

## Chapter 2

### **Atomic destruction**

A single word can impart what was being reflected from the panel: 'Desolation'. The street we were observing, piece by piece, was cluttered with 'mounds' generally arranged one behind the other. Some stood apart while others lay right in the middle of the openings to the buildings. Imperceptibly, the camera zoomed closer and I soon understood that these 'mounds' had to be vehicles - vehicles that were somewhat similar in shape to flat-bottomed boats.

Around me, the astronauts were attending to their desks. From each sphere emerged a long tube that descended slowly towards the surface. When the end of the tube touched the ground, a little cloud of dust rose, and I realised that the vehicles too were covered in a thick blanket of dust, rendering them formless and unrecognisable. Of course, the sphere that hovered above the river had its tube in the water. My attention was now riveted on the panel, for the scene was quite fascinating - one had the exact impression of being in the street.

My attention was especially drawn to a darkened place in the entrance of a huge building. I could have sworn something moved...

I also felt there was a certain agitation among the astronauts. Abruptly, and with a series of jerks, the 'thing' emerged into the light. I was horrified by what I saw. As for my 'hostesses', apart from some utterances spoken more quickly, and a few exclamations in which emotion could be discerned, I must say that they didn't really seem surprised. However, what we were seeing so clearly on the panel was a horrible cockroach, about two metres long and 80 centimetres high.

The reader will certainly have seen, at one time or another, these nasty little insects we have on Earth, particularly in hot climates, living in cupboards and damp places.

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You will agree that they are loathsome, but the biggest would be no more than five centimetres in length. Imagine then, one with the dimensions I have just described. It was truly an abomination.

The tube from the sphere began to retract, yet was still a metre from the ground when suddenly, the creature hurried forward to attack this thing which moved. Untrustingly, it stopped again, when from under the building, a veritable swarm of the creatures emerged, spilling one over the other. Just then, a ray of intense blue light beamed from the sphere and swept over the group, reducing it instantly to carbonised dust. A cloud of black smoke hid the entrance to the building from view.

My curiosity further aroused, I watched the other screens, but they indicated no problems. The sphere from the river was returning towards us, and the sphere on the hill retracted its tube, moved a little higher and lowered the tube again, along with a second cylinder above the sphere. I had guessed, of course, that the astronauts were collecting samples of soil, water and air. Being in Astral body, I couldn't ask Thao any questions; in any case, she seemed quite busy conferring with two of the 'hostesses'. The spheres began climbing towards us and were soon ready to be 'reabsorbed' by our spacecraft.

When the operation was complete, Thao and the two astronauts mentioned took their places opposite their respective desks. Instantly, the images we received on the panel and screens changed completely.

I understood we were leaving when each one took her place. I observed that all the astronauts had a similar posture in their seats, which intrigued me. I later learned that a force field restrained them exactly as a security harness would have restrained a stuntman on Earth.

The suns illuminated the planet through a reddish fog. We had left by then, and I assumed we were following the contour of the planet, at the same altitude. In fact, we could see a desert-like area passing by, dissected by dry riverbeds that sometimes crossed each other at right angles. It occurred to me they might be canals, or at least had been man made.

The panel revealed images of a town apparently intact, then it disappeared and the screen went blank. The vessel had obviously gained speed in flying over the planet, as the images on the smaller screens, showing a lake or inland sea, flashed by quickly. Suddenly, several exclamations were heard and we immediately slowed down. The panel was turned on and presented a close-up of the lake. We stopped.

We could clearly see a portion of the coast and, beyond some large rocks by the lake, we could make out cube-like structures which I imagined to be habitations. As soon as we had stopped, the spheres began their operations again, just as they had earlier.

### 16 *Thiaouba Prophecy*

We received some excellent shots taken from one of the spheres that hovered above the beach at a height I judged to be 40 to 60 metres from the ground. Its tube extended right to the shore. Very clearly, it transmitted a scene of a group of *human beings*... Indeed, at first sight, they were identical to people found on Earth.

We had a very close view. In the middle of the panel appeared the face of a woman of uncertain age. She had brown skin, with long black hair that fell to her breasts. As we could see on another screen, she was quite naked. Only her face appeared to be deformed - she was Mongoloid.

When I saw her, I didn't realise she was deformed, I simply assumed we had to contend with a race of humans only slightly different from our own - as science fiction writers like to describe them - all twisted, with big ears or such like. Still, we had other shots and, in this group, the men and women seemed to resemble the Polynesian race. It was, however, obvious that more than half of these people were either deformed or eaten away by what appeared to be *leprosy*.

They were looking towards the sphere and gesticulating, appearing to be greatly agitated. Many more were emerging from the cubic constructions which proved to be their habitations, and on which I will elaborate a little.

These structures closely resembled the 'blockhaus' of the Second World War, to which had been added very thick chimneys (installed, I supposed, for the ventilation of the buildings) which only seemed to rise about one metre above the ground. These blockhaus were all built with the same orientation and the people emerging from them, did so by openings on the sides which were in shadow...

Without warning, I felt myself drawn backwards away from the panel. Rapidly, I passed through several partitions until I found myself once again, in the cabin where my physical being lay stretched out on the bunk, just as I had left it.

Instantly, everything was completely black. How well I remember the unpleasant sensation that followed! My limbs felt like lead and when I tried to move them, it was as if I was paralysed. I could not understand what prevented me from moving. I must confess I panicked a little and wished with all my heart that I might leave my physical body again, but I couldn't do that either.

I don't know how much time elapsed before the cabin gradually became suffused with the most restful blue-green light. Finally Thao entered, wearing a different suit.

'I am sorry to have made you wait, Michel, but just as your physical body recalled you, it was impossible for me to come and help you.'

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'Don't apologise, I understand perfectly,' I interrupted, 'but I believe I have a problem - I can't move. I'm sure something in me is disconnected.'

She smiled and put her hand just beside mine, undoubtedly operating a control mechanism, and immediately I was freed.

‘Again, a thousand apologies, Michel. I should have pointed out to you the spot where the control cell for the security harness is found. All the seats, beds or bunks are equipped with them, and they are automatically activated when occupied if there is the least possibility of danger. [2]

‘When the vessel arrives in a dangerous area, the three security computers cause the closing of the force fields, to use their proper name. When the danger has passed they automatically release them.

‘At the same time, if we do want to be released in a zone deemed dangerous, or even if we simply want to change position, we have only to pass a hand or just a finger in front of the cell and the force field is immediately neutralised. When we return to our seats, we will be automatically restrained again.

‘Now, I’m going to ask you to go and change - I’ll show you where. In the room, you will see an open trunk where you can put your clothes -in fact, all that you are wearing apart from the glasses. You’ll find a suit there, which you are to put on before meeting me back here.’

Thao bent down and taking my hand, she helped me up. I was really quite stiff. I went into the small room she had pointed out, undressed completely and put on the suit, which fitted me perfectly. This was surprising, given that, in spite of my 178 centimetres in height, I was a dwarf compared with my hostesses.

A short time later, back in the cabin, Thao handed me something in the form of a bracelet, which was actually a pair of enormous glasses.

A little like motorcycle goggles, they were strongly tinted. At her request, I put them on, but to do so, I was obliged to remove my own glasses, as they would have been crushed by this larger pair. They fitted exactly into the shape of my eye sockets.

'A last precaution,' she said.

Lifting her hand towards the partition, she in some way released a certain mechanism, for the intense light reappeared and I felt the intensity in spite of the strong glasses. I was again aware of the current of cool air.

The lights went out. The air current could no longer be felt, but Thao did not move, appearing to be waiting for something. Eventually a voice was heard and she removed my large tinted glasses. I replaced them with my own and she asked that I follow her. We took the same route as when I followed her in Astral body, and we found ourselves again, in the command room.

### 18 *Thiaoouba Prophecy*

One of the older astronauts (I say older but perhaps I should instead say 'more serious' as they all appeared to be about the same age) signalled briefly to Thao who took me to a seat in front of the panel and asked that I stay there. She quickly rejoined her colleague and I realised they were very busy.

As for me, I began checking whether I could in fact free myself from the force field. As soon as I sat down, I was effectively plastered to my seat - a feeling I did not like at all.

Moving my hand slightly, I found I was immediately liberated for as long as my hand remained in front of the cell.

The panel relayed an image of about 500 people standing on the shore and quite near the 'blockhaus'. Thanks to the close-ups possible with our cameras, we had an excellent view of these people, who were quite naked, from the oldest down to the youngest. Again, I could see many of them were either deformed or sporting ugly wounds. They were all gesturing towards the spheres taking sand and soil samples, but no one approached. The strongest looking men were holding what appeared to be machetes or sabres. They seemed to be watching something.

I felt pressure on my shoulder and turned round, surprised. It was Thao. She smiled at me and I clearly remember appreciating, for the first time, the beauty and nobility of her face.

I have already mentioned her hair, which was long and silky, golden-blond in colour, which fell to her shoulders and framed a face that was perfectly oval in shape. She had a large, slightly protruding forehead.

Her blue-mauve eyes and long curled lashes would have been the envy of many women on our planet. Her eyebrows curved upwards, similar to the wings of a seagull, adding a unique charm. Under her eyes, which sparkled and sometimes teased, was her nose, well-proportioned and slightly flat at the bottom, which accentuated a sensual mouth. When she smiled, she revealed perfect teeth - so perfect, one could believe they were false. (This would have surprised me.) The chin, well-shaped but slightly angular, suggested a wilful determination that was somewhat masculine, but this did not detract from its charm. A faint shadow of hair above her upper lip could have spoiled this perfect face, were it not blond.

‘I see you already know how to free yourself from the force field, Michel.’

I was about to reply, when an almost general exclamation made us turn our eyes to the panel.

The people on the beach were surging back en masse towards the habitations and dived inside in one big rush, while a line of men had been formed armed with sabres or picks, facing the most incredible ‘thing’ I could ever have imagined.

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A group of red ants, *each the size of a cow*, were rushing from behind the rocks onto the beach. They moved quicker than horses in gallop.

The armed men kept glancing behind, as if to compare the speed at which the people scrambled to safety, with the advance of the ants. Already, the latter were near - too near...

The men faced them bravely as, with only a second's hesitation, the first beast attacked. We could distinguish the mandibles clearly - each the size of a man's arm. At first, the creature feigned, enabling the man to strike with his sabre, but he slashed only air. Immediately, the mandibles encircled his waist, severing him cleanly in two. Another pair of ants helped the first to shred him, while the rest launched their assault on the fleeing combatants, gaining rapidly on them - too rapidly...

From the sphere, an electric-blue beam of unbearable intensity shot out, just as the ants were upon the men. The creatures were struck dead, one after the other, with amazing precision and effectiveness. Curls of smoke rose from the burnt flesh of the animals strewn over the ground, their enormous legs convulsing in a last spasm.

The beam continued its devastation among the ants, instantly and systematically annihilating the giant insects. They must have known instinctively that they could not match this almost supernatural force and fled in retreat.

Everything had happened so quickly. Thao was still at my side, her face reflecting disgust and sadness, rather than anger.

Another glance at the panel revealed a new scene - of the sphere pursuing the ants in their hasty retreat, not only with the camera, but also with the deadly beam. The rest of the swarm, which I estimated to comprise six or seven hundred, were being decimated. Not one was left alive.

The sphere returned to its earlier position above the beach and produced a special tool with which it combed through the carcasses. I could see one of the astronauts seated at her desk, talking into her computer. This prompted me to ask Thao if she was supervising the work being carried out.

‘At the moment, yes, for this work was not originally scheduled. We are taking samples of these creatures, pieces of lung in particular, in order to analyse them. We think that certain types of radiation have produced this mutant form of creature. In fact, ants do not have lungs but the only logical explanation for their sudden gigantism is...’

Thao stopped short. The camera was relaying a picture of the men now re-emerging from their shelters, gesticulating wildly at the sphere. They were holding their arms open-wide and prostrating themselves on the ground. They repeated this pattern.

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‘Can they see this vessel?’ I asked.

‘No. We are at an altitude of 40 000 metres, and, further, there are presently three layers of cloud between the planet and us. On the other hand, they can see our satellite and I think it is to that they are addressing these gestures of gratitude.’

‘Perhaps they take the sphere to be a God which has saved them from ruin?’

‘It’s quite possible.’

‘Can you tell me what is happening? Who are these people?’

‘It would take too long to explain to you, Michel, especially now with so much activity in the vessel, but I can satisfy your curiosity by explaining briefly.’

‘These people are, in a way, the descendants of certain ancestors of people existing still on your planet. In fact, a group of their ancestors peopled a continent on the planet Earth about 250 000 of your Earth years ago. Here, they possessed a civilisation which was very advanced but, having raised enormous political barriers between themselves, they finally destroyed themselves, 150 years ago, with the atom.’

‘Do you mean - a total nuclear war?’

‘Yes, brought about by chain reaction. We come, from time to time, to take samples in order to study the degree of radiation still existing in various regions. Sometimes too, just as a few moments ago, we help them.’

‘But they must take you to be God himself after what you did just now!’

Thao smiled and nodded her head. ‘Ah yes, that’s certainly true, Michel. They take us to be gods, exactly as, on your planet, certain of your ancestors also took us to be gods. Still, they talk of us...

I must have shown complete surprise, as Thao threw me a look of amusement.

‘I told you a moment ago that my explanation is somewhat premature. We’ll have plenty of time to talk of this again. Besides, that’s why you are with us.’

With that, she excused herself and resumed her place in front of a ‘screen-desk’. The images were changing rapidly on the panel. The sphere was on its way up and we had a view of a whole section of the continent, on which, I noticed in places, patches of green and brown. The sphere took its place again within the vessel and we departed.

We flew over the planet at a breathtaking speed and I allowed myself to be imprisoned in my armchair by the force field.

On the screen were images of the waters of an immense ocean. We could distinguish an island, which 'grew' rapidly.