

‘Will you please be quiet? I am trying to listen.’

There was the faintest hint of irritation in Gaby’s voice as he gave Helel the dagger eye.



‘The dagger eye? What’s that?’

Sett had never heard of such a thing.

‘I guess it means he gave him a hard stare to keep him quiet,’ replied father.

‘Kind of like what mother gives you when you eat your food too quickly.’

‘Ahh! I see. She can be so scary!’

Sett was tickled by the idea.

‘Tell me more.’

Father continued reading.



‘They will be great inventors and produce wonderful machines just like the Urites. They will be animal lovers like our Booters. They will be great farmers and will produce lots of different crops, fruit and other produce. Sorry, Landers. I think you will now have some competition.’ There were smiles all around as the Sokens soaked in the electrified atmosphere of this unusual briefing. Their anticipation grew with each pronouncement. ‘And, Talers, they will follow your path of telling stories and will learn to write stories, produce great theatre and even virtual forms of storytelling.’

In the excitement of the moment, no one had noticed that the Council members had stood up. None of the Sokens had ever seen them so energised before.

‘One last thing,’ spoke another Council member.

‘They will be given the gift of creating life. Because of that, only a pair of people will be needed in Terra. They will fill the province up all on their own.’

There was a dramatic pause of silence as the Elementals held its collective breath at the grandest plan any of them had ever been privy to. Then there was a torrent of applause which reverberated through every street of Royal Ville.

The only one not joining in the celebratory mood was Helel.



Sett almost felt sad for Helel but his curiosity got the better of him.

‘Father, what will be the name of Terra’s Soken?’

Father smiled.

‘I was just coming to that.’



‘One last thing.’

The Council members spoke almost in unison.

‘The Soken of Terra will be named Benel. In a short time from now, he will be joining our great assembly.’

Yells of ‘hip hip hurrah’ rang within the Grand Chambers, echoing through the streets and made its way via every network to every province. Such unadulterated joy had never been experienced in Sky Kingdom. The dawn of a new era was about to change Sky Kingdom forever.



‘Why is the Soken of Terra called Benel and not Terrel?’ asked Sett.

‘I wish I knew, son. But you’re right. It is somewhat different from the other Sokens.’

There was a brief pause.

‘What happened to Helel?’ asked Sett.

‘I think we should know soon enough, son, but it’s now snooze time.

Nite, nite, my boy.’

‘Nite, nite, father.’

Sett slowly drifted off to sleep, with a questioning smile across his face. Father glanced back at his son, turned off the lights and left his son's bedroom. Neither father nor son could sleep well that night. They would later call it the Sky Kingdom effect.



Sky Kingdom

The Seed

‘Father, isn’t it story-time already?’

Sett sounded almost hopeful. He was wondering if his father had somehow forgotten. The whole day he had been mulling the events in Sky Kingdom over and over in his mind. He just had to know what would happen next. The thought of having to wait even a minute longer was almost unbearable.

Teasingly, father responded, ‘Maybe we should skip the story tonight. I feel a bit tired.’

Even as he said this, he knew exactly the response he would get. He smiled as he waited for Sett’s reaction.

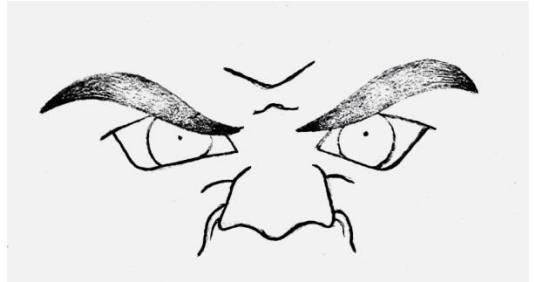
‘Nooo!’ came a half cry, half moan from Sett.

‘How could father do this to me? Not fair!’

He was about to turn to the wall and sulk at his perceived misfortune when he heard the bedroom door creak open.

There was an audible sigh of relief as he muttered, ‘I knew you were just teasing me.’

‘Really? Then why do I see tear drops in your eyes?’ Father could not resist the temptation to mock his son.



‘Oh, nothing. Some dust got into my eyes.’

Sett was a bit embarrassed at letting his emotions out so quickly.

‘Well, big man. Do you want the story or not?’

‘Yes. Yes. Yes,’ yelled Sett.

He was partly annoyed at his father for making fun of him. Soon the two settled down into their story posture and father started reading where he had left off.



Another era was also dawning over Sky Kingdom. Helel stormed out of the Grand Chambers as if he had been bitten by a cobra. His exit caused a great stir since most of the attendees had no clue of what was transpiring. Only Gaby had a small inkling that things were not right with his friend, but even he was taken completely by surprise with Helel’s premature departure.

Nothing like this had ever happened in living memory. All of a sudden he felt a cold chill in the great room and the aura of the occasion somehow got slightly fuzzy.

Gaby turned to the other side of the room to catch a glimpse of the response from the Supreme Council members. They were as calm as a crystal lake on a sunny day. Gaby could not help wondering if they had even noticed the ruckus Helel had made. They kept on talking about their Terra Project and there was a dose of assurance in their conduct.



‘Father,’ interjected Sett, ‘Is it possible the Council members didn’t care?’

‘I’m sure they did,’ replied father, ‘but maybe they didn’t want to draw attention to it. Sometimes it is better to let things play out than to react.’

‘Father, I have no clue what you just said.’

Sett giggled hard but father was really speaking to himself. He was as disturbed by what happened as Gaby was. He continued reading.



There were murmurs among the Soken about the strange events.

Soken Urel spoke out first.

‘I think Helel was so disrespectful. So childish!’

Others agreed with him. Soken Talel even suggested some sort of punishment was in order.

‘Punishment?’

There was a ring of incredulity in Soken Xenel’s voice.

‘What do you mean by that? Punishment? For what?’

Others echoed similar sentiments. Soon the ring of confusion pervaded the Grand Chambers. Every Soken had an opinion and everyone wanted to weigh in on the chaotic discussions.

Gaby was as completely perplexed as everyone else, but he belched out one of his deep laughs, catching everyone’s attention.

‘Don’t worry,’ he said, not very assured.

‘I think Helel is just upset about something. I’ll go talk to him.’

He rose from his seat and started towards the door when a member of the Supreme Council stopped him in his tracks.

‘Gaby, it’s alright. There’s no need for you to do anything about this. Everything is as it should be.’

There was a magical calm about his words. Gaby immediately returned to his seat while silence fell over the great hall.

‘Let’s continue with the briefing, shall we?’

Somehow Gaby and every Soken knew this was not a question.

Everyone settled down once more before another Council member continued with the briefing. As the meeting continued, Gaby was partly lost in thought. He was really concerned about his friend Helel.



‘You know son,’ this time it was father who spoke first, ‘it seems like the Supreme Council either does not care or knew exactly what they were doing.’

‘Father, why do you say that?’ queried Sett.

‘Well, they seemed so calm, so undisturbed. This is unusual but perhaps the story will make it clear. I think we should keep reading.’

‘Yes, please.’

Sett was relieved to get his father away from thinking too much. He just wanted to continue with the story.



When Helel stormed out of the Grand Chambers, he rapidly made his way to his favourite rock overlooking Terra.

‘I must do something about this injustice,’ he exclaimed to himself.

‘They can’t get away with this. You don’t just take someone else’s dreams. There’s got to be a reckoning!’

Even as he spoke, the lights over Royale Ville began to dim and a fog-like shadow descended over the City and the surrounding areas.

News of the incredible events inside the Grand Chambers quickly went on air throughout Sky Kingdom. It did not take long for people to start discussing this matter.

Wy-Sky was quickly stretched with views and counterviews, rumours and fake news and some serious attempts of balanced reporting.

Everyone had an opinion and wanted to have their say. No one had ever heard of such a thing happening in Sky Kingdom, ever. They were equally puzzled by the shadow creeping over the land.

‘What’s going on?’

That was the question in every person’s mind as they attempted to make sense of all this.

‘What shall we call this . . .?’

Someone else, lost for words, asked to describe the new natural phenomenon. No one had any useful suggestion, but they all wondered and worried.

Inside the Grand Chambers, the Supreme Council completed their briefings as though nothing had happened.

However, Gaby swore that he heard one Council member say to the others, 'It has begun.'

THE END!



'No way!' Sett was incredulous. 'That's it? It can't be!'

'Well that's what it says.'

Father held up the last page for his son to see. It was the end of the story.

'You know what, I think there must be a sequel to this.'

He was hoping that was true as much as his son did.

'Father, please promise me you will search for the second Sky Kingdom book?'

Sett was literally begging his father.

'I promise. Scout's honour. Now go to sleep. Nite, nite.'



SKY KINGDOM

Part 2: After Beginnings

Wann Fanwar, @ 2022

Sky Kingdom

Mind Games

School was out for the day and Sett half-skipped towards home. He was in a very buoyant mood. He felt so good about things that he started to whistle some random tune. He did not care because there was only one thought in his mind.

‘Surely, this has to be the day!’

Father had been gone for forever (or so it seemed) and each day Sett told himself ‘this is the day’. This particular day was no exception. He



knew in his heart that his long wait for father was soon coming to an end. Besides, it was almost birthday time!

Nothing could spoil his mood. He imitated the chirping of the birds along the way. He attempted to count the flowers by the roadside until he lost track of the number. He stopped to stare at his own reflection in the clear waters of the stream running by the side of the road. His mind and heart were racing at a rate higher than normal.

‘What is happening to me?’ thought Sett.

But, he continued his joyous journey home. As he approached the picket fence which marked his house, he momentarily stopped, almost in awe of the scene before him.

‘I wonder what’s going on!’ he said to himself. ‘Must be father’s home!’

What had gotten Sett so excited was the long line of cars along the picket fence, at the gate and on the drive way. This many cars near his house could mean only one thing.

‘Mother! Mother!’ shouted Sett as he doubled into a full run. ‘Has father come home?’

Bursting through the front door, he screeched to a halt at what he saw: lots of men and women all dressed up in black.

‘How strange,’ he thought as he looked around the room. People were everywhere. Totally puzzled, Sett stared at all these black clad strangers who were in his house.

From the corner of his eye he caught sight of mother slowly walking towards him. He was about to call out to her when he noticed she was not smiling; in fact it looked as though she had been crying. Sett stood frozen, as if his feet refused to move. His mind told him to go to mother but his feet would not budge.

Mother reached the spot where Sett stood, slowly reached out her hand, caressed his right cheek and spoke very deliberately, ‘Son, I need to tell you something.’

She gently grasped his hand and guided Sett to his room.

He followed her but his mind was all jumbled up; wild thoughts ran through every fibre of his young body.

Mother seated him down on his bed, again softly stroking his hair and then spoke in almost hushed tones.

‘Father isn’t coming home, Sett. I’m so sorry!’

‘You mean today!’ Sett blurted out.

‘Sorry, son. I mean he is never coming home again.’

There was an awkwardly long pause. Sett stared at his mother uncomprehendingly.

Then . . .

‘What do you mean, mother? What do you mean?’

Sett was now beside himself; he sensed the truth but could not accept it. His voice became hoarse. Tears started streaming down his face. He felt a choking sensation around his throat and heart, as though someone was strangling him.

Mother put her arms around her young son and, for a brief time, simply held him close.

‘Please tell me, mother? What do you mean father is never coming home?’

At that moment, Uncle Rob (that’s what Sett called the Company’s local Spiritual Mentor) entered the room. He sat down beside Sett. Placed a strong arm around him and spoke in a firm but gentle voice. ‘Son, I think it best you rest for now. I shall explain everything in the morning.’

To his own surprise, Sett found Uncle Rob's words somewhat reassuring and he lay down on his bed. He cried for what seemed like an eternity but eventually fell into a fitful sleep.

The joy had definitely deserted Sett's family that night!



Early the next morning, Sett made his way to the living room. His head was throbbing from too much crying and the thoughts which whirled around. His sleep had been restless, troubled by the strangest dreams he had ever had.

As promised, Uncle Rob was already in the living room. He beckoned for Sett to sit beside him.

'I will do my best to tell you what happened to father', began Uncle Rob.

'As you know, he has been gone for a long time. He was away on Company business which is why he could not tell you where he went.' Sett simply looked at Uncle Rob, saying nothing.

'The work father was sent to do was very sensitive and extremely important. He knew there would be danger and many people did not want him to complete his mission.'

Still, Sett sat silently; numb with emotion.

'There were some really bad men,' continued Uncle Rob, 'who were determined to derail father's mission. These men worked for the

Competitor and did not take kindly to father's presence in their territory.'

'So what happened?' Sett's question was tinged with impatience.

'Well,' continued Uncle Rob, 'the Competitor inspired these bad men to do something horrible. . .'

Uncle Rob paused, uncomfortable with what he knew.

How could he possibly explain to young Sett the awful torture and decapitation of his father? How could this young innocent boy ever comprehend these events? Would he understand that his father was doing what he loved best, carrying out the mission of the Company?

'Sett, I am so sorry to tell you that those bad men, they . . . well . . . they killed father to make an example of him.'

Sett broke down uncontrollably as mother rushed to his side and held him ever so tightly. It was all she could do as she herself was overcome with grief. Even Uncle Rob, who was always so reassuring, seemed a bit lost for words.

Sett felt he was drowning in his tears and did not notice the endless streams of people, especially from the locality, who had come to pay their respects. Not that it mattered to him!

A wicked thought ran through Sett's mind.

'This is the Company's fault!' he said even as he cried himself to sleep.

A few days passed by before Sett appeared again outside his room. When he finally came out, he seemed to be in much better control of his tears.

‘Mother,’ he spoke up, ‘can we go through father’s things please? I want to know if he kept his word or not.’

Mother was totally taken aback at this turn of events and could only blurt out, ‘Okay. Will tomorrow do?’

‘Yes, mother and thank you.’

Once more Sett disappeared into his room.



As Sett and mother rummaged through father’s belongings, their hearts were heavy but Sett insisted they do this. So they did: going through the drawers, closets and father’s desk. As they sorted out the items from the desk, Sett discovered a hidden compartment at the back of the desk.

‘Mother, did you know about this hidden space?’ he asked.

‘No. I did not. Open it. Let’s see what’s in there,’ she replied.

Sett paused before slowly opening the drawer. He was almost afraid of what he might find. Gently he pulled out a package, properly wrapped up with a beautiful ribbon all around. There was a card which simply read: ‘For Sett’.

Sett did not need any encouragement to rip open the wrapper. Stuck to the top of the package was an envelope. He tore that open and discovered a letter inside.

‘Mother, I’m scared to read this letter. Please read for me,’ he pleaded.

‘I think you should read it. I am here with you. Go ahead.’

Sett gingerly opened the letter and began to read.

My Dearest Son,

First, I want to wish you a very happy birthday and richest blessings on another year for you. Happy Birthday, Sett.

Second, if you are reading this after your birthday, it would mean I did not make it home on time so I have left this birthday gift hoping you will eventually find it.

Third, my mission for the Company is full of danger and I suspect it may not end well for me. I may not make it back home. In case I don’t please look after mother for me.

I hope you enjoy the gift. I have kept my promise. Keep your faith. Whatever else happens, don’t lose that.

I love you very much.

Father.

Sett tore open the inner wrapper and there was a book inside. It was titled, ‘Sky Kingdom: After Beginnings.’ He could scarcely believe his eyes!

‘Mother, this is the second Sky Kingdom book. Father did keep his promise.’

Sett’s voice was filled with excitement. This brought an instant smile to mother’s face.

‘I think he will be alright,’ she said to herself.

‘What if we begin reading the book tonight, at bedtime?’ she suggested.

‘Yes. Yes. We shall.’

Sett’s new mood was nearly palpable.

Dinner was over. Bedtime had arrived. Mother sat beside her son’s bed, picked up the new book. Before reading, she wanted to check something out.

‘Do you recall how the first book ended?’ she asked Sett.

‘Of course!’ He spoke out confidently. ‘THE END’

‘Good for you. Let’s read.’



The ruckus caused by Helel’s outbursts and the apparent silence of the Supreme Council had to be tackled sooner or later. An emergency meeting of the Elementals was quickly convened. Gaby could not help but wonder if it had anything to do with what he had heard; the silent conversation between the Supreme Council members.

As the members of the Elementals tramped into the Grand Chambers, they noticed something different. There were name tags with each Soken individually identified. At the head of the table were the names Adonel, Adonyesh and Adonruk.

Soken Talel whispered to Gaby, ‘I did not know the names of the Supreme Council members until now.’

‘They usually prefer not to use their names unless absolutely necessary,’ responded Gaby.

Adonel spoke: ‘Please be seated everyone. You all know about the recent events within this Chamber and around Sky Kingdom. We feel it is only fair to allow Helel to present his dissatisfaction and we can all discuss it.’

Everyone turned around to look at the sulking Helel.

‘Why is he still here?’ queried Soken Xenel who sounded rather crossed.

Adonyesh spoke: ‘It’s alright Soken Xenel. Every member of the Elementals has a right to present their case. Right now it is Helel’s turn.’

Helel pushed his chair back, stood up and began his speech.

‘At our last meeting, we were told about the plans to form Terra into Sky Kingdom’s newest province.’

His words elicited a murmur of agreement.

‘My problem has to do with process. I think these self-styled Supreme Council members have acted injudiciously by not consulting me, the only member of this group who ever cared about Terra.’

Helel’s accusing voice and finger pointing shocked every Soken in the Grand Chambers. There was an audible pause as everyone held their breath.

‘Helel. That is not the way to speak to the Council,’ interrupted Gaby.

‘Aww. You be quiet, Mr Do-gooder. Who wants to hear from a boot-licker like you?’

Helel’s words and tone of voice dismayed the Elementals, especially Gaby.

‘What has happened to my friend.’ he mused.

Adonruk spoke: ‘Despite your dismay at Helel’s intransigence, we have decided to grant him a full light cycle to present his case to the people. No impediment will be put in his path.’

The Grand Chambers became deadly silent. No one spoke. No one breathe (it seemed). The shock level reverberated throughout the Chambers.

The only one who appeared excited was Helel. He was literally jumping up and down with glee.



‘Mother. I don’t get what is happening?’ Sett was clearly confused.

‘Neither do I.’ admitted mother. ‘Would you like to continue or shall we sleep on this new development?’

‘I think we should pause. I am quite confused. Maybe a good night’s sleep will clear things up for me,’ said Sett.

‘Good idea. The sleep will also help you deal with what happened to father.’ Mother continued, ‘Before we get back into the story, you may want to think about how Sky Kingdom can help you understand what happened to father.’

'I will. Good night mother.' Mother tucked him in, turned off the light and soon Sett was fast asleep.

The following evening Sett was anxious to get back to the story. He rushed mother through the evening chores, which she patiently obliged. After all, this might do him a world of good by getting his mind off the family tragedy. Once at his bedside, mother picked up the book, turned it to the marked page and started reading.



Adonel spoke again: 'Since we have given Helel one full light cycle to present his case, I suggest you all return home to your families and people. You are at complete liberty to share the events of this day with your constituents. There is nothing to hide. Truth will always prevail.' 'HA!' was Helel's retort.

Adonruk spoke: 'After the full light cycle is done we shall reconvene the Elementals. However, it will not be here at the Grand Chambers. Instead, the meeting will be held at the Arena.'

'The Arena?' queried Soken Urel.

'What is that?' asked Soken Volel.

'We have an Arena?' Soken Erinel was clearly perplexed as was everyone else.

Adonyesh spoke: 'The Arena is where the three of us do our workouts and meditations. Only Gaby and Helel have ever been there. But you will all get to see it.'

Soken Landel asked what was in everyone's mind. 'What happens at the Arena?'

Almost in unison, the Supreme Council answered, 'Come and see.'



'Wait a minute!' Sett was really lost. 'I don't get it!'

'Honestly, neither do I.' confessed mother.

'Supreme Council means they are in control?'

'Yes, Sett. I believe so.'

'Why are they accepting the challenge of Helel? He does not own Terra. They do.' Sett seemed irritated.

'I think the Supreme Council is being too kind. They should just bust Helel up and put him in prison or something.'

'Wow! My son, the judge.' Mother spoke with a twinkle in her eye and Sett burst out laughing.

'Perhaps the story will reveal what should happen,' assured mother.

'I guess. Kind of like what happened to father.'

Mother was flushed with pride as she looked at her son's visible growing maturity. She continued reading.



Helel stormed out of the Grand Chambers with a new determination.

He would win the hearts and minds of the people of Sky Kingdom. He

would turn them against the Supreme Council. He would depose the Supreme Council and make himself the new ruler of Sky Kingdom. His agenda suddenly crystallised in his mind and he quickly jotted down his threefold agenda: prove the Council unjust with regards to Terra, make a case for regime change and propose himself as new supreme ruler of Sky Kingdom.

Meanwhile, at the Grand Chambers, members of the Elementals were briefed about the different scenarios of upcoming events. The pressing question was who would represent the Supreme Council at the Arena. There was much debate and arguments were made for various candidates.

Soken Urel's name was proposed. His province was famed for their machines. Perhaps that skill would be needed.

Gaby's name was also proposed since he was the lead Malkim and had been to the Arena previously. Maybe this would give him an edge.

Soken Pernel who usually did not speak much made a counter suggestion.

'I think the challenger should be one of the Supreme Council. We all know Helel's unique skill sets and only a member of the Supreme Council would stand any chance against him. Furthermore, Helel's challenge is not against the Sokens, so how can any Soken meet his challenge?'

The Elementals were silenced, as much by the length of Soken Pernel's speech as by his logic. They looked at each other and then at the Supreme Council.

Adonyesh spoke: 'We think Soken Pernel makes a very valid point. Give us a second please.'

The Supreme Council entered into private deliberations. Everyone in the Grand Chambers waited with much anticipation. Every person kept their thoughts to themselves.



'Mother. What do you think the Council will decide?' asked Sett.

'My. My. Someone is pretty impatient tonight.'

Mother stopped reading and fondly tickled her son as she loved the sound of his laughter.

'Let's stop here for now. To be continued.' Mother announced boldly and Sett knew it was useless arguing.

'Okay. Good night mother.'

Another day passed. Another evening came and with it, story time.

Once again mother picked up the book and continued where she had left off.



Adonel spoke: 'Thanks everyone for your patience. Here is our consensus decision. Adonyesh has agreed to be the representative of the Supreme Council and Elementals at the Arena. Also, please note

that because of this, should he come out victorious at the Arena, then he will take primary charge of all things Terra.'

There was a loud burst of applause in the Grand Chambers and the Sokens murmured their agreement to each other. They all felt that this was the way forward.

Adonyesh spoke: 'One more thing. We need a candidate from this council to be my go-to person at all times, especially with regards to Terra. We would like to suggest Gaby for this truly important role.

What say you?'

Another round of applause plus shouts of 'Hurrah' filled the hallways of the Grand Chambers.

Adonruk spoke: 'Now please return to your provinces and return to Royale Ville when the full light cycle is complete. Don't worry. We will send reminders through Wy-Sky network. Blessings!'

With that the meeting was adjourned and every Soken returned home with much in their minds and hearts heavy with an unclear future.



'Mother. What if Adonyesh loses the contest? What will happen?' Sett sounded really concerned.

'I guess we just have to be patient to see how the story pans out.'

Mother replied. 'For now, sleep time. Nite. Nite.'



The Elementals in conjunction with the Supreme Council jointly decided that Helel would be granted full access to Wy-Sky network and he took full advantage of this. It did not take long for Helel to enlist some supporters and they put out non-stop adverts and commercial through the network.

One of the primary ideas advertised was that the Supreme Council was far too arbitrary and did too many things in secret. Another idea was that Sky Kingdom needed a regime change otherwise it would always be a de facto dictatorship by the Supreme Council.

Word began to spread throughout Sky Kingdom as people tuned in to the various network discussion groups examining the pros and cons of these adverts. Behind the scenes, Helel was also training for the contest he would have to face when the full light cycle was completed. He had heard that Adonyesh would be his opponent at the contest and relished the opportunity to put the Supreme Council in their places.



Sett was very troubled by the story and requested a pause in the reading. He sensed a connection to his own loss but could not put his finger on it.

After a day had passed by he still could not make sense of the story. 'Mother. I think we should continue the story,' he said.

Mother lovingly obliged and started reading again.



While Helel was running full steam with his campaign, the Sokens were also rather busy with their assignments. Their work went surprisingly well because very few people in the provinces were willing to buy into the views put out by Helel. In fact there was a certain level of anger over his impertinence.

However, in Royale Ville itself, the situation was quite different. More and more Malkim began to sympathise with Helel. The situation became so volatile that Gaby made an appointment to meet with the Supreme Council.

‘My Lords. Many Malkim are taking Helel seriously. I think his sympathisers group is growing rapidly.’

Gaby was clearly agitated.

‘Patience, Gaby. This has just begun. Worse, much worse is yet to come. Be assured all things will work out for the best.’

Somehow these words from the Supreme Council did not quell the disquiet he felt. Helel was his friend. He was staunchly loyal to the Supreme council. He had a strong personal sense for the well-being of Sky Kingdom. Gaby felt he was being pulled in so many directions.



Sett interrupted. ‘I feel sorry for Gaby. It must be so hard to have to choose.’

‘I am glad you get this.’ Mother sounded serious. ‘Do you think father faced similar choices?’

Sett thought for a while then chimed in, 'I guess so. For sure, I would not know how to choose.'

Mother smiled. 'Let's finish this chapter shall we?'

'Yeah. Let's' agreed Sett.



Helel had apparently made his choice and now Gaby had to make his. 'I really don't understand what is happening but I have to stay loyal to the Supreme Council. I am here because of them and they trust me enough to choose me for this important task. Come what may, I have to stand and be counted.'

Gaby's thoughts were personal but unknown to him, at the time anyway, similar thoughts were ringing in the hearts of most of Sky Kingdom's people. Even though there was time to play with, Gaby still worried about the outcome of the Arena contest.

'I will just have to wait and see as the Supreme Council said.'

With that Gaby resumed his duties but with a heavy heart.



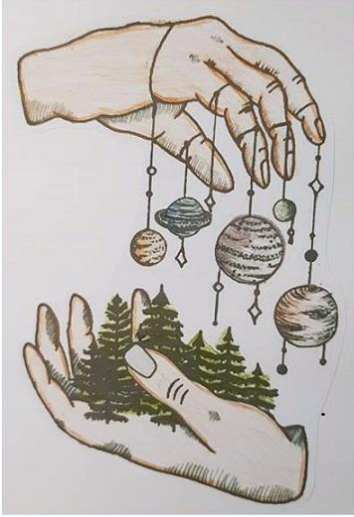
'You know what mother, Gaby sounds like father,' Sett chuckled.

'You mean fathers sounds like Gaby, don't' you?'

Mother's suggestion made sense to Sett.

'Maybe,' he uttered and sleep overtook him.





Sky Kingdom

Terra Forming

'Mother!'

Sett's frantic cry brought mother rushing into his room.

'What's the matter Sett? Are you alright?'

Sett broke out into one of his mischievous laughs.

'Ha, ha, ha! Tricked you! Just wanted to

make sure you do not forget it's story time.'

Realising his trickery, mother launched her own trick, tickling, mother's favourite weapon. When Sett could laugh no more, she settled into reading mode.



While preparations were being made for the Arena, the Supreme Council invited the Sokens to witness the forming of Terra. They also informed the people of Sky Kingdom that this event would be broadcast live via the network.

There was immense excitement throughout Sky Kingdom. It had been a long time since a new province was formed and for the younger people this is something they had never witnessed.



'I wonder what Terra forming would be like,' wondered Sett.

'Okay big boy. Quiz time!' announced mother.

'Oh no. Do we have to?' Sett had never been fond of quizzes.

'Oh yes, if you want to continue with the story.'

'Sounds like a threat,' thought Sett. 'Okay. Shoot!'

'What will the people of Terra be called?' mother asked.

'Hmmm. Let me think!' Sett pretended he did not know. 'Oh wait. I know. Terramites!'

'You mean they are insects?' mocked mother.

'Okay. Okay. Seriously. They are called Territes.'

'Good for you. Cheeky kid! Let's continue.'



When the appointed time arrived people all over the country gathered around open air big screens or personal display devices waiting to watch the forming of a new province. Excitement filled the air as members of the Elementals gathered at the observation platform; even Helel was there. The young ones wondered how this was going to happen.

Adonyesh stepped to the front and motioned everyone to silence. Then he rolled his hands together and suddenly it was as if the lights had been turned off. People were concentrating hard trying not to miss anything.

As Adonyesh continued to roll his hands together, Gaby heard him softly whisper, 'Light!' and like magic a glow began to roll across the darkness and Terra was revealed.

'Wow!' exclaimed Gaby and everyone else did the same.

Adonyesh again gently rolled his hands and again Gaby heard him softly whisper, 'Waters separate!'

The watching crowds could hardly believe their eyes as water which had engulfed Terra slowly began to separate above and below.

Adonyesh again gently rolled his hands and once more Gaby heard him softly say, 'Land!'

To everyone's delight earth, land, soil began to surface out of the water and colourful plants and flowers dotted the new landscape.

'Amazing!' 'Unbelievable!' 'Hurrah!' rang out across the country in every home, watching area and especially at the observation platform.



'Is that it?' asked Sett, no longer lying down but sitting up with eyes wide open.

'Maybe this is a good place to stop,' suggested mother.

'No way!' protested Sett.

Mother knew she also did not want to stop.



Gaby noticed a shift in Adonyesh's actions. This time he simply whispered, 'Sun, moon and stars.'

Suddenly the lighting system began to play tricks (it seemed) switching back and forth between dark and bright and to everyone's amazement they could see incandescent objects shining, twinkling and flittering in the spaces around Terra.

Gaby was almost dumbfounded. Even he had never seen anything like this. He wondered . . .

Adonyesh whispered once more, 'Flying and swimming creatures.'

Sure enough the sky and waterways were filled with creatures cutting the air with wings or gliding through the waterways.



'Sounds like airplanes and submarines,' interrupted Sett with lots of mischief in his voice while making a fish face.

'You naughty boy', joked mother. 'Stop interrupting.'



For one last time Gaby heard Adonyesh whisper, 'Animals.'

The audience laughed with delight to see so many creatures run and gallop across the landscape of Terra.



'Are those the Territes?' asked Sett.

Mother was not sure if he was serious or simply being facetious. She assumed the latter and continued reading.



Then to everyone's surprise, curtains were drawn to prevent anyone from seeing what happened next. The only thing they could see was the silhouette of Adonyesh on the other side of the curtain. What they did see puzzled them. It looked like Adonyesh was on the ground and doing something.

'I wonder what he is doing,' murmured Gaby to himself.

'I know. He is showing off!' hollered Helel, as if to prove a point.

'C'mon. Be quick about it!' Helel continued his heckling.

Those around him sensed Helel's hostility and tried to distance themselves from him.

Suddenly, Adonyesh arose and waved the curtain away. As it rolled away people caught a glimpse of the first Territes, a new brother and sister for them.

Adonyesh addressed the crowd: 'Ladies and gentlemen; citizens of Sky Kingdom; it is my delightful privilege to introduce to you Mr and Mrs Benel.'

The roar of the crowd was simply deafening. The joy was palpable; you could almost taste it. Such a thing had not been witnessed in Sky Kingdom or in their lifetime (for many of them).

Helel, stormed out of the observation platform and disappeared. In doing so he missed the best part.



'I wonder what that is,' mused Sett.

'You're about to find out, I think,' responded mother.



Soken Xenel had brought along his famous Xenite choir and even prepared a song for this occasion, this celebration.

'One, two, three,' counted Soken Xenel and the choir broke out into the most heavenly rhapsody anyone had ever heard.

The Xenite choir may have been famous and had performed numerous concerts in the past, but this beat them all. The singing was simply divine.

It did not take long for Malkims and others to join in the celebration. Everyone, except Helel, who was out nursing his wounded pride in some isolated corner of Sky Kingdom.

Gaby swore to himself that he again heard Adonyesh telling the other Supreme Council members, 'It has begun.'



'That's it for tonight Sett. Time for bed.'

'Do I have to?' Sett knew the answer even as he raised the question.

As he drifted off to sleep, he could not help but wonder, 'What would father have thought of all this?'



Sky Kingdom

Contest

'Mother, what is the next chapter called?' Sett wanted to know.

'I believe it's called 'Contest' or something like that.' Mother was still busy in the kitchen tidying up after dinner.

'Will you please hurry up mother,' called out the ever impatient Sett.

'Wait a minute. I'll be there shortly,' responded mother.

'Father would never make me wait,' complained Sett. Suddenly his mind was again focused on how father had died.



Sett wondered if the contest in the next chapter would help him understand his own loss. He did not notice his mother walk in; he was lost

in his thoughts.

'Still thinking about father?' she asked.

'Yes. Sorry. I can't seem to forget.'

'You know son, remembering is the bright side of loss. We aren't supposed to forget but to remember.'

'I suppose.' Sett was not sure but it was story time.



A full light cycle was completed. The time had come for the contest and Sky Kingdom had learnt that the event would be streamed live for

everyone to see. All businesses closed. School children were sent home early. People hurried from their workplaces to wherever they could view the event.

As members of the Elementals walked into the Arena, they were utterly amazed. They did not know it existed and they had never seen anything quite like it.

There was an open floor area with many sections around marked Station plus a number. The place was enormous, almost cavernous. Rafters rose up on every side, clearly intended for people to sit on. There were several objects at every station but no one knew what they were for.

The Sokens remembered being told this was the place where the Supreme Council did their workouts and now wondered what that really meant. One of the Sokens asked Gaby to explain but he was not able to (or chose not to).



Sett could not help make the comparison.

‘Sounds like some gigantic gymnasium,’ he said but then wondered, ‘Why was it so secretive?’

‘Beats me,’ responded his mother. ‘I think the book called it a workout and a meditation place.’

‘Yeah. I remember. No one meditates in a gym,’ chuckled Sett.

‘Well let’s find out.’



Once the Sokens had been seated, Adonel summoned Gaby.

‘Open the doors for others to join so we can fill the Arena,’ he said.

Gaby followed the instructions and soon this enormous Arena was filled to the brim.

Then it was time to meet the contestants.

Helel entered the Arena first and much to everyone’s surprise, he was accompanied by a large number of Malkim. People were shocked that so many Malkim had chosen to side with Helel but they had been warned it could happen.

Next, Adonyesh entered the Arena and received a standing ovation from the assembled audience.

Adonel spoke: ‘Since this is a challenge against the Supreme Council, we cannot also serve as referee. Therefore, I am asking the Sokens to serve as referee for this contest.’

Helel was indignant. ‘That is unfair. They are all on your side.’ He paused momentarily then said, ‘But I am the better person and I am here to prove you wrong so I accept.’

An audible sigh of relief went up, filling the Arena with a collective ‘Whoo!’

The crowd began to chant, ‘Speech. Speech. Speech.’

No one knew why they did that but Helel took full advantage.

‘Citizens of Sky Kingdom. I want you to know that this is a contest for justice and equality in this country. Far too long we have been ruled by this tyrannical Council.’

He gestured rather dismissively towards the Council members.

‘Their time is over.’ He continued.

‘Now it is time for me to demonstrate to all of you that I am best equipped to be your new ruler.’

He punctuated his speech with a fist pump. No one moved. Just some quiet applause from the Malkim who had accompanied him.

Meanwhile, Adonyesh stood in his side of the Arena without saying a word.



‘I don’t like this Helel guy,’ admitted Sett.

‘Touche,’ echoed mother. ‘He sounds like a politician.’

‘Mother, can you read this chapter until the end? I don’t want to stop half way,’ pleaded Sett.

‘I guess we can do that since you don’t have school tomorrow.’



While Helel was making speeches, the Sokens had met and chosen Soken Norel to be the head referee.

He stood up and said, ‘It’s time for the contest to begin. Before we do that, the consequences of loss have to be registered. Here is our decision.’

He slowly waved his hand and a hush fell in the Arena, so quiet that you could hear a feather drop.

Soken Norel continued. 'If Lord Adonyesh loses, then the Supreme Council will relinquish power to the victor. However, if Helel loses, he and all his followers will be banished from Royale Ville forever.'

There was a wave or agreement from the spectators.

Soken Norel was not done. 'We do have a caveat.'



'Mother, what's a caveat?' asked Sett.

'That is like a condition for something else. Kind of a way out.'

Mother wished for a moment that father was there; he was so much better with such questions.



'The Board of Sokens has decreed that should Helel lose the contest, he will be allowed to choose his own place of banishment.'

'That's fine with me,' retorted Helel. 'But you know I'm going to win, right?'

'Contestants, choose your weapons,' instructed Soken Norel.

There was an urgent murmur in the crowd.

'Weapons? What are weapons?' asked one spectator.

Another replied, 'I don't know but this sounds sinister.'

Helel was so pleased he was about to burst with ecstasy. He started to prance around the floor, applauded by his followers and booed by the crowd.

‘You all know me,’ he shouted above the din of the crowd. ‘My weapon will be shapeshifting. Ha!’

Soken Norel pointed to Adonyesh but again he said nothing. He simply nodded to the Elementals and to his fellow Council members.

‘Let’s begin then!’



‘This doesn’t sound good,’ Sett thought to himself.

Mother was thinking the same thing. There was almost a telepathic connection between them. They glanced at each other, said nothing and mother continued reading.



Helel quickly went to work changing shape into all sorts of apparitions the likes of which had never before been seen in Royale Ville. With each shape something different would happen. He finally settled on the shape of an ugly creature which breathed laser beams and he demonstrated his power by targeting the beams at sections of the Arena causing all kinds of explosions.

People panicked and a stampede almost ensued until . . .

To their wonderment, Adonyesh was at the centre of the Arena and was repulsing every beam thrown at him by Helel. He had no objects in

his hands (so it appeared) and he barely moved. It was almost as if he was in a trance covered by some kind of deflector shield or force field.

‘What’s going here?’ queried one bemused spectator.



‘Yeah. What is happening?’ echoed Sett.

Mother simply kept reading.



Then the unexpected happened. A beam aimed at Adonyesh seemed to bounce off him back on Helel. Before anyone could speak, Helel was writhing on the floor and the bouncing laser beams had stopped. Helel opened his mouth but nothing came out; he had no voice.

Soken Norel immediately stopped the contest and announced, ‘The winner of this contest is Lord Adonyesh.’



‘What a relief!’ Sett was genuinely pleased with the result as was mother. They both exhaled slowly as they continued with the story.



‘Malkim Helel. You may now choose your place of banishment,’ said Soken Norel.

There was a brief pause then Helel slowly stood up and hoarsely said, ‘I . . . choose . . . Terra! Terra! Terra! Terra!’

A cry of horror went up throughout Sky Kingdom. The Arena which had burst into victorious jubilation seconds earlier was suddenly hushed by this unthinkable request. No one said a word as they watched an evil grin break across the face of Helel who by now was the main portrait on all media outlets.

However, Adonyesh raised his hand, a gesture that seemed to calm the crowd and for the first time since entering the Arena, he spoke.

‘Helel. I will see you in Terra. Depart from here!’

The hand movement was clearly intentional. Everyone, including Helel, knew what it meant.

As Helel slided out of the Arena, Gaby again overheard Adonyesh saying to the other Supreme Council members, ‘It has begun.’

They then left the scene.



‘Mother, I feel so bad for Terra. They are so new. How can they stand up against Helel and his Malkim? There are only two Territes? Poor things!’ Sett’s concern was genuine.

‘I think you should remember the story. Adonyesh had pledged to always look after Terra. I think they will be alright.’

Sett thought about it then said, ‘I hope so. I guess that is what father always meant when he said he is always with us.’



Sky Kingdom

Virus

Throughout that day, Sett kept running the contest scene in his brain, trying hard to make sense of it. He wondered why there would be such an event in such a beautiful place.

‘If Sky Kingdom is so perfect,’ he thought, ‘how could such disharmony enter the Kingdom?’

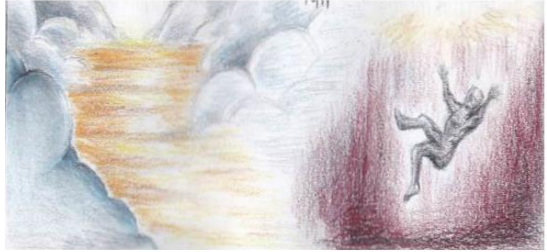
Questions rattled around his overworked brain.

‘Why did the Supreme Council not act immediately?’

‘Why did they allow things to get so far?’

‘Why did they not stop Helel earlier?’

‘What would happen to poor Terra and the new Territe couple?’



‘Why did the Sokens make it possible for Helel to choose Terra?’

‘Why did the Sokens not decide the place?’

Soon all these questions made Sett very depressed. His mother noticed the furrows on his forehead.

‘I think we need to get some traction quickly,’ she murmured to herself. ‘Otherwise Sett might take this story too personally.’

Mother quickly arranged an advanced reading time and this perked Sett up a bit.



The Supreme Council acted promptly to avert further disruption to Sky Kingdom. They were especially concerned about Terra. A quick decision was made and at the click of a finger, Adonyesh arrived in Terra.

Benel and Havah (Mrs Benel) were pleased beyond words. The visit was much anticipated. They had heard about the ruckus in Sky Kingdom. They did not know what really happened. Their minds were fresh but had so much to learn.

‘I am here to help you settle in,’ began Adonyesh, ‘but also to explain to you about recent events.’

‘Yes, please. That would be really good.’

Benel was both delighted and curious. He called Havah to join them as they sat down on the fresh grass. Adonyesh began to tell them all about Sky Kingdom, the forming of Terra and the challenge he had faced from Helel.

‘Who is Helel?’ asked Havah.

‘You will meet him soon enough,’ said Adonyesh. ‘For now let me take you to your new home.’



Sett looked at mother and said, 'I wonder what their home would look like. Do you think it would be as nice as ours?'

Sett loved his house with its white picket fences, marbled floors, polished staircases and lots of room to play in. He loved mother's flower gardens and the maple trees father had planted. He was especially fond of the tree house he and father had built.

Sett began to reminisce about all the good times he had with father. He felt both happy and sad and this surprised him.

Mother sensed the mood swing and gently suggested to continue with the story.

Sett snapped out of his reverie and agreed with mother. She continued reading.



Adonyesh, Benel and Havah strolled down the rolling hill towards a spectacular valley in the distance.

Havah ran ahead, inspecting every floral petal and blade of greenery. Everything was new; everything was unknown. She chased down a colourful flying creature but could not catch it. Her laughter reverberated against the hillsides and even Adonyesh (usually so serene) had to smile at her limitless inquisitiveness.

'By the way, Benel, I have a job that requires your immediate attention.'

Adonyesh's tone caught Benel's attention.

‘Yes? What would that be?’ he queried.

‘Do you see all these creatures in the air, the waterways and the land?

Your job is to name all of them.’

Benel stopped in his tracks, surveyed the panorama before him, glanced up and down the land and released a lengthy burst of air.

‘Wheew! Some job! I will do my best!’

Adonyesh smiled as he looked at the puzzled expression on Benel’s face.



‘All the animals and birds and fish?’ Sett almost fell off his bed just thinking about it.

‘I could never do that!’ He shook his head vigorously.

Mother chuckled, smiled and kept reading.



The two finally caught up with Havah. Adonyesh stopped, looked around and gracefully waved his arms.

Tall trees with full heads of foliage sprang up like walls around them.

A green and purple carpet rolled across the space between the trees.

Flowers of every hue and colour dotted the spaces around the trees.

Four crystal clear waterways magically appeared and flowed in every direction.

A gentle breeze ruffled the tree tops and rustled the grass carpet.

Benel and Havah marvelled at everything they were seeing for the first time.



‘I wish I was there,’ sighed Sett.

‘I heard that,’ whispered mother into his ear.

‘That tickles!’

They both laughed at this slight diversion.



‘Benel and Havah, this is your new home!’

They were not the only ones watching. The rest of Sky Kingdom was also watching as the event was again streamed live. Roars of approval could be heard all over the Kingdom. Helel was also watching but no smile broke across his face.

‘What should we call this place?’ asked Havah.

Adonyesh put his hand to his chin and said, ‘How about . . . HaGan?’

‘Hmmm,’ thought Havah. ‘What does it mean?’

‘It means garden,’ answered Adonyesh.

‘Before naming the creatures, I will name these four waterways first,’ interrupted Benel.

‘Great idea!’ replied Adonyesh.

‘I think I will call them . . . let’s see . . .’

He was momentarily lost in thought. Everyone watching the scene held their breath in anticipation. What a momentous occasion!

‘Let’s see . . . I think I will call them . . . Pishon . . . Gihon . . . Hiddeqel and . . . I got it! Parat!’

‘Bennie, my love.’

Havah’s affectionate address surprised Benel and the watching crowd. Helel looked disgusted.

‘What do these names mean?’ she asked.

Benel heaved a huge roar of laughter and said, ‘I have no clue but I like them!’



‘Mother? Did you and father purposely choose Sett as my name or did you just like the sound?’ Sett put up his serious fish face.

‘Honestly! I forgot!’ she teased.

‘Mother! How could you!’ Sett turned around and pretended he was mad.

‘Alright,’ said mother, ‘maybe we should stop.’

Sett whirled around in his bed almost screaming, ‘No way!’

Mother giggled and continued reading.



Adonyesh knew it was time to leave but Benel and Havah needed one more piece of information.

‘Before I leave, I have one more thing to tell you,’ he said. ‘Do you see those two lights over there?’

Benel and Havah instantly turned in the direction he was pointing.

‘Yes, we do,’ they both replied.

‘Those are two Portals you may choose to enter and that will decide what happens to Terra.’

One could hear the murmurs of people up and down the land. This was unexpected. Two Portals? Two destinies? Questions raged in the mind of every viewer.

‘What are they? What are they for?’ asked Benel.

‘The white sparkly Portal is called Daat Khayim. It will guide you to life. The blue glowing Portal is Daat Tov-Ra and it will guide you to death,’ explained Adonyesh.

‘We don’t get it!’ Benel and Havah uttered in unison.

‘You will. You will.’

With that Adonyesh was gone.

Unseen by Benel and Havah, Helel silently emerged from the evening shadows with a huge grin across his face.

‘So that’s it,’ he said. ‘Now I know what to do. Now it begins!’

He too disappeared.



‘I have a bad feeling about this,’ said Sett.

‘I fully agree,’ said mother.

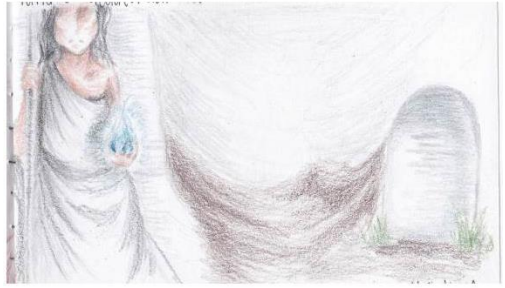
Clearly it was the right place to stop so mother closed the book, tucked her son in and left the room.



Sky Kingdom

Quarantine

The following evening mother suggested that they should read the final chapter without



interruption. Sett agreed but mother knew such would never be the case.

‘I strongly suggested we should read right through the story,’ she insisted.

‘Mother you’re right. But what if I have questions?’ Sett was perplexed at mother’s decision.

Mother explained, ‘This is the concluding chapter and it probably holds the key to all your questions. I think it will help to pay attention right through.’

Even as she spoke she knew her son would be hard pressed to listen quietly. After all, he had a keen mind and, yes, questions; lots of them! Nevertheless, she was determined to read without interruption and started.



Meanwhile, Benel and Havah continued their blissful life until that day! Helel was always on the lookout for an opportunity to befuddle these new Territes. This was his chance!

As they sauntered through their land, Benel and Havah reached the two Portals. They were fascinated with the lights and colours but remembered Adonyesh's admonition.

They were about to turn back when Helel quickly changed shape into a strikingly beautiful creature and engaged Havah in conversation. This went on for a while and then the unexpected happened.

Havah reached for the blue light Portal, took hold of the knob and swung open the Portal. Instantly, things changed, mostly within themselves. The sensation of exhilaration and something cold intoxicated them.

Adonyesh reappeared quickly with anguish in his voice. 'What have you done?'

They had no explanation except to say, 'Sorry!' They did not even dare to look at him. Benel wanted know what the cold sensation was.

'That is the sensation we call shame or guilt or a conscience. This will always tell you when you go too far off the beaten path,' explained Adonyesh. 'This is what we did not want you to experience because it will deprive you of freedom.'

Adonyesh assured them that for everything would work out, they just had to trust him.

As soon as Adonyesh returned to Royale Ville, a gathering of the Elementals was convened. Everyone had unspoken questions. They had witnessed the forming of Terra and the creation of a magnificent

province for the Territes. They had also heard Adonyesh's explanations to Benel and Havah and could not comprehend a word of it. They had also seen Helel lurking in the shadows and wondered what he was up to. And, they had just witnessed the Territes opening the blue Portal and could only guess what that meant.

Adonyesh spoke: 'What you are about to see is restricted viewing, only for the Sokens in this room. This is not for public viewing.'

They were astonished at this announcement as the Supreme Council had always been very transparent with information.

They dared not ask, but Gaby did. 'How come? We don't understand.'

Adonyesh spoke: 'What you are about to see may be far too disturbing for general viewing so for now we think it best that this is only for your eyes.'

That did not sound very reassuring and the Sokens suspected things were far more serious than they had imagined.

Adonel spoke: 'Before we start the screening, we would like to share with you our understanding of what it will take to fix things. We have to adopt certain forensics measures to ensure the well-being of Sky Kingdom.'

By now, everyone's curiosity had risen to almost bursting point.

Adonel continued: 'These forensics measures would involve three specific actions. (1) RivGate. This action would require accountability from every citizen of Sky Kingdom, especially of Territes. It would be

accompanied with appropriate responsibility for choices and consequences. Until such time as they are able to demonstrate this, Terra shall be placed under quarantine.'

The quizzical looks on the Sokens' faces spoke volumes but they held their tongues (for the moment).

'(2) NaviGate. This action is the prime directive for ourselves as Supreme Council and to some extent for Gaby.'

'Huh? Me?' Gaby was clearly surprised.

'This action would require constant communication, especially with Terra, to engender a sense of well-being and preclude thoughts of abandonment.'

Soken Bootel whispered to himself, 'Sounds good to me! But will it work?'

'(3) GoelGate. We could also call it MashiakhGate or SoterGate. This action would involve direct and indirect intervention. If we don't intervene, Terra would fall prey to Helel's schemes and have no chance of survival.'

This time the Sokens broke out in measured applause.



Sett could no longer hold back.

'Mother, what is Adonyesh saying? Please explain!' he begged.

‘I am not sure, but if I was to guess I’d say he was telling everyone how the Supreme Council intends to ensure Terra does not become Helel’s victim.’

‘Oh! I think I see. Continue mother.’



Adonruk spoke: ‘What you are about to watch is a screening of what will have already happened.’

‘Now I am really lost,’ confessed Soken Tusel out loud. Others murmured their agreement.

Adonruk continued: ‘Let me clarify. Over the course of this screening, you will learn the entire history of Terra, the outcome of Helel’s rebellion and the ultimate ending to this tragedy.’

Soken Pernel raised his hand. ‘I have a question. How is that possible if it has not happened yet?’

Adonel spoke: ‘Allow me. For all of you there are blocks of time. This is why we speak of a full light cycle, for instance. However, for us time is totality; something we experience all at once.’

Soken Pernel responded with a very slow ‘o k a y !’

Giant screens glided down the sides of the Grand Chambers. Lights went dim. The screening began with a quick introduction, ‘The Unfolding Story of Terra.’

The Beginnings

The Sokens watched in disbelief as the descendants of Benel and Havah dived into an existence of chaos and anarchy. In horror they watched murders, decapitations, moral depravity, environmental destruction, war, injustice and so on and so forth. They wondered how Territes could create horrific monsters and yet speak of progress. Their hearts sunk as Territes set about destroying themselves and their province while apparently enjoying the carnage.

The Deluge

After this initial phase, the Sokens watched the first serious intervention of the Supreme Council. They saw Terra being rinsed in a gigantic deluge. They saw the selection of Nukh and his small family to survive the deluge and provide a restart for Terra.

Somebody suggested, 'We should call this reformat 1.'

Someone else shouted, 'Wait a minute! It did not work! Look!'

In shock they continued watching as Nukh's descendants simply repeated previous history. Terra was now a different looking province but the Territes had not changed. If anything, they got worse—more evil, more chaos, more anarchy.

Nuk's descendants built great cities and gigantic ziggurats. Yet in one moment of madness even their speeches changed; they could not understand one another and divided themselves into groups and races.

The Berit

As they kept watching, another intervention was enacted. This one was different. It did not involve purging but covenant. This time the Supreme Council attempted direct involvement of Territes to carry out the intervention. Warriors, messengers, writers, judges and many types of people were enlisted. The Sokens marvelled at the multiplexity of Territe talents.

The Sokens greatly admired one of these specially chosen Territes. His



name was Abe and he did everything asked of him even when it cost him everything.

They went wild with adulation for another Territe. He was called Moshe and his actions were almost divine.

‘How could a Territe perform such feats of strength and astounding miracles?’ The

Sokens pondered this thought as they kept their eyes on the giant screens.

They saw great shepherd leaders who attempted to bring peace and prosperity.





They saw young men risking their lives for their convictions and willing to confront incredible odds.

They saw writer after writer put



thoughts on paper for those who would come after them to record for all time their

understanding of the Supreme Council and its plans for Terra

Someone suggested, 'Let's call this reformat 2.'

Someone else shouted again, 'But wait! It also did not work!'



Sett could no longer hold back.

'Mother, are the Territes ever going to get things right? Are they always doomed to fail?' he asked.

'Personally, I hope not. I don't know about you but I am rooting for them!' she confirmed.

'Me too!' exclaimed Sett, 'and for the Supreme Council.'

'You sound just like father. That's what he used to say.'



As the Sokens continued watching the drama, they saw something which startled them to such an extent that they leapt to their feet and almost in unison cried out, 'Is that . . .?'

Their question was broken up by an unambiguous, 'Yes!'

Jaws dropped slightly as the Sokens slowly sank back into their chairs as Adonyesh confirmed their worst suspicions.

‘Yes. That is me.’

‘But . . . but . . .!’ Gaby never got to complete his sentence.

They were transfixed to the giant screens as they witnessed the horrid events being enacted before their very eyes.

They saw Adonyesh become Territe, lived among Territes, experienced their evil, walked their beaten paths, taught them the way back to pre-Portal choices and about the love which the Supreme Council held for Territes.

They watched in breathless silence as Territes, inspired by Helel, blamed Adonyesh for all their troubles and executed him in the most cruel and unimaginable way. To their relief they saw Adonyesh return to life with a promise that he had opened a new Portal for every Territe.

At this point the screening was abruptly paused and Adonyesh spoke:

‘My friends. In Terra I became known as ‘HaEbed,’ the ‘Servant’. This act of humiliation was the only way to turn the hearts of Territes.

While many did not accept me, I am pleased to announce that myriads of them did. This is the final reformat!’

Gaby could not understand the new feelings welling up inside. His eyes were filled with moisture and his voice was choked up. He glanced

around the room and noticed that there was not a dry eye in the Grand Chambers.

‘I don’t understand what has happened to me.’

His thoughts seemed to echo every Soken’s thought as well.

Gaby grabbed his Sky Pad and began to scribble furiously:

တဝှဲ ... αγάπη ... 爱 ... प्यार ... ལྟོགས ... aimer ... amor ...

jingieit ... upendo ... ЛЮБОВЬ ... cinta ... amare ... LOVE!

Meanwhile, the screening had reached its final scene. Gasps of excitement ran through the Grand Chambers as they watched something far more amazing than Terra forming.

Right before their eyes they saw a new Terra, a new Sky Kingdom, being fashioned. They witnessed the final fiery purging of Helel, his Malkim followers and all Territes who chose his side. They watched as a new home for Territes grew out of the ashes, a city so magnificent it was indescribable, kind of a second Royale Ville.

They smiled and applauded as they watched the rescued Territes gather before Adonyesh and proclaim in song their gratitude. These Territes were now the toast of Royale Ville and all of Sky Kingdom. When the screening came to an end, the Sokens broke out in ‘Hallelujah’ and their song reverberated through the corridors of the Grand Chambers and filtered through the lattices to the streets of Royale Ville.

Passers-by wondered, 'What happened in there?'

Gaby overheard Adonyesh whisper to the other Council members,
'It is finished!'

THE END!



'Now I get it!' exclaimed an excited Sett. 'If the Supreme Council makes a promise, they will keep it.'

'I am so glad Helel was not the winner.' Mother let out a sigh of relief.

'Since the Company has promised to look after us, I know they are looking after father also and one day we will see him again.'

'You're right my son. Good night!'

Before falling asleep, Sett sent out a quick prayer.

'Thank you for all your promises, especially the ones about reversing all bad things if we trust you. Amen!'

With that he fell asleep and for the first time in a long while there was peace on Sett's face.



