THE COLONIZERS

 The huge, black rectangular crafts suddenly appeared, floating on the world’s oceans, in the year 2051.

 There were dozens of them, and they had evaded the radar detections of every military defense system on the planet. They measured about five city blocks long, by two city blocks wide, by a half-city block high. Armed reconnaissance patrols from the Earth’s major powers, by air and ship, rushed to confront the extraterrestrial crafts.

 When the mysterious vessels opened to reveal their occupants, the troops were taken aback in awe and surprise. They were presented with several seven-foot tall, 800 lb. creatures wearing enveloping graphite grey uniforms and matching helmets. When the strangers removed their helmets, dripping water, their heads and faces resembled those of bottlenose dolphins. Removing a headset filter from the top of their heads, the aliens revealed a breathing blowhole like the familiar Earth marine mammal. The main differences, however, were a protruding forehead which appeared to indicate superior intelligence, and the fact that these beings could stand upright and move out of water.

 “Greetings. We come in peace.” They communicated telepathically to each nation and culture across the globe, each in their own language, simultaneously. All humans heard the message, wherever they happened to be. “Do not be afraid.”

 The visitors went on to explain where they came from.

 “We come from an Earth-sized planet which we call Lexia and which you call Proxima b. As you know, it is 4.2 light years away, orbiting the closest star to Earth, Proxima Centauri – our Sun -- in the Alpha Centuri AB system. Our Sun is very dim compared to yours, yet it emits excessive radiation. Our species, the Lexians, have evolved as a race of water dwellers for protection from those harmful rays. But because our atmosphere has degraded over millennia, much of our habitable water is gradually yet alarmingly evaporating into space. We have sent out probes throughout the neighboring galaxies, looking for a new planet to eventually colonize. That is why we are here now.”

 The military forces noticed no visible weaponry or hostility displayed during this initial pronouncement, so they stood down with their armaments and continued to cautiously listen.

 “About 10,000 years ago as your race measures time, Lexian scouts first arrived on your planet. This was largely before your so-called human civilization began to develop, so we were undetected. We were amazed at the abundance of sea life in your oceans, and the fact that your planet was 70% life-enhancing water. The scouts brought with them a special sea plant enzyme from Lexia which is essential for our form of life. They introduced this enzyme into your waters, where it developed perfectly over thousands of years and was undetectable by your scientists. Periodically, over your centuries, the Lexian scouts were replaced by fresh recruits. Because we resembled your own dolphins -- only smaller and lighter in weight -- we blended in effortlessly. Under cover of your night, we eavesdropped on human conversations near the seashores around your world – even leaving the water secretly for short periods. We learned all about your habits, your thoughts, and your desires. Your ingenuity and determination over the years was commendable as you organized your societies, but your propensity for violence and destruction was appalling. We were also perplexed that you had named your planet Earth, when it was only 30% land. So we renamed it ‘Liqua’ instead, in honor of your abundant water supply. Of all the planets we had investigated over thousands of years, yours was the most suitable for us to colonize. We were forced to come now before you irreversibly ruined your own precious planet with your persistent air, land, and water pollutants. Plus we could not ensure that your nuclear weaponry would not render Liqua uninhabitable through uncontrolled warfare someday soon.”

 The people of the world were now very, very worried about what they were hearing and gradually comprehending. This alien encounter was taking a decidedly negative turn.

 The Lexians continued. “So, to be concise, we need your planet. And we need you to leave. We prefer that this transition be peaceful, but we have brought a deadly sealed toxin which we will release into your atmosphere if you resist. It will render death to every human being within 48 of your hours. Plants, land-sea-air animals, and other lesser forms of life will be unaffected. We warn you not to make us utilize it. Finally, we have dis-assembled several Time Portals and have brought them with us from Lexia. We have selected a suitable new planet for your species to move to. Every human being on Liqua will be safely and instantaneously transported to this new Earth, if you choose to name it so. Within 60 of your days, all of your people will be gone together to a new part of the galaxy. Each person will be able to carry anything they want – as much as they can carry in one load -- but no weaponry of any kind will be allowed. Your children can even bring their pets. We will then transport a one-year supply of preserved food and water to get your new colony started. Because some of your kind consume animal flesh, we will also transport an ample supply of your livestock, as well as suitable seeds for growing your plant food crops. We can also provide a type of what you call ‘thought control’, to make any fearful or reluctant humans totally compliant and orderly during this transition.”

 The 60-day countdown began immediately for the people of Earth/Liqua. Given the threat of world-wide toxic extermination, there was little point in dissent or refusal. The Lexians deftly assembled their Time Portals on every continent. The Portals were enormous, roughly the size of circular soccer fields, powered by a new energy source never even imagined before in our solar system. The Lexians, once their Portal assembly tasks were completed, spent long periods of time out of their space crafts and water-infused spacesuits, swimming and enjoying the waters of Liqua’s oceans. While their heads largely resembled our own bottlenose dolphins and their bodies were light grey and smooth-skinned, their flippers were more like webbed hands and feet, and there was a smaller dorsal fin. When moving upright, they slowly wobbled to and fro much like Emperor penguins. They appeared to be able to communicate with the other creatures of the deep as well. The Lexians seemed to act more as friends and allies -- and less as conquerors -- towards the other animals of the sea. A final act was to bring the remaining four million Lexians through the various Time Portals to Liqua. This was easily accomplished.

 The human population of the Earth in 2051 was close to one billion, down from seven billion just three decades earlier due to a global experiment in genetic manipulation gone horribly wrong. Soon, as the 60-day deadline approached, the last human beings stepped with their families and friends into the various Time Portals in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. (The scientific community in Antarctica was evacuated to one of the South American Portals, and any island nation peoples were similarly transferred to the nearest continental Portal.)

 But when the humans arrived at their new home planet through the mirror-opposite Exits of the Time Portals, they were utterly shocked. What they assumed would be a similar -- if not a better -- environment proved to look instead like parts of Utah or the desert Southwest in the United States, or like much of the desolate planet Mars. The landscape colors were mostly brown, orange, and purple. There were limited sources of water, and unidentifiable vegetation, and the soil was not rich. Gravity was largely Earth-like, and the atmosphere was breathable but somewhat thin. The sun was closer, yet unusually dim, which gave the sky a dark cobalt color. Measuring equipment, however, detected dangerous above average radiation. Upon closer exploration over the coming days, the Earthlings discovered abandoned dwellings and discarded artifacts left by another race of beings – all near sources of water like lakes and rivers, which all indicated dropping water levels like during prolonged drought. It was then that the people of Earth realized that they had been tricked, and that they were not on a pristine, promised planet.

 They were, in fact, on Lexia.

 Not knowing how to reverse the Time Portal mechanisms, they could not walk back through the Exits and take their chances back on Earth against the Lexians.

 Assorted leaders stepped up to the challenge of sheer survival in these dire – some would say hopeless – circumstances. The humans were assembled into communities of a thousand people each, then linked together through primitive communication networks.

 “We have to build shelters underground. We have to ration our food supplies and try to plant our food crops. We have to rebuild our entire civilization here, starting today. It will take time before we are self-supporting enough to have hospitals, schools, churches, and a working global economic and governmental system again. But we have no alternative,” the leaders proclaimed. “It might take a hundred years or longer. But we can do it. We must do it. We bought many books and tools and some technology with us. We still have our brains and our muscles and a thousand interrelated skills. And there will come a day when we will be capable of returning to our beloved home planet of Earth through the very Portals which so cruelly and deceptively brought us here.”

 So the people of Earth got to work on the foreign lands of Lexia. Through struggle and setbacks and deaths and new births, they clawed their way back from almost certain extinction, fighting for species survival, generation after generation. Scientists particularly seemed to work miracles in regards to the efficient utilization of water and in adapting new methods for consistent food production.

 It took almost two hundred years of sweat and toil for the human race to progress to the point where they finally figured out how to operate the Lexian Time Portals. It was mankind’s finest hour. The time of humanity’s galactic exile was over at last, and the reverse exodus HOME was ready to begin. People assembled with a few keepsakes at the various Portal sites for the near-instantaneous journey back to Earth, a real place none of them had ever seen, but a place they knew about in minute detail from their ancestors – almost like a wondrous, mythic fantasyland.

 But what the people of Earth couldn’t know yet at their supreme moment of triumph was that the Lexians had destroyed the Time Portals on Earth/Liqua immediately after the last human being had gone – almost two hundred years earlier…

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

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