

The Lost Scent of War

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Unearthing the Tale

Jenti Tendercase surveyed the underground excavation site in front of her. Her small black, shiny head with its two antennae rising from its peak tracked back and forth through the air, acutely aware of every current as she sampled the ancient scents that swam through the dusty cavern. Her thorax and abdomen, also black and hard-shelled swayed slightly, effortlessly balanced on her six long and jointed limbs.

The cavern rumbled and dust, streaming from the roof cascaded over her head and antennae. She looked upwards, cursing the closeness of the launch pad directly through the rock above her. She had chosen its location herself so there was no one to blame. The jet would already be screaming through the atmosphere of her species original home planet. It had long since lost any atmosphere capable of sustaining life so the shuttle would head for orbit to meet with a cruiser that was stationed there for the benefit of the science team. She did not lead the team, but she was the chief intellectual here, a priestess of the 'Temple of Rescent'. She heard the shuttles boosters kick in, giving it the velocity to escape the thin atmosphere. Its pilot would find no interest in the lifeless landscape, having seen it too many times. The

vast and still imposing prime tower would now be to their aft, hence out of sight. Whatever their feelings about the view, both the crew and any departing archaeologists from her team would be thankful to get away from the harsh environment where all movement was restricted through airlocks and tunnels full of stale processed air. The process of making this recently discovered cave complex safe to work in had been tortuous. Each attempt at pressurizing a work-zone would reveal yet another small fissure in need of sealing. Yet the perforated nature of these caves was what had provided fresh and cooling subterranean air for her ancestors until the ancient colony had slowly given way to habitats cooled by more sophisticated methods.

The shuttle had possibly already broken from the rarified atmosphere and her staff would not be able to help looking down, she knew this from experience. From orbit this continent was an awe-inspiring sight. The prime towers, one of which she now excavated beneath were widely spaced over the whole landmass and so great was their stature that they were clearly visible, even from space.

She preened her antennae. The clinging dust that had showered down from the roof clouded her senses, overwhelming her with its own rock scent, communicating nothing of interest to her. Leave that for the geologists. She scented to one of her three assistants to bring her a cloth and it approached with intense submissiveness.

“Raise your antennae fool. You know I will not stand for this slave mentality.” The first half of her statement was scent-speech, chosen to ensure obedience in a command of that nature. For the second part she used a series of drumming taps on the cavern floor, heard as vibration in the nerve packed base of the antennae. This was a form of communication that did not immediately communicate their difference in status. It could not influence him directly through his biology, like scent-speech could. It would allow his intellect to respond, and

make it possible for him to hear the statement as the reasoned feelings of a colleague and not the unquestionable order of a superior.

The assistant scented back to her, feeling guilty but knowing that she wanted the response in scent speech. Nevertheless it was an act that left him feeling strange. No scent-sensitive worker could ever scent to the ruling classes, not because it was forbidden but simply because the ruling classes no longer had their antennae. It was only possible between himself and Jenti because she was a Priestess in the 'Temple of the Rescent', and as such her antennae had been left intact.

"Of course Priestess. Again I am humbled by your respect."

Jenti dipped her antennae, signaling acceptance of his statement and he moved away.

She had three assistants assigned directly to her. They were all scent-sensitive, yet skilled and educated. Nevertheless they still existed within the strata of society that were nothing more than slaves.

This society of hers was corrupt and evil beyond words. Once, it had been a pure thing, like a complex machine that followed an intensely beautiful natural order. Now, the elite class that ruled the working masses, gave orders, tormented, tortured and destroyed at whim through the power of their most ancient form of communication, scent. The true perversion, and what Jenti despised most was the fact that at one particular historical turning point, which she was only now beginning to understand, the elite class had first been formed and began the most distasteful practice imaginable. They had permanently turned their backs on the one thing that kept their species in touch with each other. Not just in touch but it linked them right down to the biological level. They had started to amputate their own antennae.

Jenti, as a priestess, was an exception. The clergy of the Temple of the Rescent kept their antennae. Those of her class were meant to be responsible for the continued research into the power of scent and as such needed to be able to appreciate it. Daily medication prevented

them from falling foul of any orders or commands that they may encounter drifting from an air duct or self replicating through a crowd at any time and place on any one of the colony planets in the system. What they learnt about the nature of scent was naturally abused by the elite and this was not what her kind had set out to achieve. It had started out, and still was, a religious movement but their knowledge was valuable and if they wanted to continue with the freedoms they were granted and to worship as they pleased they had to pay a price.

She drummed her forelimbs on the cavern floor telling her assistants to pack up, again consciously avoiding the use of command scents.

Once more she surveyed the room. It was a vast cavern with a low roof that had fully collapsed at the far end but closer to where she stood the space had filled with easily removed silt. In its day the chamber had clearly been filled end to end with stories, dictionaries, and learning, all of it stored on small scent-plaques, collected and racked in a meaningful order. Each plaque was designed to be a permanent form of the scents used by the colony and thousands would be arranged to form each story or record. Many ages ago, when they were still fresh, simply scratching a row of plaques would release a complex stream of scent. She had been lucky to find the story that she now carried in her scent analyser buried at this end of the room. At the end where the roof had collapsed the carefully ordered collections of plaques had ended up in irreversible disarray. They could never be fully recompiled, without an irresponsible level of guesswork, but the fragments allowed them insight into the scents of the time and hence ideas about the lifestyle they had.

She was certain that the story she now carried took place during that exact pivotal point at which their ancient and natural civilization turned a corner and began to slip into this warped and grotesque slave-race it had now become. If they had catalogued and translated the plaques correctly, distilling the minute traces of remaining scent from the encased discs then

what she carried was the story of a monster. From their brief initial analysis, the changes that ensued from the events of the story were initiated by one individual, clearly a deceitful power hungry individual. How else could today's horrors have begun? She hoped to use the example contained within to fuel the revolutionary backlash that she and a few selected clergy were secretly planning. When the colony saw how things used to operate and experienced for themselves the hatred she knew she would feel for the very first of their traitorous tormentors, she and her allies would offer them a way out.

She turned from the cavern and into an antechamber that housed an airlock and elevator system. Two broken bodies lay twisted and twitching in the corner of the room. One of the site commissioners had been displeased with the attitudes of these two unfortunates. They would be easily replaced; the life of a non-elite individual was entirely expendable. Their species could breed with astounding speed, even though only a small group of the population was capable of doing so. The breeders who were kept entirely segregated from normal society were not entitled to do anything else. At least her recent studies were showing that this had been a traditional part of their races culture, but she was not sure that it had always been the tradition to restrict their food and health care when they did not keep up with the greedy demands the elite imposed.

Within moments she was back on her shuttle, resting by one of its thick windows and staring out at the night and at the ancient colony site, which was gigantic beyond imagination. Even the lowest living mounds where the colony members once scurried and worked were immense, growing from the dried earth, like mountains. Her legs flexed as the shuttle lifted from the parched earth and it was soon throttling upwards with some speed. Nevertheless the nearest mound still towered above her. What was most astounding of all was that these

monstrous colony spaces were dwarfed to insignificance when compared to the colony tower itself.

She commanded the shuttle pilot to maintain their current aspect and to continue powering upwards, but informed him he could turn the shuttle and break for orbit after a measured amount of time. The tower wall raced past them and curved out of sight to the right and left. The tower was just too big to view its full width from this distance. The peak of the tower, obviously out of view from this position, would be lost in planets hazy upper atmosphere even if they were far enough away for it to fit into her field of vision. Nevertheless she ordered the pilot to pull the shuttle a little further back from the tower wall.

At least now she was able to see its circumference and she remembered that on her first visit she could not even believe, regardless of its size, that it was an artificial structure at all. It looked too natural. The closest thing she could compare it to would be a vast stalagmite, as if the moons themselves had melted and dripped their rocky substance to the lands below.

The machine behind her emitted a powerful, low click. Without turning she used her right rear-limb to switch the scent analyser onto its output setting. The scent story it contained had been fully compiled and was now being reconstructed and sprayed towards her antennae as a stream of image-laden air. As the scents flowed and her antennae twitched her real vision out of the shuttle window began to compete with the images the story was creating in her mind. She had intentionally taken less of her medication today. The story would lose its passion if her scent-vulnerability was too suppressed.

Her real vision, becoming insubstantial in comparison to the image in her mind, showed a large hole that loomed up in the tower wall. The story began in exactly this spot, a visual scene intended to place the characters in time and place. She had seen this part of the story as part of a test compilation and this was why she was starting the story now, as she watched the

tower. The tower in the story showed her the same hole, only slightly smaller and housing a complex crisscross pattern of black tubes. The shuttle speed continued to increase as another of the gaping apertures loomed up. She prepared herself for what she was about to see. The next hole, as vacant as all the others in real life was very different in the story images she was seeing. In the story the hole was not fully visible because it was covered in a vast black living curtain. It was difficult to see any detail but she knew that this black curtain was a construction scaffold, and most importantly she knew it was made up of nothing but hundreds of thousands of living bodies, workers bodies, not dissimilar to her own. She could just make out movement over the curtain as more workers carried clear shiny objects upwards to the top edge of the aperture using their co-workers limbs, heads and bodies as foot-holds. She knew, because the names mentioned early in the story had appeared in some of the scent they found later, that the creature responsible for setting their once beautiful civilization on its terrible slide into corruption was almost certainly there-now. He was probably already plotting, suspended along with its multitude of co-workers in the cool of the night. As the shuttle began to turn she was already fully lost in the story. And although she had did not know exactly what was to come she did know that a terrible chain of events was about to start.

* * *

The Scryat colony 'sun trap' construction team was little more than an interlocking wall of black, rigid shelled, six-legged creatures, spread only one individual thick but many hundreds high and wide. It was reaching the end of a 6-hour work-phase, ready to dismantle before the fierce sun rose above the arid horizon. The scaffold they created formed a curtain over a vast hole within the Prime-Towers wall, itself one of twenty such holes. Scurrying over this

living scaffold structure, small teams of the same creatures carried large delicate looking transparent lenses.

Somewhere near the top of this construction wall, with each of his six limbs interlocked with those of his numerous neighbors was one particular individual, if not unique in appearance then at least in position. He was 187th from the right on the 20th row from the top. He did, nevertheless look somewhat different from the majority. He, like one in 25 of those in the scaffold wall was larger, had more prominent sharp ridges along each forelimb, markedly more corrugated shoulder plates, and a small white marking near where his thorax met his head section, distinct against the hard black sheen of his body-shell. Physical characteristics aside, he was perhaps most individual in that he alone, excepting his neighbor and antagonist, was engaged in a serious argument.

‘Selfish, dangerous, stupid Angryfood! You said you would stop’ The words did not come in sound but as a wave of complex scent directed at Angryfood’s head, more exactly, directed at the two slender and agitated antennae that reared from its peak. His dark, glistening eye-lenses were featureless but his mandibles clicked with frustration. The speaker repeated, ‘You said you would stop’. He instinctively went to move its forelegs to suffix the scent with a time signal, a simple count 1,2,3, communicating in combination with the scent that the sun had passed only 3 times since, but this most basic part of his language was restricted by not having free use of his limbs.

Angryfood studied the upper segment of his own left forelimb, close to where it attached to his dark and rigid thorax and acknowledged the already well healed crack in its hard shell which 2 days ago had been oozing restorative fluid. This new wound would heal and join the many other older scars that intersected his body plates. Yes, he said he would stop.

'I remember what I scented you Tunnelcool, I had need, complex'. Again he looked to the healing wound that he had personally inflicted in what had slowly become a ritual.

'What did you use this time Angryfood? Elevator mechanism again?'

'Not important'

'Yes important tell!'

Angryfood spat his reply back at Tunnelcool. 'A sharpstone, not easy.'

'Attacked own limb with a sharpstone? YOU GRUB!'

This insult, lacking the cautious direction of their previous scent-speech traveled upwards on the rising breeze that surrounded the tower in a wave of acrid smell. As it washed over the bodies of those higher in the construction wall some reacted in agitation to the viscous nature of the insult. They didn't need to look round to know where it had come from. The speech-scent would decay in a precise manner indicating the distance of the speaker and their scent organs, the antennae, could test its direction perfectly. In the silence Tunnelcool realised he had not added a name-indicator to the message. He should have clearly stated Angryfood as the intended recipient. There would be nothing to stop anyone hearing it from assuming that the insult was equally meant for them. His antenna thrashed wildly for a moment.

Work in the construction wall was tedious. To relieve this, the workers commonly produced a constant, gentle mix of meditative scents and motivating jaw clacks. Now, curiosity at the reasons behind this outburst resulted in these mingling scent patterns and noises fading, a sign that those around them had become interested in Angryfood and Tunnelcool's unusual discourse. They postponed their debate until the interest of their neighbors had passed.

As the general murmur began again Angryfood broke their silence. 'Not me alone. Many do it, is a symptom of our time. Hundreds here-now do the same, more each day.'

'Then here-now are too many also selfish, dangerous, stupid, Angryfood.'

Angryfood continued. ‘Also many more are becoming...’ he did not have the scent vocabulary to explain the phenomena, so he resorted to ‘...sleepy, unproductive, those that just gather and question. The colony is wrong Tunnelcool’.

Ten construction workers climbed over them carefully carrying a large transparent resin sheet. Their feet were not so carefully placed as they ascended the curtain of bodies, taking a foothold wherever was most suitable to their needs.

One of the climbers scented at the two of them, ‘Chatter chatter, wall creatures, do not loose your concentration’. Again the two combatants stopped until they had passed.

‘I still do not understand Angryfood, why hurt yourself?’

‘Hard explanation Tunnelcool. Many reasons but mainly just helps’

‘How? Important, tell’

The scent that hit Tunnelcool in reply expressed just how important Angryfood felt his reasons were, communicating a deep, real pain but with it was the scent of pleasure and of release, an unburdening. Release from one pain through another. Angryfood’s scent glands almost closed up towards the end, choked with confused emotion.

Before Tunnelcool could rally a response to this confused statement a blast of scent hit them both from above. Only then did they notice the older creature one row above them in the scaffold. His carapace was scarred in numerous places and they both recognized the signs. Since there had been no wars, no surviving predators to threaten the colony, nothing other than the elements as a threat, and considering that no one suffered that many accidents, he too must be like Angryfood, a ‘healaddict’. Angryfood’s antennae probed towards this new figure with curiosity.

This old one spoke with incredible eloquence. ‘Change your scent nestling, I am trying to forget that feeling. I have managed to stop for 100 of our burning suns but even after so long your pleasure scent is not helping. It opens old desires.’ A visual scent describing a sightless

burrowing creature, unseeing and ignorant punctuated the elder ones cutting remark.

Angryfood was speechless. This wise old thing must have spent years attacking his own body. He must know real pain. Angryfood vowed to know more from this wise creature yet he had no idea how to approach it and with his great age came a complex eloquence in his scent-speech that immediately made discussion intimidating.

Angryfood was also shocked that he had also managed to express his long abstinence from self-harm without the use of the normal forelimb movements. Instead he had manipulated a small decaying scent, tied to an image, a rotting fruit, which showing them exactly how long he had meant. Amazing! Angryfood could barely open his glands through fear of sounding ignorant. And, not only was this wise creature eloquent he was skilled. The powerful scent stream carrying his message had traveled against the breeze to a point just behind Angryfood and Tunnelcool so it had then washed back over their bodies, remarkable precision.

Tunnelcool was less hesitant. 'You're right seasoned one, nestling he is,' Tunnelcool split his scent-stream in two directions, wanting to be sure that Angryfood heard despite the breeze. 'but with respect this grub here knows no better, but you?'

The stranger's anger was abrupt. 'NO, you are the grub! Nestling's actions show comprehension and understanding. That you do not express fear about the colony shows you as the ignorant one.'

'Important, tell' Angryfood was not going to miss out on the advantage of having the wisdom of age backing his position.

'NO, instead question. Why bad for nestling to attack self?' It was directed at Tunnelcool.

'Makes him ineffective'

'NO, he is here-now working. Again, why bad?'

'He might kill himself, reduce the Colony size.'

'Why bad?'

‘We need all colony members’

‘Why?’

‘Our birth rate is dropping, don’t ask why! No one knows why breeders breed less now.’

‘No-one? Ask nestling’

‘Me?’ Angryfood waved his antennae in agitation. ‘I don’t know’

‘Don’t know? feel’.

He could only answer with a question and felt ignorant. ‘Why Breed? What purpose in breeding?’

‘That’s what I scented!’ Tunnelcool’s antennae drew back over his head in indignation.

‘But not what you meant! Nestling is correct. Why is high birth rate important?’

‘To replace losses to the population.’

‘No real losses in population now, again, why nestling attacking self bad?’

‘Because birth rate is low, colony cannot sustain losses.’

‘I will re-scent – Birth rate is low because there are no losses. No wars, no predators, all is safe. We have civilized. Individuals forgetting their purpose, to breed, build, feed and fight! Boredom and lack of purpose breeds wilting Nestling’s. This is wrong. When we were a great colony we fought, we died, we ate and were eaten, and because of this we would breed, fast and often. Without that the breeders will begin to look elsewhere for meaning. They have always thought themselves of a higher caste, but that is illusion, breeding is just more essential colony activity, like this.’ He scented a ‘toil image’. ‘They will search for more, and the result will be our downfall. Nestling knows this. Colony will become non-colony.’

The elder-one waited for some response but smelling nothing he continued.

‘This Nestling’s behavior feeds a deep need in his body, which craves to feel it has been damaged to help his colony. The process of healing is the reward of the warrior, indicating sacrifice. Yet also it is a way to alert the colony, it is a sign that we have lost our purpose.’

What Nestling does here is our alarm for what is happening to our breeders and we should listen to his message.'

'If attacking self is so wise, why you stop?'

'Because I have had enough of debating with ignorant grubs like you, and more importantly I now know what I must do.'

'What your name old one?' Angryfood's antennae formed two rigid spears directed at this new awe-inspiring individual.

'I have not asked yours, and when we have accomplished our task our names will be forgotten. That is how it should be.'

With that he turned his head and he spoke no more.

The rally call

The 'sun-trap' construction team had dispersed and somehow the old creature had avoided Angryfood and vanished. He had decided, if he wasn't to be given a name he would give him one anyway. He called him 'Trapper'. Trapper may have escaped him but Angryfood had not escaped Tunnelcool so easily.

'Avoid the old one Angryfood. His fancy scents smell good but I have seen his type before. He will have you off on some wasteful task, away from your work. You'll find yourself lonely in an out-tunnel 3 days since your last decent toil. How will that feel? Or worse you'll end up with those others who spend their time gathered in a cave scenting nothing but 'why?' at each other all day and night, unproductive. Just stay in touch with the scent and keep working.'

“These sad ones tell us something Tunnelcool, but I will not be like them. Still I want to do something.”

As Angryfood headed away Tunnelcool scented after him, “You are doing something, you are working.”

Having headed back into the tunnels of the main complex Angryfood had located his favorite inter-labour rest spot. He regurgitated some grub sap from his storage pouch, an organ rarely used for its original purpose, to store foraged food for return to the colony. Dipping his mouthparts into the pool he had created he shut down his awareness and ran through the events of the day. A passing grub-farm labor team trampled him with fifteen sets of feet as they passed down the tunnel but this did not rouse him for a moment. Soon enough an appropriate rallying scent would run through the colony calling him to whatever was his duty of the moment. For now he rested as the constant gentle cooling breeze filtered from deep beneath the colony.

The suntrap he had been working on was an addition to the mechanism that caused that breeze to exist. Without its cooling current the colony would become like an oven, heated from the outside by the relentless baking of the sun. To his knowledge the utilisation of a ‘prime-tower’ was not a technological advance but something his race had done as a matter of survival since..., well forever. Those ancestors that had by nature built tall structures had created the very same phenomenon, a convection current that cooled their nest. They had survived and passed on their genes. It was simple. As a general rule the Prime-tower was darker than the rest of the colony and as such it absorbed more heat. The heat contained within it rose up the full height of the towers impressive dimensions and in doing so dragged vast amounts of air from lower down. This colony had been built above some extensive and

still partly unexplored cavern systems, and the cool subterranean air was the perfect replacement for the escaping stale air that disappeared up the Prime-tower. This had been more than adequate for countless generations, but nothing remains unchanged and the climate was no exception. In time the sun grew hotter and the earth more parched so that the river that ran through one edge of the colony became less than the raging torrent it once was and the air within the colony grew more uncomfortable.

Some unthinkable number of generations ago alterations had been made to the Prime-Tower. Openings were made in the Towers wall, where the sun was given freedom to shine upon networks of sealed black tubes. These increased the heat produced and the current grew faster. Opening more caverns increased the available cool air and the colony beat off the growing heat. Now, after all this time it was again necessary to improve on the process. Large transparent screens were being placed and secured one by one over the previously opened holes in the towers wall. Each hole would need thousands of such screens, and the raw materials had come from a solution of their own excrement, which was itself an opaque resinous material carefully mixed with grub sap and refined. The inner lining of a dead colony member's carapace was even better than excrement, creating a hundred times as much resin from the abundant grub-sap but with less turn over of population they had to make do. Estimates suggested that it would take 100's of generations to cover all of the apertures, mainly due to the need to accumulate enough excretions. In spite of the unfathomable time scale, as each lens was fixed in place, covering a small fraction of each hole, the intensity of light was increased in a small way. As each full aperture became sealed it would create an enclosed space of such sweltering heat that the tower had the potential to sing with the force of air that would rise up to its impossible peak.

His thoughts returned to the wise old creature he and Tunnelcool had met among the scaffold crew, 'Trapper'. For the first time he had met a heal-addict who was not confused by his habit, who would defend his actions with wisdom and confidence. For as long as his despised obsession had lasted he had been frowned upon, seen as the weak link in the colony chain, a selfish creature. So great was the shame carried by the heal-addict that one would never discuss it with others of their kind. At best, meetings between Heal-addicts were punctuated with an involuntary release of an increasingly common 'shame' scent, which would communicate the experience they shared but then linger like a painful mistake for all to witness. Both parties would often then initiate a furious and embarrassed blast of puerile conversation that would be thrown into the space between them in a futile attempt to mask the guilty emissions of their untrustworthy scent glands.

When had he first hurt himself? He had been younger still and was on his first ever shift in the Grub-works. Deep in the caverns, interspersed between the numerous fields of the fungus-farms were the grub-works, little more than row after row of carefully formed tubes running along a vast cavern floor. This was one of five hundred such work areas spaced throughout the caverns. The grubs were penned within this large area but were otherwise free to roam on top of the tubes, where they were safe from molestation. Here the tubes were sprayed with an acrid potion made from more of the bitter excretions of the tall trees in order to discourage the fungus, the grub's only food source, from growing. As the only way for the grubs to eat was by entering inside the tubes where the fungus was nurtured and lush, this they would happily do, once their relaxed flopping and squirming had built up a significant hunger.

It was when they were inside these tubes contentedly scraping the fungus into their vast guts and releasing the steady stream of appetizing gasses from their rears, that they could be

harvested for their sap. They were huge, 3 times in length than a colony member's own body, and fat, soft and fantastically delicious. It wasn't unknown for young workers to sneak inside an occupied tube and bask in the sweet flatulence they released.

Despite their vast mass the grubs were not at all dangerous, however trying to harvest one without it being restrained in the tubes, would cause it to thrash and squirm in a horrible way. It would be very unlikely to result in injury, they were a tough race, but it made the task inefficient.

His mentor for the day had pointed to his tool for that morning's lesson, one of the suck-harvesters. Another tube, slim and flexible, it dangled from the roof and emitted the commonplace high whine of a suction device. It contained nothing more than a powerful rush of air, harnessed from the ever-climbing gale in the prime tower. One of these could be found every 20 paces, and this thinner, flexible tube fed into a larger one, suspended along the roof of the cavern. The end of the suck-harvester with its sharpened nozzle would be carried to any number of holes that ran along the fungus-tube walls. All it took was to scurry around, until you could see one of the Grubs passing one of those holes as it bloatedly wormed its way along, eating the fungus from the tube walls within, its fat body pressing appetizingly against the hole in a juicy bulge. Then with minimal effort the farmer could simply open the nozzle and plunge it into the side of the Grub.

'Not too hard, not too long' warned his mentor, as the vibration of fatty Grub-sap could be felt traveling through the tube. 'Why? Tell, important!'

'Internal organs not to be damaged, only outer 30 percent is suitable and only 10 percent of Grubs mass to be suctioned at once.'

'Good hatchling, now complete, while I look for next.'

It was after his mentor was gone and Angryfood had released the Grub, slightly lighter but hungrier because of it, that he had the misguided idea to press the suction tube against his

arm. The nozzle snapped against his rigid exoskeleton. Realizing his mistake he had strained to remove the nozzle, his antennae beating against each other wildly. When he finally managed to pull it free he heard a crack and saw for the first time his healing inner juices flowing from a vicious break in his armor.

He didn't understand why it had felt good, but leaving the Grub-works later that day it seemed as if something inside had changed. Despite the pain, his body was crying out that what he had done was good, both for him and for his species, he buzzed slightly. The constant fears he carried were now replaced with the simple task of ensuring he got better, because that was good for the colony.

Over the next few days the feeling of wellbeing continued, but decreased. As it passed he began to feel empty, as if he was no longer a useful member of the colony. A sense of decay and lack of meaning surrounded him, requiring real action. It seemed as if the colony and reality itself would dissolve, leaving him alone, an individual with nothing but his six limbs and an empty foraging sac. So, without even knowing it was happening he began to allow his body to open up to an experience that their modern civilized and stagnant colony no longer provided. It was the only really true experience for a creature of his demeanor, the illusion of healing from battle and strife, for the best of the colony, temporarily allowing him to feel that the colony was good, cohesive and not degrading, stagnating and ultimately dying around him. His mind thought none of this, but pushed aside his malaise and returned to work. Yet his body now saw the everyday objects around him in a new way, as tools that if suitably misused would place him in just enough peril to cause injury and thus a tragically fleeting relief from the growing emptiness inside him.

* * *

He awoke from his thoughts, back in his rest place, the exertion of the scaffold a distant memory. A rallying scent drifted past him and traveled down the tunnel on the constant breeze. It contained what he needed, information regarding location, nature of the labor to come and tools required. His body reacted independently, racing with urgency towards his destination, lower tunnel, 320 degrees, river side, three quarters out, tunnel excavation work, tools already present. A localized scent would direct him as he got closer.

He was half way there before his mind reached full awareness and he began to think about the rallying scent. He had reacted with such urgency for one reason only. The scent, which would cause an immediate physical response in any colony member, was unusually pertinent to him specifically. A rally scent would always attract those suitable for the work involved, but above that it would hold a normal time marker, caused by the precise deterioration pattern all their scents contained, the same one that allowed them to sense the distance that speech-scent had traveled. If a call to work had traveled a long way the body would not respond with such urgency, it was normal to wait for a repeat signal as it would be expected that the quota would be filled by those who had received it earlier. If you were closer to the source the body would react quicker, knowing that there would certainly be a space in the team. He now realized that this scent must have originated from very close by and was designed to decay fast and not travel much beyond the tunnel he was in. He briefly glanced back realizing that he had moved so fast that he had undoubtedly passed the very point where the scent had originated, running up-breeze as he had been. He also reflected that it was possible that had reacted so quickly for the simple reason that the scent, designed to travel such a short distance, was not meant to be detected by any other colony member, it was intended for him alone.

It took him some time to start moving again. In that moment of strange comprehension, knowing the maker of the rallying scent was now behind him and had some purpose for him, his body had come to an immediate and rigid stop, an alert listening pose. Slowly one antenna waved in the breeze, one forelimb lifted and then, from static to run in an instant his body was in motion again, scurrying towards his destination having shed any trepidation, leaving it like a lingering scent behind him. He was running towards the unknown and doubtlessly towards danger, the unknown was danger and nothing was going to hold him from it.

He had reached as far as the instructions could take him, where he would expect the localized scent to lead him forward. There were four choices of tunnel, all leading to outlying, unused colony space, except one, which led to the extreme edge of a farm complex. He had lifted his upper body and head high, waving his antennae hoping for something that would direct him. It finally came, drifting lazily on the breeze emanating from the fissures within the unused tunnel, urging him forward, and with it came an image intended as a name, 'Nestling'.

He entered the tunnel, clicking his mouthparts in the usual non-scent query-sound, 'Where? Who? Where? And then it happened. From above, something fell, dropping on his back and grappled both sets of forelimbs, leaving him completely disabled. He was confused, he had expected the old creature he had met in the construction-wall, and the scent had contained the name that he had used in their conversation.

A sharp pain ran down his right antenna, like an electric shock. The pain, inflicted on one of his main sensory organs clouded his thoughts and reactions. His mind sang with phantom words, images and he fought to stop his body reacting to them in the expected way. He was immobilized and could do nothing but allow himself to relax. His remaining free antennae sought the air for something to identify his assailant but all he could smell, curiously, was a

scent that reminded him of the lubricating oil used on the few elevator mechanisms within the colony, a strong, overpowering scent. Many errors in communication happened around those elevators, its aroma somehow interfered with normal scent patterns, but it only did so very close up.

‘Enough fun Nestling.’ Suddenly the pain in his antennae eased slightly, and with one swift movement the weight was gone, along with the elevator smell. Angryfood ran forward, up the tunnel wall and reversed himself onto the roof, looking back to where he had lain helpless. He felt exhilarated. If there was some sort of invasion going on he would die in defense of the colony, but before he even saw old Trapper waiting on the tunnel floor, he knew he would be there and the whole event was intended to make a point of some kind.

‘What for old one? Should I learn?’

‘Certainly you should learn to fight, but no point meant nestling, unless....’ He blasted a recall scent towards Angryfood, encouraging him to relive the feelings, ‘what do you think?’

‘Feels significant, strange behavior, unexpected’

Trapper looked thoughtful, ‘I think I was just looking for a fight, I’m sure of it. Hoping you might have inflicted some pain in return, but not selfishness on your part, just ineptitude.’

Trapper moved further down the tunnel ‘I want you to follow me, can you live without work for a while?’

‘I don’t think so’

‘Then think of this as work, it is for the good of the colony. Follow now.’