# Chapter 29

## Leaving Kvet

The crew had packed up their temporary home in Kvet. Able had felt that they had been there so long it almost seemed like his second home. What with studying with Nicolle, Rilla and now Xistra in the laboratory during the day and everyone having meals together in the evening, the crew had begun to feel like a family to him. He would miss it dearly, even though being underground meant eating more, which he really didn't care for.

The negotiations were exhausting and took weeks still, but in the end, a pact was worked out. The chimexapods would be allowed to stay, their hive could remain where it was. The Dustmyn would clear a circumference around it and ask citizens not to cross. The rest of the city on the ground could be re-occupied by the Dustmyn. Gef, with he help of Po, showed the Chimexapods how to build greenhouses like the ones that Ghendra had designed. The Dustmyn would help the construct it and in return receive some share of the substances that the chimexapods manufactured—an edible, sugary type of honey called sne, a savory nutritional paste called ev'cl, and a burnable fuel called stick-stick. The names, of course, were Dustmyn estimations of how they were pronounced. These supplies would also amount to a kind of rent. The chimexapods additionally agreed to pay reparations to the Dustmyn for the lives that were lost in the form of some precious metals.

Gef was chiefly concerned with communication between the two groups once the crew had moved on. Without Po, he wasn't sure how it could be done. At one point, he and Able, Nicolle and Xistra attempted to duplicate Po, hoping that perhaps it could be left behind with the Dustmyn for translation.

Standing around the laboratory table, Able, Gef and Nicolle watched as Xistra pulled back Po's shell. At Gef's behest, she had dawned a pair of metal gloves. The group was unsure if Po might attempt to "copy" Xistra as it had so many others; hopefully, the gloves would protect her from the effect. Once Xistra had the shell pealed back, she traced her finger along numerous lines on one side of the qubit at the center of Po.

Just as with Nip, the quiet shimmered and Xistra pulled a copy of the device out of itself, each copy containing a checkered version of the other, such that each qubit was now half the surface area of the other with gaps and holes. However, once separated, the devices quickly repaired the gaps and holes, filling it in with electrol that Xistra had.

For a brief moment, there were then two Pos sitting on the laboratory table. Almost as soon as that was the case, one Po approached the other and burbled a noise like a question. The other Po responded with a disgusted blat and the two Pos absorbed one another. The remaining Po sighed and sang a brief song.

"What was that?" Asked Gef.

Xistra looked on, perplexed. "I've no idea. I've never seen that happen before."

"Po," said Able, "do you not want a copy of yourself to talk to?"

Po ambled across the table toward Able and chirped.

Xistra asked, "What did it say?"

Able closed one eye, "It just wants to be the only one."

Nicolle stroked her chin, "What if we separated them once they were copied?"

The team tried this as well. Once the two Pos were on the table, Xistra took one to one side of the room and Nicolle (with gloves) to the other. But they were not more than several feet apart before the Pos began vibrating uncontrollably. Vibrating might not even be the word for it, as to Nicolle and Xistra the Pos appeared to be in their hands, then around their hands, then outside of their hands, appearing as transparent ghosts all around the room, glowing brightly, moving more rapidly until they simply appeared back on the laboratory table again, sitting next to one another, where the one absorbed the other, sighed and chirped.

"What the..." Said Gef. Nicolle and Xistra looked at their own hands in amazement. What they had felt was utterly strange, like trying to hold a cloud of lightning.

Able just laughed and laughed. He walked over to Po and pet it. "Just the one then," said Able. Po purred.

A laugh came from the door tot he lab. It was Wacamolo. "Trouble with your automaton?" asked the old nomex.

Gef looked and shrugged. "It won't copy—not in any way we can find."

Wacamolo shuffled over to the table and threw a heavy, newly-bound book on the table. "My strategy is a bit less technical, I'll admit, but I think it will do."

Wacamolo worked with Po for a few days, and as he had done with his new guide to the Archelux, he used Po to print in the new book. He created a kind of dictionary made out of columns on each page containing a Dustmyn word, followed by a phonetic version of the word spelled out in the Dustmyn alphabet, a phonetic version of the way the chimexapods would say such a word, and then finally the chimexapodian ideograph for the word. Then, Wacamolo pressed and bound another book and had Po create a second version of the first, but this time with the columns reversed and the order of the words changed.

The translation texts were handed off to dustmyn and chimexapod scholars. With them and with study, some of each group would learn to be translators in time. Both present at the presentation of the volumes, Alharih and the chimexapod queen, Zzxclk Flckflck Xymmm, were wholly impressed that such a thing could even be created. The queen told Gef, "[We know of legends of you daemons that would suggest you could accomplish feats such as this. We hope we are wrong in thinking that you caused the Shattering. Perhaps you truly can repair the Inverted Mountain.]"

"[We will certainly try, your majesty.]"

The road to Siltstone was a large tunnel that switched back and forth to control the descent from the upper reaches of Kvet down to the coastline of the Silt Sea. There were a series of elevators for some things and people; too small for Arthra. The crew opted to walk with her, and the Dustmyn moved the expeditions' gear through the transport system. They had collected new equipment, and thanks to the Chimexapods, barrels of sne, ev'cl and stick-stick. The Dustmyn had provided provisions as well and there would be more available onboard the silt ship that the crew was to board.

On the walk through the tunnel, Gef had said to Able, "You have created quite the expedition, Able."

Able looked at him, not understanding 'expedition'.

Gef said, "In more ancient times, before the world was totally known, people gathered groups and equipment like this in order to explore. Those trips were known as expeditions. It's a trip you take when you don't know where you're going. Think: all this started with you and Po, Nip, and Ka coming out of Idex Mortez. Now look." Gef gestured behind them where Wacamolo and Rilla sat atop Arthra going over a tome, Nicolle and Xistra were walking and exchanging ideas, Ka'Rolly lay on its back at the end of Arthra, and of course all four of Nip were hovering nearby and Po sat snug in a bag in Able's pack. "It's truly amazing what you've accomplished."

Able felt a strange feeling: one of weight, not unwanted, but at the same time, foreign to him. "I didn't really do all this."

Gef pat him on the back. "Your honesty, courage and perseverance did. Your belief in the preciousness of life did. It brought us all together. You did that. Don't forget it."

Able was silent. He did not know what to do with such a vast sentiment.

The trip to Siltstone took two days, and on the night of the first, Wacamolo gathered Rilla and Able, got out his go board, and said, "I want to tell you a story, children." Having secured their equipment, Nicolle and Xistra sat to listen as well.

"There once was a chimexapod named Ix. As you may or may not know, the chimexapod people consist of drones and queens. The queens oversee hives and the creation of new chimexapods. The drones look after their queen and are either scouts or caretakers. The scouts fly out into the world to gather supplies for the creation of all the materials the chimexapods require. They also defend the hive when necessary. The caretakers use these supplies to manufacture sne, ev'cl and stick-stick. They repair the hive, grow it, and feed and look after the queen and her young.

"And just so you know, now and again, a new queen is born. When this happens, there is war. It is not obvious for some time what chimexapod child is to become the queen. So, from time to time, a scout will see a child among the brood that they think might be a queen. The scout will steal this child away and raise it in a hidden part of the hive. Sometimes the child simply is another drone and then the two chimexapods have a unique relationship, but the child will only become a new scout for the hive. Ix, in fact, was a fifth generation scout. Sometimes, rarely, the child turns out to be a queen, in which case the scout will gather other scouts and some caretakers, steal the child queen away and start a new hive. The old caretakers will attempt to kill this new queen.

Rilla asked, "Why?"

"It is because of something that all living creatures possess: instinct. When your comes near a flame, you must pull it away."

"That's because it hurts," said Rilla.

"Not me," said Able.

"Really?" Asked Rilla. Able nodded.

"Yes, children, instinct is often driven by pain and pleasure. Rilla, it does not feel good when you don't get to eat for a time."

"Yeah," Rilla put her hand on her stomach.

"I feel better when I'm in the sunshine."

"Yes," said Wacamolo. "Different creatures have different instincts. But, there is something in all of us that compels us to act is my point. And among chimexapods, a new queen is a threat to the old queen. And drones protect the queen at even the cost of their own lives."

"Now, Ix hated his life in the hive. He could never explain it, but he didn't like what his tasks were. He wanted to stay in the hive, in the shade. Going out into the sun was a nuisance. Gathering pollen was irritating. Showing other drones where to go to collect more pollen was silly. He dreamed of being a caretaker. But that would never happen unless he could find a new queen. So, during his idle hours, he would look among the brood, at the eggs, trying to find one that seemed like a queen."

"One day came and he was sure he had found a new queen. He stole the egg away to a quiet part of the hive, near the bottom. He stole away sne to bath it in. (Chimexapod eggs absorb nutrients through their shells.) After a time, the egg hatched and Ix began to raise the pupa."

"The what?" asked Able.

"Chimexapods are born as grub-like creatures that gradually grow their shell and legs and wings."

"Weird," said Rilla.

"Not really. You, at one point, were quite like a grub, but you did your growing inside your mother."

"Ew!" said Able.

"Shut up! You probably grew out of a... a... toy."

"Rilla," Wacamolo admonished her.

"Well, what did Able grow out of?"

"Able was born the way he is now."

"Oh." Rilla looked at Able, who shrugged.

"Children, please pay attention. Ix raised the young chimexapod until one day he saw that it was to be a new queen. He began gathering other drones he thought he could trust and brought them to see her. Most were immediately charmed. She was beautiful. And after a time, Ix and his followers made plans to take the queen to a new land and start a new hive."