

## 1:Caldar

Caldar looked at the empty house across the street. The house to which his parents had retreated once they were no longer involved in the business of the House of the Golds. It was small, but the closest they could get to the 'dream house' they'd wanted when they first got married. It was fifty years now since his parents had made their last change and flown away to find their last resting place. Despite his age, two thousand years, old even by Dragonia standards, he still missed his parents guiding light, their leadership, their laughter, above all their love. When he'd first emerged from his egg on the planet Traymar he'd never imagined that such feelings would come to him; he was strong, he was powerful, and he was gold. His parents had taught him love and understanding. At first he found the concepts difficult to grasp; to serve instead of being served, to have friends to share life with rather than servants to order around. As he looked back to his previous life he could see that all he knew now had been strange to him then. Now he understood, his parents' ways were better.

He looked up into the sky where young dragons frolicked, he could even see a gold amongst them, unheard of in the past. *The past*, he sighed. His parents had brought him, his sisters, their partners, and some of their grandchildren to this planet of their birth. It was much changed from the time when they had left a thousand years before, but it had healed. Some humans had survived the asteroid disaster, and his parents had brought some other humans and prey animals from Traymar. *Ah, Traymar* he wondered if his feelings were similar to those that drove his parents to attempt the return to Earth. He would like to see Traymar once more.

Retracing his steps he entered the House of the Golds and made his way to the changing room. It seemed lonely now that his wife, his one and only mate, was no longer with him. He had used his gifts to stave off the inevitable for as long as he could, but no other colour lived as long as the golds, and he had had to let her go. He still had his sister Sylvana, and although she had her own suite, she now mainly stayed with him. Sylvana had also lost her mate, Strarnt, many years ago. Now the city of Ortuna no longer felt home. He changed to his dragon form and flew across the mountains to their original settlement, New Traymar, where he and Sylvana still had a dwelling. Entering his old home, he changed back to human form and walked slowly – nothing worked so well now – through the thriving town and out into the woodland beyond. He breathed deeply of the pure air, the fragrance of the forest renewing old memories. Then he returned to his New Traymar home and slept soundly.

The next day he again changed to his dragon form and flew to another part of the forest, away from New Traymar, and much too far to walk, where he changed back to human form and dressed in the clothes he had brought with him.

There, in a clearing deep within the trees and still standing proud, protected as it was by magic, was the building that housed *Starseeker*. He sighed again as he opened the door. *Starseeker* was now two millennia old and, once its power source had finally failed; it had not flown for almost a thousand years. He would try once more to get inside, for his father had told him that all *Starseeker's* drawings were inside and that these were the only true blueprints. *Would Starseeker let him aboard one last time?* He felt close to his parents every time he came here, as if they were willing him from wherever their spirits were, to get aboard and return to the planet of

his birth. The feeling was so strong now, he felt that there was even an urgent need to return to Traymar.

Caldar carefully opened the door to this museum, just enough that he could slip inside. The ramp to the entrance door of *Starseeker* was still down. Slowly and wearily, as he had done many times since his parents had flown off on their final journey, he made his way up the ramp and pressed his hand over the panel that should, but never before had, open the door. As before nothing happened, *Starseeker* remained silent. As a tear ran down his face Caldar kept his hand in place, partially for support. He didn't know how long he stood there, still as a stalking cat. Suddenly the panel glowed, and he almost fell as the door to *Starseeker's* interior slid silently open. He marvelled that after all this time it should open so smoothly and quietly. *But why now?*

Caldar carefully made sure that the door couldn't close behind him if the power failed again. Slowly he made his way through the vessel. It was so long since he'd been aboard it was hard to remember the way. Eventually he found the passage leading to the control room and hurried forward. *Now where did Dad say those plans were hidden?* Caldar looked around the room at the many glowing lights, some red, some yellow, only two were green. *Not good.* Caldar searched the room thoroughly trying not to wince when one of the yellow lights turned red. *The power is not going to last long.* He searched among the controls and deactivated a number of circuits that he would not need at this time. As he did so, two yellow lights turned green. *Good, that will give me a bit longer.* As Caldar looked around the room there seemed to be no place that he hadn't searched. *Oh come on Dad! Where did you hide them?* He swivelled on the stool he was sitting on, but not everything turned, not even the whole seat Caldar realised. He stood and looked closely at the stool; only the very top had turned, the seat itself was hollow. Caldar tried to twist the top off the seat but it wouldn't move. *Dad, just what did you do to this?* Caldar sat again on the seat and tried to swivel once more. This time the seat turned. Staying seated he turned himself around again and again. After the tenth turn he felt something give, at the same moment the door to the control room slid shut, many systems shut down and then cool dry air flowed over him. *Air control. It takes power, so Starseeker has shut down all that is unnecessary.* Caldar stood up once more, *If he broke something now.* He tried again to turn the top of the seat, now it turned without resistance and after only three more turns he had the seat in his hands. He look down. That was quite a space, and crammed into it were several large packages all labelled '*Starseeker*'. *I've found the blueprints, but after all this time how fragile will they be?*

Caldar gently pulled out the first package. To his delight this was the blueprint for the power source and its mountings. On the top because it was the last one his father had used when he had changed the power unit just before they left Traymar. It might be the only one he needed. *It should stay here,* he thought, then, *I need a copy. Sylvie! He needed Sylvie. She had a photographic memory.* He sighed as memories came back to him. Sylvie, his big sister, conceived after him but born human a few days before he had emerged from his egg as a dragon. He remembered his initial anger when his parents had named her Sylvana; he had sworn never to call her by that name, but only by her true gold name of Malene. He had been shown better ways and it was now many centuries since he had last called her Malene. Sylvie too had lost her partner, a red, many years ago. With Sylvie's attention her beloved Strarnt had lived far longer than normal for a red, but even she couldn't prevent the inevitable. Dragonia mate for life so he and Sylvie had been consoling each other since his mate had passed on. They had had time to study and

practice magic to much greater depths than before. In their early years they had studied and practiced for need, now they had studied and practiced for fun. Woe betide any who crossed them these days; even their grandchildren regarded them with awe at times.

Caldar sighed again; he hadn't come prepared for this. He put the package back where he had found it and sealed it in the stool. Immediately the flow of cool air stopped and the light display on the controls changed. He shut down as many functions as possible, he didn't know how long the sudden power in *Starseeker* would last. It be a disaster if the outer door shut and he couldn't get in again. Caldar reached out with his mind, but couldn't find Sylvie's mind. She was either too far away, or she was busy and concentrating on something else. He would have to go and find her. Caldar made his way through *Starseeker* and back to the exit ramp. Perhaps being inside *Starseeker* shielded his thoughts. He tried to contact Sylvie again to no avail. Nothing for it, he would have to return home and fetch her. He left *Starseeker's* door jammed open, no one came here these days, in fact most of the Dragonia on Earth had either forgotten *Starseeker* existed, or never been made aware that this museum was here and that their origins were not of this world. The door to *Starseeker* might be open, but once he left the museum Caldar sealed the museum's doors with magic, *just in case*. He turned away and sighed once more; a double return journey was not what he'd planned.

Caldar flew back to the House of the Golds in Ortuna where he called Sylvie once more with his mind, again she didn't respond. *Damn it! Where is she? I hope she's just asleep.* He went to the kitchen for some refreshment. "Anyone seen Sylvie?" he asked of those there.

"She went out some time ago," the red who loved to come and cook for him replied.

"I don't suppose she said where she was going or when she'd be back?"

"I'm afraid she didn't. She's been like that lately. Just going off and no one knows where she goes or when she'll be back."

"How long is she usually away?"

"She's usually back by sundown. Looks pleased with herself too. I worry about her, she sometimes has small burn marks on her face. I think she's found some new magic to practice and doesn't always get it right."

Caldar frowned. They weren't going to get back to *Starseeker* today. "I'm going to our suite," he said. "When she appears tell her I need to see her urgently."

"You can rely on me Caldar," the red said.

Caldar left the kitchen and went to the suite he had shared with Sylvie since soon after their partners had died. He saw the note on the table as soon as he entered the room. Picking it up he read 'Gone fishing, back at sundown.' "Gone fishing?" he muttered. *What is she up to?* A book lying beside one of their chairs caught his eye, he grabbed it and read its title. 'Harnessing the Elements: An advanced treatise'. He weighed the book in his hands. It was as if the book was calling to him. He looked more closely. This book was old. Very old. Carefully he opened the cover. This was not made from anything found on this planet, this was one of the few books they had brought with them from Traymar so long ago. Imbued with magic it had not decayed, nor had the writing faded. He sighed again, *I must stop doing that. Ah Traymar! My home.* He sat down wearily and allowed his thoughts to wander back to the time of his childhood and a planet so far away. *I would like to see it once more,* he thought before falling asleep in the chair. He dreamt of Traymar and his childhood. Remembered Sylvie's first flight when she had

scared her mother near to death, his own transformation from dragon to human a few days later, and his joy at finding that when he changed back to a dragon again, his wings were properly formed and he could fly. *Ah, the joy of the air.*

"Boo." Caldar was suddenly awake and momentarily confused as to where he was, one moment he was flying to the feeding grounds with his parents and sister, now he was pinned to his chair by that very same sister now grinning into his face. Much older now, she carried a graceful air with her, and, although aged beneath those lines, the beauty of old could still be seen if one cared to look.

"Heck Sylvie, you spoilt a wonderful dream."

"Come on old man, out with it. What's so urgent?"

"Less of the 'old man' thank you. I'm actually younger than you if you remember."

"By a few days only. You were spoilt having all that time in the egg."

"It was necessary. I had to teach our parents things they should have known."

"I thought I'd teach them too, but while in the womb I learnt a lot." She paused in thought. "Like you I remembered my old life, but Mum and Dad were so different."

"And so patient with both of us." Caldar closed his eyes again.

"Hey! None of that. What did you want that's so important?"

"Traymar. I'd like to go back." He said simply.

Sylvie stood and took a step back looking sharply and intently into her brother's eyes. "You know that's not possible," she said softly.

They moved to a couch and sat side by side. Caldar put his arm around his sister and she sank into his embrace. "Until today I had resigned myself to never seeing Traymar again."

"What's happened? Has someone come from there?"

"Nothing so dramatic. I went to the museum." For a moment Sylvie looked blank. "The building that houses *Starseeker*. I wanted one last look at the machine our father helped to build, and I thought if I could get inside *Starseeker* maybe I could find a way to make her fly again."

"*Starseeker* sealed herself after that last flight, when she almost crashed on her return. The door has never opened since."

"I went up the ramp and put my hand on the door," Caldar said. "I must have rested it there for a long time just wishing it would open."

Sylvie reached up and stroked his hair. "That's not like you; you're usually quite impatient."

"I know. I've been a pain to you and others at times."

Sylvie snorted.

"I was just about to take my hand away when the panel glowed and the door slid open. I nearly fell inside."

Sylvana came bolt upright. "*Starseeker's* door opened? You got inside?"