

DISTRICT 41

(Part 2 in *The Community Series*)

By Philip Rainford

Read Part 1 – Seeds in Exile [here](#)

The last thing Richard remembered was being shot by his dying ex-wife in the main street of the little town they escaped to from their dying world. He awoke to find himself in an unfamiliar bedroom. Outside it was daytime; bright clear skies he could see through the window. A big change from the grey radioactive world he and his team had escaped. How had they done that?

Then he recalled their passage through the gateway from their dying world to this untouched community in the mountains who had been unaware of the desperate refugees entering their world. At first, they'd been hostile until they realised a greater threat existed from his ex-wife's bandits and her desire for revenge against him.

He staggered to his feet and found his legs gave way; his fall attracted attention and someone who looked familiar came to his rescue. The face was older, but it was Doc. "What happened?"

"You've been in a coma for nine years," was the reply as he helped him back into bed. "It's good to see you finally awake."

"Nine years?"

"Allow me to fill you in, but first you need to get back into bed and let me check you over. Then you need to build up the strength in your muscles that have atrophied over that time, despite Mouses efforts to keep them operational."

"Mouse?"

"Yes, she's massaged and exercised your legs and arms twice a day for the last nine years. Otherwise you'd have wasted away. She'll be very glad to see you're awake. So will the whole town."

Richard lay back and tried to come to grips with nine years gone as memories flooded his mind. His first thoughts were of Canny. The reality of her loss became too real. He pictured himself bending over her body, her face framed by her once beautiful hair which lay matted and dirty about her head. He imagined her looking peaceful as if asleep. She had looked like that when they had slept together, her arm lying across his stomach resting peacefully as she slept.

“Richard!” The cry came from his bedroom door and there stood Mouse. She still looked frail, but she was more confident, more sure of herself as she approached. “How are you feeling?”

“A bit weak but I understand I have you to thank for keeping me in good nick.” She smiled with pleasure and automatically checked my legs.

Mouse spent a lot of time working on getting him mobile over the next few weeks. Mouse and Doc decided not to announce to the community that he had awoken, they knew they’d be swamped by visitors so they just quietly worked on getting him able to walk unaided.

Finally, Richard felt like going it alone. Mouse wanted to go with him, and Doc was pressuring him to allow it but Richard stubbornly refused, he wanted some time alone.

First, he found his way to the edge of town where the sporting store had once stood. It had been rebuilt and he wondered if old Pete still ran it. He walked back towards the town hall where he’d had the showdown with Carmen and where Canny had been killed. Mouse had given him directions to her grave and soon he stood there as tears welled up as memories flooded his mind of the good times they’d had together.

After that he wandered around in a slight daze. The town had changed, it was bigger. People passed him going about their business; no one recognised him and when he got lost many people ignored him, assuming him drunk as he was still unsteady on his feet. Finally, he became totally disoriented, his legs were giving way from the strain of him overdoing it. Eventually he found someone who took pity on him. “Are you alright?” queried a stranger who noticed him staggering down the street.

“Just tired, can you direct me to the ‘Saviours House’?”

“What do you want there? They don’t accept uninvited visitors,” the stranger warned becoming concerned at Richard’s plight. He looked pale and very unsteady.

“They expect me,” replied Richard, weakly.

“Then you need to go down Main Street to your left here at the far corner you’ll see a sign.” Richard nodded and staggered off but didn’t get far. “Here, let me help you.” The stranger helped him downhill along Main Street to the corner; they followed the sign to the third house along with a high brick fence, iron gate and a security guard on station. The stranger left him there and Richard approached the gate. As he’d left by a locked back entrance, the guard did not know him so he was challenged as he approached the gate.

“I live here,” replied Richard to the challenge.

“I’ve never seen you before, move on! Request an audience when you’re sober.”

“I’m not drunk; I need to see Mouse, tell her it’s Richard. She’ll let you in,” he pleaded as he felt his legs give way beneath him.

“Move or I’ll have you arrested,” warned the guard as Richard collapsed at his feet. “Wake up you rotten drunk,” yelled the guard kicking Richard to arouse him. When he got no response, he checked him closer and saw he was unconscious and called an ambulance.

Mouse enjoyed reading and in this world there was a wealth of new literature while at the same time she missed the classics of her world that had not made it into this one. As a librarian in her former life she had wondered where these books came from until she discovered they made their way across the world migrating from one community to another.

When she heard the ambulance, she didn’t take any notice, it was a small town and everyone heard everything. Her mind drifted back to that awful day when they’d come to this town. She had seen Richard fall after Carmen had fired her near fatal shot. She had rushed to him oblivious of anything else as she was joined by Doc.

“Will he be alright?” she had asked her voice laced in fear.

“He’s not breathing! Help me!” urged Doc as he tried to revive Richard, they worked for some time until his heart restarted, his breathing shallow. Officer Scrutney had called the ambulance, its siren sounded distant as it approached her mind focused on Richard as he was carried away. Doc joined him in the ambulance as it drove away leaving her alone in the street.

It was Scie who had come over to join her, placing his hand gently on her shoulder. She reacted instantly bursting into tears as she buried her head in his shoulder. The rest of their group had gathered around watching the ambulance disappear around a corner. Around them the street was littered with bodies as townspeople lined them up in rows after checking for life signs.

Scrutney approached them his face solemn. “I misjudged you people, I’m sorry and we are all very grateful for saving our community. Will there be any more like this?”

It was Husk who now spoke for the group. “Maybe a few but in a few days nothing will be alive back there and Scie tells us the doorway has closed.”

“You are truly our Saviour, we have never experienced such violence in all our history. On behalf of my people you are all welcome to stay.”

“Thank you, we’ll probably accept.”

Scrutney smiled weakly and walked off to assist in supervising the clean-up.

“Will we never return to our world?” asked Mouse thinking back to her old life. Scie shook his head slowly, it was then she noticed he was wounded and insisted he go to hospital. Together they set off on foot away from the death.

Scie found her staring into space her mind obviously elsewhere as he went to the window. All he could see was the flashing light of the ambulance, the fence too high to allow any further detail. “Any idea what’s happening out there?” he asked. She didn’t respond. “Mouse!” he called firmly.

She jumped as she became aware of him in the room. “What happened?” she asked anxiously her emotions still stuck in the past, her senses alert to danger.

“The ambulance outside, any idea what’s going on?”

“I wasn’t watching,” she replied still distracted but rose to join Scie at the window. Scie went to the intercom link with the gate. “What’s going on out there?” he demanded of the guard.

“Just a drunk, sir. Collapsed in the street,” reported the guard. Scie cut the link.

“Where’s Richard?” asked Mouse.

The gurney was unloaded from the ambulance and wheeled into the hospital. The hospital for a community this size was small with six private rooms, three wards of four beds, an ER, an operating room and reception. Doc heard a patient was coming in so he was waiting in the ER when Richard arrived. Doc recognised him instantly. “What happened?”

“Collapsed in the street, apparently drunk!” reported the ambulance medic.

Doc smelt his breath. “Not drunk!” he declared having detected no alcohol. Now he guessed the problem, Richard had pushed himself too hard on his weakened limbs. “Get him to a private room!” he ordered.

A short time later, in the private room with his head nurse. “This man collapsed, see how limp his muscles are, this man has been bed ridden for some time. He needs rest and when he comes around, we need to place him on a rehab program.”

“Yes, doctor,” agreed the nurse.

Mouse answered the call from the gate and admitted Doc. By this time she was getting quite anxious about Richard. When Doc entered she announced Richard’s disappearance.

“He’s fine, he’s in the hospital. He collapsed. Why did you let him go out alone?”

“You ever tried to tell Richard anything?” replied Mouse relieved and angry at the same time. Richard had been selfish and put himself in danger. “I need to go to him!”

Doc stopped her. “And have everyone wonder why one of the Saviours is interested in him. He said he wanted to remain anonymous until he regained his strength.”

“What do you suggest?” she asked her usually placid face dark with anger.

“That we admit him and put him in a rehab program. This could be for the best, we can treat him openly there,” stated Doc.

“How long?”

“I’m afraid it could take months to rebuild his muscle strength. You’ve done a great job but now he needs different care that only rehab can do.”

Richard woke to find himself in a hospital with a sternest faced elderly nurse he’d ever encountered bending over him. “Who are you? Where am I?”

“You’re in hospital, you collapsed in the street and were brought here,” she stated as his memory of the stubborn guard came back. After that it was blank. “What is your name?”

He hesitated unsure what to say then decided. “Richard.”

“Just Richard? No other name?” Richard shook his head uncertain. “Where are you from? You’re new to town!”

He struggled to get his thoughts together; he didn’t want to reveal much until he knew more. “Nowhere in particular, can I go now?” he went to rise and was firmly forced to lie back down.

“You’re not going anywhere!”

When Doc arrived, he came alone. “Am I glad to see you! What’s going on?” Doc was not happy, Richard could see he was about to be reprimanded.

“You stupidly went for a walk and collapsed. Now the town knows you are here but as a stranger who’s recuperating in the hospital. We’ll put together some story but for now you will be here for a few months using our rehab program to build your muscle strength. So sit back and do what you’re told. Is that clear? No arguments!”

Richard did not sleep well that night, dreaming of the rickety little cross that had been erected over Canny's grave. In his dream he stood there for hours blaming himself for her death as the dark clouds dumped their poisonous load of black rain upon the earth.

Richard was assisted into the rehab room by Doc. The place reminded him of a gym with exercise equipment, walking bars, treadmills and weights. Already present were two other men, an elderly man, and a young man both exercising. "Hey Doc! Got another victim to torture?" joked the young man who was lifting weights.

"That right Kel, this is Richard," replied Doc.

"Good day mate, haven't seen you around before?"

"I travel a lot," replied Richard a bit abruptly. He was not feeling up to socialising and the idea of being here for several months did not cheer him up.

"I'm Levi Kent," stated the older man stepping forward to introduce himself. Welcome to rehab. I hope we can be friends as we'll be spending a bit of time together," stated Levi a big beam on his weather-beaten face as he left the treadmill.

Richard softened and smiled. "I hope so too."

"Good!" interrupted Doc. "Now that intros are done we need you to start working." Doc led Richard over to a piece of equipment and got Richard to lie on his back. At his feet were two large pedals, more like blocks than those on a bike. "Ok Richard, as you press one pedal the other comes up, gradually the pressure will increase making it harder to push it; if it gets too hard press this button." He indicated a yellow button on the left of where he was lying. "Now commence!"

Richard started pushing but after a dozen pushes on each leg, he found he couldn't proceed. They were not easy to push even at the first go. Doc lowered the pressure and he started again. "Just keep going a little longer and we'll call it a day."

"But I haven't achieved anything!" complained Richard frustrated by his weakened state. Doc saw his reaction, he knew it was normal especially for an independent personality like Richard but he didn't want him straining himself. A little each day was what was required, it would be a slow, frustrating process, a process Richard was going to fight and attempt to complete quickly, resulting in damaging himself. He would need to be supervised.

A few weeks later, Richards was feeling better in that he was able to sustain the pushing of the pedals for a time he considered reasonable. He completed his work out there and went over to start the weightlifting. This involved sitting in a chair and pulling down on cords that lifted weights.

Kel had just completed his workout and although they'd spoken, their conversations had been stilted and brief. He felt that Richard was distancing himself from him, hiding something he was afraid to have revealed. "Hey Richard! You hear that District 41 is putting up posters around town claiming we fall under their jurisdiction."

"Not likely, stuck in here all day. What does that mean?" replied Richard grumpily.

"It means that the Governor over there wants to control us. But we're an independent sovereign community. They can't do that unless we agree, and no one here is going to agree nor is any other satellite community within range of the District."

"And if you refuse what will they do?"

"No choice, they'll have to back off," replied Kel walking off with a pleasant smile, happy to have actually had a small conversation with Richard, a victory in his mind. Richard on the other hand was not so sure the Governor would back off. He didn't trust people who made power grabs.

Sandy squatted by the roadside outside the town hall scratching in the dirt while several District Officers put up posters out front. These posters were declaring the community was now part of District 41. The proclamation was quite clear, they were taking over. People walking past read the notices and walked on scoffing at the Governor. They also ignored Sandy as she read the signs in the dust.

"The shadow of violence falls again over this community. Beware danger is afoot!"

"Crazy woman," commented one man as they passed her by.

Later that day, she wandered off up a nearby hill to her shack, a one room tin structure smaller than a single car garage. In it was a bed, a table, and a wood fire stove. It was decorated with crystals that hung from the ceiling or sat on shelves. As it grew dark, she prepared a meal and went to bed.

Scie stared at the sky through his telescope. He often did that a night and jotted down what he found, mapping the sky as he worked. Mouse found him out there and sat beside him without saying a word. She knew that would distract him. It was a pleasant warm night, clear skies, no city glare; perfect for watching the sky in all its glory.

"This is not the same sky we had in our reality," he stated suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

“I’m not an astronomer but I did know a little about the main constellations and they are not here, none of them.”

“Is that a problem?” she enquired.

“No, but it means that if the theory of multiple realities is true then each parallel reality should only be slightly different from the one before then we are many realities from our own. So far in fact I doubt we could ever find our way back even if we knew how to reopen that gateway.”

“Do we really want to go back, Scie?”

“No, I’m talking theoretically. I also can’t find Pluto, it’s simply not there and Jupiter here has rings as bright as Saturn.”

Richard closed his locker after drying his hair. He’d just completed his daily workout and was now well on the way to recovery. He had made friends with Levi and Kel and become acquainted with others who came and went from the Gym. He was enjoying the care free life, he’d never felt so relaxed, no responsibilities, no pressures, just his focus on getting his strength back.

Kel emerged from the shower and caught Richard. “How’s it going, Richard?” he asked as he approached his locker wrapped in a towel. They were not alone, Levi was also changing and in the background others were changing and joking. The locker room itself was just as you’d expect a locker room to be, rows of metal lockers that clanged when doors were shut, the tiled floor echoing the sound of voices.

Richard smiled at his friend. “It would appear I’m going well, may even be discharged in a few weeks, maybe less.”

“Can’t say we’ll miss you,” joked Kel as he dropped his towel to put on his underwear.

Richard laughed. “Can’t get rid of me that easy; I’ll be back to maintain fitness.”

“So not planning to go back where you came from?”

Richard shook his head. “No, can’t do that. I can never go back there,” replied Richard thinking of the radioactive world he’d left behind all those years ago, which to him was only weeks.

“Want to share?” queried Kel who’d been hinting for weeks he was curious about Richard’s origins. He knew Richard had a secret and now he knew it was linked to his place of origin.

“Maybe one day, maybe one day,” replied Richard as he hung his towel on an overhead line to dry. They both continued to dress while Levi joined them.

“Hey you guys, you hear District 41 entered the community and started throwing their weight around? Apparently the mayor told them to go home but they refused.”

“What do they want? They can’t just come in and tell us what to do!” stated Kel.

“Well, that’s what they’re doing! They claim they gave notice, you know those posters they put up?” Both Richard and Kel acknowledged they knew. “Well now they’re moving in on us!”

“I was afraid of this,” stated Richard. “Men in power often get over ambitious. They could cause big trouble.”

“No one took those posters seriously, by law they can’t move in on us without our consent,” objected Kel.

“What can they do?” added Levi, his voice conveying both fear and concern. Memories of the battle to protect the community flooding back. “Our people won’t accept their governorship!” A door slammed and they all turned to see three men in sandy coloured uniforms enter. They carried no rank or insignia, but they were armed and had a round gold badge on their chest. “Here comes trouble!”

The officers walked straight up to Richard. “You Richard McCarthy?”

Kel and Levi recognised the name as that of the leader of the Saviours. They were taken aback by the accusation; everyone knew McCarthy was in a coma.

“Who’s asking?” replied Richard standing his ground and showing no signs of submission.

“The Imperial Guard of District 41, you are under arrest for conspiring against Division 41.”

Richard gave them an amused smile. “That would difficult given that person has been in a coma for several years.”

“You will come with us,” ordered the officer patiently but he was suppressing his real feelings.

Levi, standing on Richard’s left stepped forward but remained behind Richard as if using as a barrier. “You have no jurisdiction here; we are an independent sovereign community. Your authority only extends here if one of our people commits a crime within District 41.”

“This community is now part of District 41,” replied the officer in a tone that was not expected to be challenged. But it was heard by everyone in the locker room.

Kelvin on Richard's right stepped forward. "We don't accept any District 41 authority!" The rest of the locker room formed up behind them.

"None the less we are arresting this man!" The officer stepped forward with handcuffs at the ready. Richard stood his ground but did not offer his hands to be cuffed.

"Not happening, officer. I advise you to turn around and go home before someone gets hurt," warned Richard. He watched as the officer put away his cuffs and drew his handgun. As he raised it Richard grabbed the barrel with one and placed his thumb in the trigger area preventing it from being fired before wrenching it from the officer's hand and aiming it back at its owner.

The other officers went for their guns, but Richard warned them. "Don't! Or I'll shoot your friend here! Now place them gently on the floor!" The other officers complied reluctantly without checking with their boss. "Gentlemen! Give your Imperial Leader a message! This community does not recognise the rule of District 41. Do not return! Now go!" he ordered.

"What about our guns?" asked the officer.

"Put in a claim, you're not allowed to carry weapons within the confines of this community." They decided not to argue further and fled.

"Are you really Richard McCarthy?" asked Levi. Richard nodded. "Why the deception?"

"Didn't want to be seen in my weakened state, not good for my image," replied Richard as he went to pick up the remaining pistols.

"I knew you had a secret!" announced Kel pleased to finally discover it.

"So what now?" asked Levi.

Richard was aware that everyone in that locker room was asking the same question and looking to him for an answer. "I'm not sure but I think we just opened a door we might regret opening."

Richard arrived alone at the Saviours House to find the same guard on duty. "You recognise me?" asked Richard but the guard did not. "I need to see Mouse urgently!"

"You have an appointment?" he asked arrogantly.

"Just tell her Richard is here," Richard stated authoritatively. He wasn't going to be intimidated by this man again.

"No appointment, no admittance," he replied with a satisfied smirk sensing Richard's hidden hostility.

“I’m only going to tell you once, tell Mouse Richard is here!”

The guard stood his ground defiantly. “I can’t do that! Now move on or I’ll have you arrested!”

Richard smiled pleasantly at the guy then without warning struck with an upper cut to the throat and rammed him into the wall. “Call Mouse!” he ordered.

The guard still pinned to the wall reached for the intercom. He pressed a button and in a hoarse voice spoke. “Intruder Alert! Secure Premises!”

Richard threw him aside. “Mouse! Its Richard!”

Inside Mouse had not had time to react to the alarm and relaxed. “Guard! Let him in!”

Having received his orders the guard got back on his feet and opened the gate, his anger, embarrassment and a desire to kill this man obvious in both his manner and expression.

Mouse met him in the driveway. “What are you doing here? You’re not supposed to be released for at least another week?”

“We have a problem; can you get the mayor and the Police Commissioner to come here?”

Mouse became worried, she knew Richard and he was worried. “I think so.”

“Get them here!” he ordered and went inside. Mouse followed.

Mayor Grayson and the Police Commissioner arrived with a half hour. Richard asked them to explain the political situation in the area, which the Mayor proceeded to do. He pointed out that the land was divided into Districts which in Richard’s world would have been called cities, but no city was smaller than 20,000 nor bigger than 50,000. Regional communities existed as independent bodies trading with the local District and had little contact with other Districts or communities outside the radius of that District.

District 41 was governed by an ambitious man by the name of Cravenforth who had several times attempted to negotiate the communities coming under his authority leading to the Declarations issued some months earlier. No community had agreed, and the matter was thought to be closed.

“Does he have an army or any force capable of imposing his will upon the community?” asked Richard.

Both men were unsure of the question. It was Sandy that replied. “Richard! They have no armies, no police force as we know it. They are a group of security guards who act as police and are hired out for individual security details like guarding this house.”

“How big is this force?” asked Richard.

The Police Commissioner whose real title was Security Chief Watson stated that there were nineteen officers and if required another seven who could be drawn back out of retirement.

“Can they handle weapons?”

“Everyone in town can handle weapons! But why? Are you expecting more raiders from your world?” asked Watson.

Richard was surprised by their inability to sense any threat. “No, I’m expecting someone like Cravenforth to come in force to remove opposition to his rule over this community.”

Sandy could see the whole idea was alien to them. “Richard. They aren’t like us. They don’t resolve issues with violence. They negotiate and come to peaceful resolutions.”

“I hope you’re right because I know people like Cravenforth, once they have a taste of power they want more and they won’t stop until they get it. I suggest we be ready just in case I’m right and place sentries on the approach roads to warn us if they are coming.”

“Do you really think we should be worried?” pressed Watson.

“I do and if I’m wrong no harm done. If I’m right we’re vulnerable to a nasty take over.”

No one spoke for a moment as they all considered the road forward. Sandy broke the silence. “I recommend you listen to him.”

“Alright, we’ll do it. As town protector your orders are to be obeyed,” replied the Mayor.

They did not have to wait long. The District Officers returned next day in numbers and rolled into town aboard vehicles carrying at least thirty armed men. Richard, Watson and Grayson stood outside on the steps of the Community Hall to greet them.

The lead officer dismounted and approached while the rest of his troop lined the street in both directions. “By Order of District 41, you are all under arrest for conspiracy to undermine the authority of District 41 within your community. You will accompany us now to stand before the District Governor.”

The Mayor responded. “We are an independent community and do not submit to the authority of District 41. You need to leave this community immediately and not return.”

The Officer was unfazed. “If you do not come peacefully, we’ll have to take you by force.”

It was Richard’s turn to come forward and confront the officer, stepping into his personal space and speaking directly into his face. “I strongly advise you to leave this community before there is bloodshed. I’m sure your Imperial Leader will not appreciate you returning with dead and wounded.”

“And how do you propose to accomplish that?” replied the officer defiantly standing his ground confidently assured he had the upper hand.

Richard raised his arm and from every roof top a rifle appeared aimed at his men. “Now, get your people back on your trucks and get out of here!” ordered Richard making sure his tone gave no hint that he might be bluffing.

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me!” Both men stood their ground as a tense silence fell over the scene. No one dared breath or make any movement in case it triggered a response. One shot at that point could have resulted in a massacre. The officer looked away to check the guns aimed at him and his men.

“Stand down!” he ordered, and his men reluctantly lowered their weapons expecting to be fired upon any minute. Richards’s people remained on alert with weapons aimed at their targets.

“Now get them back in the trucks and out of here!” ordered Richard.

Again, the officer hesitates before acting. “Return to your vehicles!” They all watched as the soldiers sought the shelter of the trucks. Once they were safely aboard the officer turned to Richard. “This isn’t over, you’ll be hearing from us and this time you will submit!” He didn’t wait for a response, he returned to the lead vehicle and they drove off out of the community.

“I would never have believed it!” stated Watson standing behind Richard.

“Unfortunately, the corrupting influence of power has come to your world. We must plan our next move. Next time there will be bloodshed,” stated Richard solemnly as he watched the last of the vehicles disappeared into the forests beyond the community limits.

“Looks like we’ve done it again.” Richard spun around at the sound of the familiar voice. There stood a man, older than he remembered touting a rifle and his face beaming with a broad smile.

“Officer Scrutney! I was told you’d retired?” Richard stepped towards him and shook his hand enthusiastically, remembering that tragic day all those years ago.

“Brought me out of retirement for this, you managed without bloodshed this time.”

Richard was not convinced. “I wouldn’t say it was over quite yet, I don’t think the governor will give up that easily. He has a power base to defend, and we’ve challenged it.”

Scrutney saw the wheels turning in Richard’s head. “What are you thinking?”

“You know anyone who is familiar with District 41 and could get us inside.”

“I do.”

“Who?”

“Me! I grew up in District 41, worked security at the mine until I decided I needed a quieter life and came here. What are you thinking?”

“I need to gauge the mood of the people, see what the governor is doing in order to work out the best way to fight him.”

“I can do that,” replied Scrutney that big smile returning to his face.

Husk and Hairy joined the expedition and were now hiding in the trees beside the road with Al Scrutney and Richard. Ahead the road was blocked with armed security.

“We’re not going to get through there, especially since I’m on the most wanted list,” stated Richard. “Is there another way in or do we go cross country?”

“I have another way,” replied Al leading them away. An hour later they approached a deep trench that led up a tree lined mountainside creating an ugly raw earth scar as it wound its way towards the top. Scrutney led them into the trench which was over six feet deep and wide enough to enable a wagon to pass through. He led them to a large metal door, not a very solid door, more like a makeshift tin shed door. Scrutney banged on it and waited.

“Who’s there?” queried a gruff voice from within challenging them.

“Jenkins? Is that you? Its Scruts,” replied Al.

The door swung open and a short bearded roly poly man emerged dressed in dusty clothes. “Scruts! It is you! It’s been a long while, what have you been up to? Come in! Come in!” he urged excitedly ignoring those standing behind Scrutney.

They all entered as Jenkins shut the door. “I brought a few friends, Richard, Husk and Hairy.”

“Pleased to meet you gents follow me and we’ll have a chat.” He led them down into the cave to a side chamber where he had an office; a simple office consisting of a desk, a chair, a photo of a woman, a few papers and a shelf of books. He sat behind the desk and pointed to a few chairs stacked behind his visitors. Once settled he pulled out a bottle from a desk drawer and several glasses. He didn’t ask, he just poured one for each guest and himself then sat back.

“So why are you here? I know this isn’t a social visit.”

“I’m interested in your views on your governor,” replied Al.

“You mean our beloved dictator!” It was not a question and Jenkins took a large swig of his drink and topped it up before continuing. “He’s taken control of everything. Anyone who opposes or criticises him is arrested and disappears. People don’t know what to do and if they did would be afraid to do it.”

“Maybe we can help,” suggested Al. “you remember when our community was raided by barbarians?” Jenkins acknowledged he remembered as he became wary. “These are the people who saved us.”

Jenkins for the first time assessed his visitors. “You don’t plan a bloody event like that do you?” Jenkins placed his glass on the table and leaned forward as if about to give a warning.

“Not at all, I’m proposing passive resistance,” replied Richard.

“Explain!” demanded Jenkins remaining wary.

“Can you get others to join us, and can you get us into the community?”

“I can employ you in the mine, everyone here must be registered; I can have you registered as migrant workers. What did you have in mind?” pressed Jenkins.

To Richard, District 41 was a small city with a population around 23,000. The roads were unpaved as industrialisation in small communities never grew big enough to build cars or even need vehicles other than the old horse and cart. Technology had advanced but there was no such thing as mass production so no aircraft, trains or ships. Travel was limited to visiting the next District and no one did that except for trade.

Security Officers were based at ten bases with around twenty officers working on shifts. Each night they went out on patrol to police the curfew leaving just a few officers manning the base. That night one by one those out on patrol were captured and taken away unconscious by Richard’s band of rebels.

Governor Cravenforth's office followed the standard formula of all dictators. It appeared to be ingrained into the DNA of those who took up that role. A lavishly engraved desk, a large ornate office, big enough to house ten smaller offices; a marble floor, crystal chandeliers and impressive paintings lining the walls. The largest and most impressive being a portrait of himself.

The Governor himself had a rather plain uniform lacking the medals usually worn by military dictators but this was a world where war was almost unknown. His uniform, matched that of his security officers, but was neatly pressed and immaculately clean unlike some of his men who lacked the military discipline to wear their uniforms proudly. Seated his height was uncertain but he was young, in his forties, wore a moustache, had short military style haircut and a cruel ruthless streak carved into his features.

A knock at the door admitted a short man similarly dressed, neither man wore any rank; their authority was drawn solely based on seniority and experience. "Excuse me, Governor. I have some odd news." He entered confidently showing no sign of fear, but his manner showed respect.

The Governor looked up having ignored the knock until now. "What is it, Graves?"

"A number of our security officers have disappeared, Sir."

"What do mean disappeared?" asked the Governor, his senses alert to danger.

"They never returned from their patrols last night."

"How many?"

"Over half our officers, one hundred and three to be exact!"

"How can this be? No one would dare attack our officers! They must be somewhere, search the District!" he ordered becoming angry, his voice becoming louder. This sort of action was unheard of, who could be behind this?

"Sir, there are some 12,000 structures in the District, it would takes weeks to search them all."

"Then search the big structures where you might hide a hundred officers!" Graves exited the ornate office leaving the Governor to his thoughts. He felt threatened, slightly afraid; no one in living memory had challenged the authority of a governor.

Richard closed his wooden locker; one of many lined up in the camp established within the open cut mine that had hollowed out the mountain. The landscape was one devoid of any

plant life just walls of rock and a dusty basin floor, a spiral road led to the mountain top but most of the output went through side tunnels like the one manned by Jenkins.

Richard was wearing dirty overalls worn by all the miners as he crossed the open cut floor to the mess hall for the midday meal. He saw the security officers enter from one of the side passages and cross the basin escorted by a mine foreman like Jenkins who supervised loads out of his exit. Richard had not met this man and watched as they entered the mess hall, known as the Grubb Station.

Scrutney joined him followed by Husk and Hairy. “Doesn’t look good,” commented Al.

“It was to be expected but I should get out of sight,” suggested Richard, still on most wanted list. Go see Jenkins he’ll get you out of sight.”

Richard went back passed the lockers and into the side cave. Husk and Hairy waited with Scrutney outside to watch the officers’ movements. Once they’d checked the faces of all present they moved outside and commenced a search of each of the tunnels. There was a hostile atmosphere and the officers felt it as they hastened their search and eventually departed.

Jenkins used a mining trolley that concealed a hidden section of the tunnels; he carried a tray as he entered and handed it to Richard. “Thought you might be hungry.”

“Much appreciated, mate. Did they cause any trouble?” asked Richard as he took the tray and commenced to greedily devour the gruel that was the morning meal.

“No, we made it quite clear they weren’t welcome. They won’t be back.”

The Governor’s patience was at an end. “What do you mean you can’t find them? If they didn’t leave by road they are still here, so find them!” he ordered the assembled officers standing before him in his oversized, over-ornate office. He waited but there was no response. “Well! Get out of here! You won’t find them here!” he yelled and they departed quickly without any military style formality. Having no Army they had not developed the formalities of discipline and respect for rank, here discipline was established through fear.

Once the room was cleared, only his trusted adviser remained. “How can they not be found? Over one hundred personnel can’t just vanish!” he said, his back to his adviser as he stared out the window into the night.

He was unaware that in the trees beyond his palatial estate Richard and his team were watching. “Richard! Am I seeing things!” asked Hairy pointing to the side of the palace. Richard was unsure what he was looking for. “In the stables!” clarified Hairy.

Then he saw it, Husk saw it also. “What are you looking at?” asked Al Scrutney.

“The grill of a Cadillac,” stated Richard.

“What is a Cadillac?” asked Scrutney confused.

Richard continued to stare. All they could see was the grill, the vehicle parked by the side of the house. “It can’t be from here, they don’t have the means of building one and I don’t like the odds of them coming up with that design by accident.”

“How long has the Governor been in charge?” Richard asked Al.

“About eight years I think,” he replied confused.

“I think he came from our world which explains his ambitions for power and control that I thought we’d left behind. It was that kind of thinking that destroyed our reality.”

“What can we do? We can’t just go in there and kill him?” asked Husk.

“Can we steal his car?” asked Hairy enviously.

Richard smiled at his friend. “Another day, for now we continue the plan of disruption, the car can wait.” Richard led them all away from the well-guarded palace to disappear into the darkness.

The Governor sat down, the news weighing heavily on him. He could not believe what was happening. He’d previously been staring out across the District as the sun rose when his aide had entered nervously with an update.

“You’re telling me we have less than thirty security personnel out there.” The aide swallowed hard as he acknowledged the statement. “And they were all taken while on patrol.” He nodded again. “Have them all report here to protect the palace.”

“What about the people?”

“The people appear to not want our protection so we’ll protect ourselves. Get them all here within the hour!” he ordered, his tone carrying a suppressed anger that could explode at any moment. The aide retreated quickly leaving the Governor in deep thought.

An hour later, a delegation of four security personnel reported to the Governor. The Governor recognised the leader of the delegation immediately and leaned back in his chair. “Richard! I should have guessed you’d be behind this. Guards arrest this man!” he ordered confidently. He was surprised when one of them moved to obey.

“These are my men, Henry,” replied Richard.

“You know this man?” asked Husk seeking clarification from Hairy who was also confused.

“Oh, Henry and I go back a long way, served together in the wars before our world destroyed itself. Is that your plan here, rebuild a world at war?”

“These people don’t know how to fight, there will be no war. Join me we could rule this place together. It’s a world of pacifists!”

“It a world ruled by communities not governments. They don’t need a ruler to bring the thinking of our world to this one. It lives in peace, there are no kingdoms, no nations, just peaceful trade and you want to destroy all that by introducing a system we know doesn’t work.”

“But they have no weapons of mass destruction; they have no means to wage war. It can’t happen here and we can redirect their science towards mass production and make a fortune.”

Richard sighed. “And how long until that same science starts building weapons developing concept of competition and fighting for advantage. I can’t let that happen.”

“I understand you exercised your own form of violence when you arrived - that community massacre. Is that what you brought to the world?” pressed Henry.

“That was Carmen; she brought her revenge on me to this world and threatened that community. They defended themselves and she got herself and her people killed.”

“Carmen did that!” he stated surprised. “Never would have thought. I knew she was strong willed and carried a grudge but that surprises me – good on her!”

“That was the price she paid for bringing that kind of thinking to this world. I’m making sure you don’t do the same,” warned Richard.

Henry smiled; he still felt he had the upper hand. “You might have got in here, but you’ll never leave this place.”

“And how do you intend to stop me?”

Henry pressed an alarm on his desk and the doors opened; six men entered. Al Scrutney, the fourth man in Richard’s group held up his hand to indicate there was no problem. “It was just the Governor testing the status of his security. Stand down.”

It was Richard who continued, he had not flinched at the arrival of the reinforcements his gaze remained firmly on Henry. “You see, Henry, your thinking expected these people to rise up and storm the gates. What you didn’t realise was that your last thirty security personnel had been replaced by my people and you invited them in. They are now rounding up the balance of your people.”

“Trojan horse, you’re right, I forgot these people are sheep they don’t know how to fight.”

“They did manage to overpower your people without anyone being killed or injured. A bloodless coup I believed they used to call it.”

“So where are my security?”

Richard smiled. “Some are in your own jail cells; others were smuggled out through the mining tunnels to surrounding communities where they have been safely secured and briefed on what is taking place. Most seemed pleased your reign is at an end.”

“So what now? You take over as Governor?” challenged Henry with a sour smirk.

“No, not on my bucket list. These people can elect their own governor and I’ll return to the peaceful existence of the community I now call home.”

“And what about me?”

“That’s a good question. If we exile you, you’ll only set up again in another District so I think you need a cooling off period in the cells. We can access your change of attitude over time, but rest assured you will never be allowed to take a position of power in this world.” Richard ordered the six security officers to take him away. Once they’d left he wandered over to the desk and cautiously sat down.

“Having second thoughts of becoming Governor?” asked Husk.

“No, I just wanted to see what it felt like to hold the fate of a whole city in your hands. I feel very uncomfortable sitting here.”

It was Scrutney that responded. “You already hold the fate of this District in your hands. You freed us and now the people will look to you for leadership, delegating that you might find difficult to do. You are the people’s hero and may be forced to take that chair even if only for a short time while the District returns to the way it was.”

“I hope you are wrong I just want to go home, to our community.”

“The thing is Richard; the fact that you don’t want it makes you the ideal candidate to lead the recovery. Others may be tempted to follow in Henry’s footsteps now that he’s demonstrated the model.”

Richard didn’t respond, he got out of the chair and went to the balcony window and looked out across the city.

To Be Continued....

#