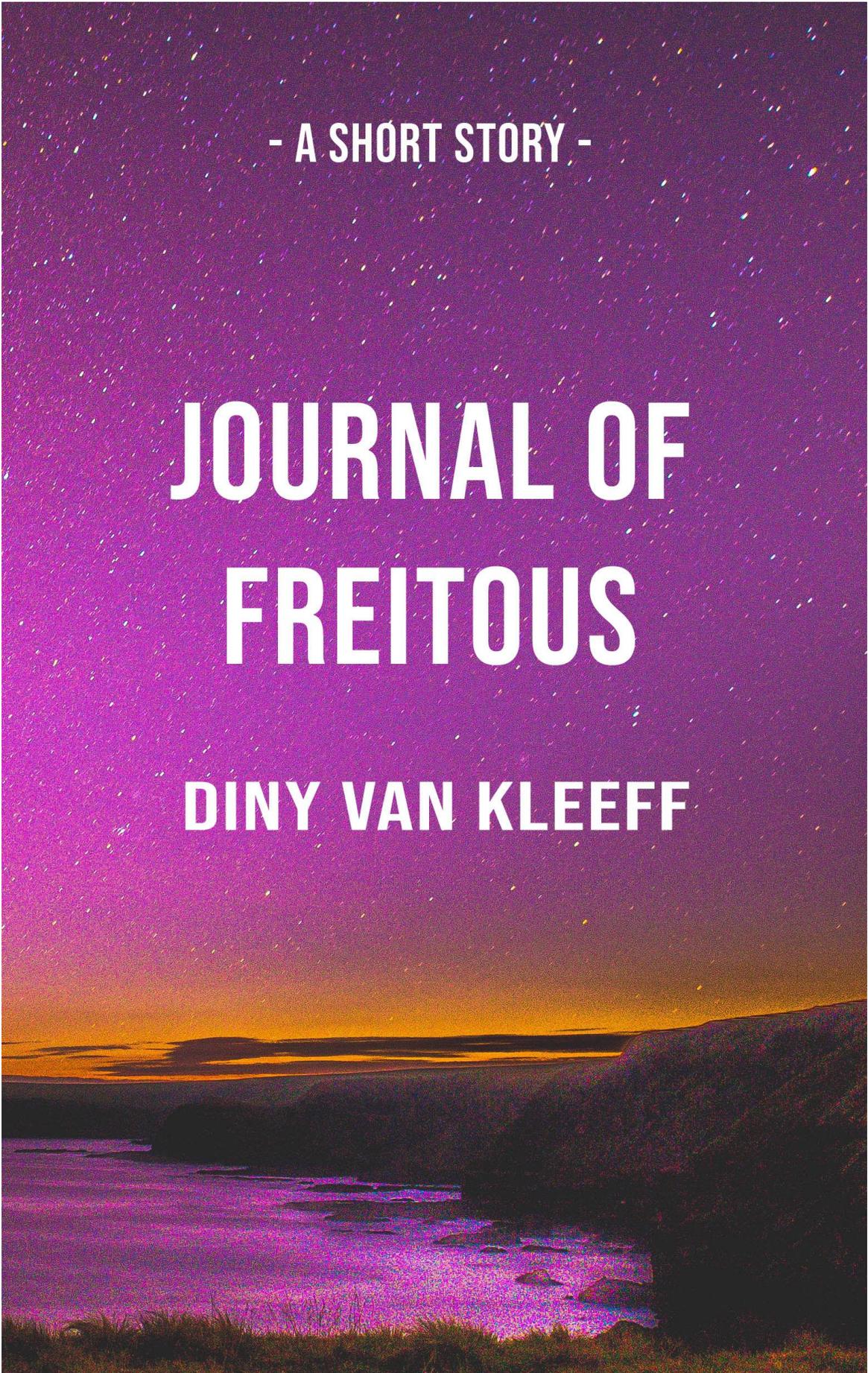


- A SHORT STORY -

JOURNAL OF FREITOUS

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CONTENTS

[Mandatory Fore-note](#)

[Journal Entry 1](#)

[Journal Entry 2](#)

Mandatory interplanetary explanatory fore-note

Entry by Garb - Official Documenter of Freitous

This planet, the one we now call home is not our original home. It is about twice the size of planet Earth and one of twelve planets the people of Earth confirmed as being potentially habitable, due, I am told, to its circumstellar habitable zone, or Goldilocks zone, which is some reference to a story that means nothing to me. They call it Kepler-22b.

We call it Freitous. It is adequate. We have warmth and light from the Burning Star in even intervals of eight Earth-hours. Freitous is primarily water, but the limited amount of land is fairly fertile and we are able to occupy several settlements on the side of the planet that faces the Burning Star, which is itself orbited by the massive moon planet of Jansper. We are a population of about one hundred and five thousand inhabitants, evicted from our home planet Freito twenty-four years ago, in an effort to reduce catastrophic overpopulation. We were provided with enough building materials to create a meagre city, vehicles to provide a simple transportation system and an archaic communication system (basically junk from the city warehouse that they didn't know what else to do with).

Journal entry 1

Entry by Garb - Official Documenter of Freitous

I am woken before the end of sleep-time by a surly, mechanical growl which resonates through the dark silence. The other seven members of my dwelling are not disturbed as I carefully creak open the lid of my sleep-pod and creep down the long, sloping shaft to the exit. I sling a wrap over my shoulders and a mask over my face to filter out the sleep-time air which is thick and acrid at ground level and although it will not kill a Freitan, the Pelsopher can make one mighty sick.

The craft is huge, dominating the entire horizon with its brightly, blinding lights. I am not the only Freitan to have heard the noise, I can make out at least six other shadowy figures milling around with their hands held high to shield their eyes. A noise from behind startles me and I turn to see my eldest birthling, Esgarb, looking down in wonder from the dwelling. He knows better than to come down to ground level.

“What is it, Garb?” he whispers in wonder.

“Visitors,” I reply, adding, “I don’t know where from though, so you’d better go back inside and warn the others to stay out of sight when they wake.”

As a planetary official, I am duty-bound to greet these rare visitors and to find out their purpose but, it being Sleep-time, no transportation runs and so I head towards the glowering lights on foot, hoping the filter on my mask is up to the job. There is still another hour until the Burning Star rises, when the Pelsopher sinks to a more manageable shoulder height. I don’t get far, half a kilometre from the dwellings I am confronted by three of their scouts. Their form, though attired in an all-encompassing exploration suit, appears very similar to our own, only taller. I hear electronic words uttered from one of them in at least seventeen different tongues until a sentence is spoken that I understand.

“Friend we come in peace.”

My eyes spark recognition and the visitor saves the setting on his translator.

I give them my much practised but rarely used Visitor Speech, “Welcome, I am Garb, official Documenter for Freitous. Take me to your Captain so that I may begin formal relations with him on behalf of our planet.”

The visitors seem to affirm this with each other and turn to lead me towards their craft. Up close, with the Burning Star starting to rise, the craft looks dated; a bit like something our younger birthlings might sketch. There are actual landing feet planted firmly on the ground at its perimeter in at least six places – it is fortuitous that our planet is mostly flat. I am directed to a chute with a mechanical lift that takes the four of us into the craft and then along a number of gloomy corridors to a room lined with breathing suits. The door closes behind us and I hear the sucking sound of an air-tight seal. A green light shines and the visitors remove their outer clothing and helmets. At about the same time, I feel dizzy and pass out.

I wake to find myself comfortably reclined in a chair with a visitor sat either side me and a primitive translation device on a table in-front of us. My first impression is of the similarities between us, in both form and gesture – it always surprises and disappoints me that the evolution of so many wonderfully different worlds produce the same biological model, over and over again with little variance other than shade, size and organ function. The air is breathable, though intoxicating and I sit forward slowly so as not to become dizzy again.

A new visitor walks into the room, wearing a formal and stiffly decorated jacket topped by a similarly formal hat. The two beside me stand to attention, I also rise, slowly.

“Sit...sit down, please,” he insists and it takes me a moment to realise he is talking directly to me without a translator.

“You speak Freiter?”

“I lived on Freito for five years,” he says.

“And the rest of your crew?” I ask, looking round.

“My original crew died when we crash-landed on Freito. It wasn’t until this ship arrived that I was able to get off the planet,” he stares at me for a moment. “Why do YOU speak Freiter, is it a common language in this planetary system?”

“I’m Freitan.”

Something he said jars a vague recollection of a third-hand report about a war on Freito, my distant home-land. I push it aside and concentrate on the issue in hand.

“So, this is where they shipped you all off to,” he says in a flippant tone that cut to my core, “it would seem that you have settled the planet well.”

“We have been here for over twenty years.”

“Yes, of course, we’ll talk more about it later,” he replies brusquely, “now, what are the procedures? I imagine you will want us to sign forms, medical tests, quarantine...?”

“Your crew will need to remain on the craft until you have been verified and cleared for disembarking,” I reply, feeling woozier by the minute, “I can take you to see the High Commander right away.”

I notice the Captain does not put on an exploration suit or a breathing helmet to exit the craft. The Burning Star is fully set and the Pelsopher is below head height, which for him, is an even more tolerable waist-level. Being wake-time, the inter-dwelling transportation is up and running again but, because he is so tall, the Captain is somewhat scrunched inside the vehicle’s cabin. He looks around with a piercing scrutiny and I wonder if perhaps his species has a photographic memory, such as that of the Zofantls people. His breath is shallower than mine but it does not appear to distress him and I presume he became acclimatised to lower oxygen quantities on Freito.

“The green mist,” he says, pointing at the Pelsopher, “what is it?”

“It’s made up of biological particles from the far side of the planet, trapped in Heavy-Saotic gases from the ground. It rises with cold and drops with heat but, never further than you see it now.”

“Is it poisonous?”

“It can make you sick, that’s why all our buildings and transportation routes are raised. Mature Freitans can walk on the ground but birthlings have to remain on Freitan-made structures until they are tall enough to have their head above it.”

“So, why did you choose to leave Freito?” he asks. “I heard some stories; they said ninety-seven thousand of you were offered the chance to start a new world.”

“Most of us weren’t given a choice.”

“It’s not exactly the perfect planet is it?” he smirks.

I don’t like this visitor much.

We continue the journey in silence. Rising Freitans stare inquisitively as I and the tall stranger wheel past. The High Commander is waiting outside his office for us and the visitor is ushered in whilst I am taken away to begin making my notes.

“Pst!” a voice from outside my window calls, “GARB!”

Besgotituld is below the window, trying to look furtive, “What’s up, can’t you see I’m busy?”

“I need to talk to you, urgently, now. Meet me in the Craskscoff in ten minutes.”

His tone is serious and his usual limp is amplified by his agitation. I finish my notes and plug the reader into the network system to upload the files – technology is so much slower on Freitous and I wonder how long we will have to wait for some-one to import the simple brain-network we were all linked into on Freito, which negated all this manual inputting.

The Craskscoff is heaving with Freitans and I try to climb the stairway without being noticed but, being a city official this is impossible. I smile and greet but push forth into the large hall. The domed roof is already filled with the sparkling steam from the many beakers of crask being consumed and when I finally locate Besgotituld, he has one waiting for me.

“So, Besgo my friend, what is it you need to see me so urgently for?”

“It’s about the visitors.”

“Of course it’s about the visitors – that’ll be all anyone is talking about. The High Commander is still with their Captain, I imagine he’ll be with him for a few hours.”

“Do you know where they’re from?”

“Planet Earth. I searched through the archives and I am certain their craft matches previously documented Earth craft.”

“So you DID steal the archives when we left Freito?”

“No,” I corrected, “I simply kept my own copy.”

“Isn’t it illegal to own personal copies of official records?” goaded Besgo.

“Only on Freito.”

“So, do you know what they want, why they have come here?”

“No, but I have a feeling you are going to provide me with one of your theories.”

Besgo is my oldest and dearest friend, we grew up together on Freito. When we first arrived on Freitous, Besgo went on a scouting mission –he fell and knocked himself out and lay stranded in the Pelsopher for several hours. The prolonged exposure has permanently affected the nerves in his legs.

“I think they are looking for a new home.”

“Really? Then why come to Freitous? It isn’t the most hospitable planet with the damn Pelsopher and so little land mass,” I counter.

“Indeed but, it IS habitable and when there is little other choice...” Besgo takes a deep swig of his crasko then exhales the sparkling scoff through his nose, watching it join the glittering cloud on the ceiling before continuing his train of thought. “Do you recall what the Zofantls said, when they stopped here about five years ago, about fighting on Freito? Visitors tried to occupy their precious land.”

“They wouldn’t take kindly to that,” I say.

“No, nor would I – if there isn’t room for us, there sure as hell isn’t room for aliens.”

Then the thought hits me again, the same one I pushed aside when I was on the visitor’s craft, “The visitor said he had been stuck on Freito for five years. He said his ship crash-landed there and all his crew were killed.”

Besgo gave me that annoying, ‘you see where I’m going with this’ look of his.

“You think he’s lying?”

Besgo shrugs his shoulders, “Let’s go and ask him.”

So we head back to the offices of the High Commander and knock gingerly on his ornate door. His assistant opens it just a crack and I can see the back of the visitor, “Ah, Garb, perfect timing. We are in need of your excellent documenting skills.” He lets me in but rudely closes the door on Besgo. I hear the indignant huffing and puffing as he takes a seat in the waiting area.

The visitor greets me with a smile and I take a seat between him and the High Commander.

“So, Garb, I presume you would like to know more about our visitors?” says the Commander, “I imagine you have already worked out that they are from the planet Earth.” He looks at me knowingly.

I nod and the visitor turns to face me. For the first time, I realise that despite his cropped hair and masculine dress, he is actually a she – without his, I mean her jacket on I can see the tell-tale curves. I have never seen a female with shorn hair, nor a female craft commander. I am fascinated.

“Captain Janson and her crew of sixty-three have requested permission to stay on Freitous for a short period of time to make repairs and replenish supplies.”

“Why here? Why Freitous? Why not go back to Freito to make your repairs? We don’t have any resources for fixing your craft.”

Captain Janson smiles generously at me, as if I am a birthling for whom she is about to simplify a complicated fact - I guess next to her, we are as short as birthlings, “Our craft runs on biological matter, we are running out and need to find an alternative source.”

“The Pels algae?” I interject.

“Yes, we think it could be used but, we will need to re-calibrate our engines to run on it.”

What dry land there is on the dark side of the planet is thick with the Pels algae.

“Commander, we know from past experience that any disturbance to the algae prompts it to release more spores. If the visitors start harvesting it, it could increase the density and even height of the Pelsopher?”

Captain Janson gestures with her hands in a decidedly dominant fashion, “Look, we have several interplanetary-class biologists on board who are confident that we can harvest the Pels algae in such a manner that it will not release any spores and that we could in-fact, reduce the overall quantity on your planet so that the Pelsopher is reduced and possibly even removed.”

The High Commander is nodding enthusiastically and looks like he is somewhat smitten by this large, androgynous female.

“Commander, I think we should proceed with extreme caution and have our own biologists over-see initial tests before we agree to this.” I silently wonder if we actually have any decent biologists left within our society. There were, without doubt, a good selection of scientist and academics thrown in with us but, many of them were mature and coming up for retirement and that was over twenty years ago.

“Yes...yes,” agrees the Commander, half-heartedly, “perhaps you could organise that Garb.”

I nod.

“And I would like to welcome our guests officially with a feast,” he adds.

I nod again and then remember what Besgo said, “Captain Janson, tell me what happened on Freito, when you lost your craft, I understand there was a war at about that same time?”

For the first time, her dominant air seems to recede a little.

“We were not welcomed on Freito, we arrived in peace looking for a new home but they told us they had no spare land. They allowed us to land and to refuel – we were there for two months, but then they turned against us and said we were trying to outstay our welcome. The Freitans killed my crew,” she looks at me, accusingly.

“How did YOU survive?” I am not convinced by this female captain.

“I fell in love with a Freitan, he took me in and hid me.”

“In the space of two months?” I am even less convinced, she doesn’t look very lovable, “and you managed to live on Freito for five years without being found out?”

“Oh no,” she says, “I was discovered after a few weeks but, without my crew, I wasn’t seen as a threat and so they tolerated my presence. I made friends, had a birthling,” she whispers the last bit.

This is obviously news to the High Commander too, his jaw drops a little. A half-Freitan child is unheard of.

The Commander steps in now, “So, where is this birthling, did you bring it with you?”

She shakes her head.

“And the father - the Freitan?”

She shakes her head again, “He died.”

The Commander asks her to leave the office for a moment. As soon as the door closes, he summons Corskant to come immediately to the office. Corskant is our chief medical officer, in-fact, the only formally trained medic on the whole of Freitous. An admin error (or intentional omission) when they compiled the list of personnel needed to settle the new planet. He fails to arrive and when I am sent downstairs to see what is delaying him, I find he has been side-tracked by Besgo and is trying to remove one of Earth woman’s boots.

“Alien biology was my specialism back on Freito. This is my first ever Human from Planet Earth - how soon can I get started on her autopsy?” We all look at him in horror and the Captain shrinks away from his probing hands. He shrugs his shoulders in resignation, “I can live in hope.” We usher him into the Commander’s office.

“So, what do you know of their biology?” asks the Commander.

“Obviously, they have a similar form to us, except for their height which, I believe is one of the tallest of all the known planets,” he starts, “but there are a few differences, starting from the outside; the skin colour varies from the palest pink in the northern hemisphere to the darkest brown in the southern hemisphere and I believe there is an area where a bright yellow exists.”

We nod with interest and the Commander gestures for him to continue.

“Their feet are really interesting, they have digits, similar to our fingers on their feet – it’s an evolutionary hang-over, from when they used them to cling to branches in trees, you see they are much earlier on in their evolutionary development than most of the planets we are aware of.” He carries on to explain the detailed evolution of the Planet Earth and we try to look interested until he finally gets back to biological specifics, “...and being less developed than us, they still have separate internal organs for each function, such as a pumping blood-flow, digestion, extraction and waste holding, which makes them complicated to work on... are you sure I can’t just take a quick peek inside her?”

“What about reproduction, does theirs function the same way as a Freitan?” I ask.

“Actually, that is the one common aspect throughout the planetary systems, it seems the only way to ensure a species reproduces is to make it pleasurable and for the birth-giver to carry the birthling within them for the duration of gestation.”

“She says she had a birthling with a Freitan,” drops the Commander.

Corskant rubs his hands in glee but we both shake our heads at him.

The meeting is rounded up and I am tasked with taking Captain Janson back to her craft before the Burning Star sets again for our Purposeful-time. I give her strict instructions to remain on-board until I return again with the scientists, which won’t be for another eight hours, when the Burning Star rises again at Leisure-time. I just catch the last running transport back to my dwelling before darkness falls and am greeted eagerly by my family all desperate to hear about the visitors. I tell them everything I have learned and we are disturbed towards the end of the tale by a knock at the door of my dwelling.

It is Besgo, again. This time covered by his face-mask and a large orange shawl. I usher him in from the heavy Pelsopher and allow him to rest from his walk. He is unusually exhausted.

“I followed them,” he says breathlessly.

“Followed them where?”

“I followed you back to their craft then I hid in one of the food-gardens until it was completely dark.”

“Why? That was dangerous, you of all people know what the Pelsopher can do if you get caught in it for too long.”

“I had my mask and a spare in case the filter stopped working, anyway, don’t you want to know what I saw?” he asks excitedly.

I nod and so do the rest of my family, but I shoo my four birthlings out of the room, allowing only my two birth-givers to remain. Cybalaingarb is fat with a near-ready birthling and rests heavily on the cushions, while Sindergarb fusses around Besgo, hanging his shawl and putting out a tray of refreshments for us.

Besgo takes several deep swigs of leaf wine and begins, “They have a distinct advantage over us,” he starts.

The females have not yet seen the visitors and so Besgo’s statement is not immediately apparent to them but I confirm, “Their height - the Pelsopher is at waist level for them and therefore, they are free to walk at ground level even when it is dark and the Pelsopher is high.”

“And there is something else,” adds Besgo, “Two of them left the craft - I followed them, they went towards the wet-plains. You will NEVER guess what they did?”

We all lean forward.

“They entered the water - they were gone for about thirty minutes.”

“What happened to them, did they survive?” asks Cyberlaingarb.

“Yes! They simply walked back out again – they had a breathing device but only a simple suit, which I presume keeps them warm.”

“Medic Corskant said they have separate internal organs, perhaps that is how they can stand the pressure.”

“But I don’t know how that would be useful to them?” says Besgo.

“Is it possible that they are omnivorous?” suggests Sindergarb, “I recall learning about it in Ancient World Cultures class.”

“What’s omnivorous?” I ask.

“They eat the flesh of fish and animals as well as organic matter.”

“Ewww!” shriek Besgo and Cyberlaingarb simultaneously.

“Which means,” says Sindergarb, “the water is a massive source of food for them – it’s full of fish. They wouldn’t need to rely on growing crops to survive.”

“A more reliable source, less labour-intensive and self-perpetuating,” I add.

Cyberlaingarb and Sindergarb are talking intently as I fetch a bowl of fruits for us to snack on. They both had high level research roles on Freito, before we left, but there isn’t the technical infrastructure or need for their skills on Freitous and so they are grasping this opportunity to analyse these rare visitors with professional glee. Sindergarb is making notes on her battered communicator and Cyberlaingarb is looking extremely worried.

Besgo and I silently watch them for a good few minutes before they turn to us. Cyberlaingarb lays her device on the table for us to see. She has scribed a list; two columns labelled ‘Them’ and ‘Us’ but, before I get a chance to read the list, Sindergarb starts to talk.

“They are taller than us, therefore the Pelsopher is less of a problem to them. They eat flesh, which means there is more food, easily available to them. We cannot enter the water, or even risk being close to it because our organs cannot cope with the pressure, it presents no danger to them and who knows what other ways they could utilise that. They possess inter-

planetary transport and possibly communication, which means they can trade - we have none of that, nor any resources with which to build any and that's what we know so far – there could be more.”

“What is your point Sin?”

The birthgivers look at me and Besgo like we have just seeped out of the Pelsopher, then, the leaf drops and Besgo beats me to say, “they are better suited to Freitous than we are.”

“Do you think...?” I am interrupted.

“Yes we do.”

The Burning Star is rising for Leisure-time and Besgo, Sindergarb and I hurry to catch the first transportation to the city offices. The High Commander is not there, so we head over to the Craskscoff where he can often be found. To our surprise, he is sitting with the Medic and the Captain, or to be more specific, he and the Medic are seated either side of the Captain, who is now wearing a low-hanging top, which shows an ample milk-shelf. Not an uncommon sight for a Freitan but, in her glossy, nut-wood hue it has an alluring appeal that is far greater than that of our own duns-flower blue. I greet the three of them and the Commander asks me what preparations I have made towards the welcome feast, I respond that I would talk to the Craskscoff owner. He wants to hold it later that Leisure-time.

When he gets up to order more refreshments, I corner him.

“Commander, I need to talk to you urgently about the Earth people.”

“Garb, my dear fellow, it is all under control. My assistant has written up a contract for their stay and I bumped into Wheelscant and he has agreed to verify the Pels tests, so you don't need to worry yourself about that. Now why don't you come and sit down with us and have a beaker of crask?”

I have always maintained that the High Commander is not the brightest of Freitans. He was a relation of the Sixth-Tier Commander back on Freito and I am sure that was his only qualification for the role he has held since we arrived. He is also partial to birthgivers and has eight in his own dwelling – I am not so sure the Captain would agree to be his ninth.

“Commander, I believe the Visitors plan to make Freitous their permanent home. I am concerned and I would like to show you my documents, which may help you to see the full picture.” I plead.

“Nonsense Garb, they simply need to harvest some fuel and to be honest, if they can reduce the Pelsopher by doing so, then they are welcome to stay as long as they need.”

I will not get anywhere with the Commander, he means well but, he is smitten.

“May I document the extraction tests on the Pels algae?” I ask.

“Of course, of course Garb, that is your job after all.”

He takes his drinks and heads back to the table, where Besgo and Sindergarb have made themselves comfortable. Besgo is trying hard not to stare at the Captain but Sindergarb has engaged her in a probing conversation.

“So why do you have hair like a male?” she asks, “is it considered attractive on Earth?”

The Captain answers tersely that it is a practical choice when one is visiting unknown planets as it reduces one's chance of catching hair-leeches. Sin is not offended, if that was the

Captain's intention and she continues, "I understand you had a birthling, why is it not with you."

I wince at her lack of tack but, at the same time, admire her tenacity, if anyone is going to get information, Sin is the one.

"I wasn't allowed to take him off-planet," she states.

"Why did you not remain on Freito with him?" Sin counters.

"It is complicated," she crosses her arms defiantly.

"Do you plan to settle here?"

"No, the crew that picked me up already have a settlement on Stracknet-9 but, we cannot get there without an alternative fuel source and Freito, as you know does not have spare resources."

Sin does not mention the water and neither do me or Besgo and she gestures us to leave. I take a moment to organise food and a room in the Crasksoff for the feast later but, just as I am about to leave, the Commander calls me back over.

"Cancel whatever arrangements you have made for the feast Garb, the Captain has requested we get straight on with testing the Pels as she and her crew want to start work on engine modifications as soon as possible."

I do as he commands and notice Captain Janson and the Medic heading towards the exit. I catch them up, with Besgo and Sin in tow.

"Are you all coming to watch us test the algae?" asks the Captain.

"No," decides Besgo, "Sindergarb and I are headed back to our dwellings, Garb the Documenter will accompany you."

The transport only goes as far as the outer edges of the furthest village, from there we must walk a distance of about six miles to where the Pels algae begins. I keep a face mask in my bag, as every Freitan does but, I worry that the filter will be inadequate if we are out for too long. My worry is needless, the Earth visitors have a land vehicle waiting for us which quickly takes us to the edge, however, a new worry grabs me. Six visitors are at the site and appear to have already extracted several huge chunks of the blue-green goo. There are four white boxes on sticks, which are being checked by a particularly short Freitan.

"Wheelscant, I presume."

"What, oh, yes, are you the Documenter?" he asks, whilst tapping impatiently on the device he is checking.

"Is it working?" I enquire.

"I think so," he says, "it flashed red for a moment and then went back to green. I presume that means everything is fine - no more spores than usual."

"Don't we have our own monitors to test the air?"

"Afraid not," he says, "we did, when we first arrived but somehow, they got lost - no need for them you see."

"Well, that's it, done then," says the Commander from behind me, "best get back before the Burning Star sets."

Journal Entry 2

Entry by Garb - Official Documenter of Freitous

Three weeks later, the Pelsopher is breaching our dwellings and the Earth craft has left. The High Commander is in a state of panic and demanding to see my documents. I upload them to his reading device but he seems incapable of finding the information he wants. I feel sorry for him.

“What are we to do Garb, what are we to do?” he wails, “the Pelsopher is getting higher by the day and soon it won’t drop enough for us to harvest even the raised gardens, we won’t have enough filters for everyone and the coscos plants that they’re made from are already dying. We are going to starve or suffocate and I don’t know which will happen first.”

I slump down into one of his oversized cushions. I am fearful for my own family and despite the combined intelligence of Besgo, Cybalaingarb and Sindergarb, we have not been able to come up with a solution. We have been duped and our entire planet will likely die because of the Commander’s refusal to listen to our concerns. I leave to meet with Besgo at the Craskscoff.

He looks tired and weak and his limp is far worse than I have ever seen it. The Craskscoff is brimming with Freitans, I order a double strength crask and inhale the glittering steam as I swallow the frothy liquid, it makes me cough as I am not used to the double intake but, it hits the spot. I lean back and watch the scoff mist glitter around like a million stars. Then it hits me.

“Besgo, do you remember those archive documents back on Freito, the ones that kept details of all discontinued technology?”

Besgo frowns at me.

“Yes, I took copies of those too,” I admit. “I recall a very old piece of technology that had a lovely name, I remember seeing it in the list and checking it out because of the name.”

Besgo looks impatient.

“It was called the Million Star Communication Magnifier”

“Goodness, that’s a name, what does it do?”

“It’s really primitive but, it takes a small-range communication and magnifies it in all directions at once. The waves stop as soon as they hit anything, like a meteorite or something but, the range is so wide, it is bound to be picked up by someone.”

“Do we have one?” asks Besgo, doubtfully.

“No, but I can access the plans to make one.”

Besgo grabs my arm and we pull on our face-masks to head to the Commanders office. There is no-one there and we are able to access the plans and raid the storage room for parts. It takes us no longer than an hour to put together the Million Star Communication Magnifier and we attach it to my communicator.

“Do we need to take it outside to use?” asks Besgo.

“I think so.”

It takes only three hours for it to work. The darkness of sleep-time is broken by the same harsh lights that brought the Earth visitors. Besgo and I watch, hoping it is someone different, someone who can save us. The ship lands and Captain Janson emerges.

“I wondered how long it would take you,” she says, smiling.

I hate this woman.

Mine and Besgo’s confusion merely amuses her.

“We can transport your entire population to our settlements on Stracknent-9,” she says, matter-of-factly.

“Why would we want to go there?” asks Besgo.

“There is plenty of land, masses of vegetation and there is no Pelsopher,” she replies, “we can start transporting you now, before the Pelsopher rises any further.”

I look at Besgo and he shrugs his shoulders, what choice do we have? We start sending out communications and an hour later, masked Freitans, loaded with possessions file past us towards the waiting transporter. I ensure my four birthlings and their birthgivers, Cyberlaingarb and Sindergarb are among the first to leave. As the Captain’s craft disappears into the dark sky with the first thousand Freitans, another, even larger craft lands and expels Earth people, who usher Freitans into their now empty craft.

“What is going on Garb?” asks Besgo, as we watch the spectacle.

“I truly have no idea.”

A hand on my shoulder startles me and I turn to see Captain Janson again. She pushes us towards the Craskscoff and takes a seat. There is no-one serving, so I help myself.

“I’m sorry I deceived you,” she says.

I still don’t understand what is happening, why the Earth people are unloading, whilst the Freitans are leaving.

“We had to save our people and Freitous was our only option,” she says.

We both stare blankly at her.

“Planet Earth was destroyed by an asteroid. A few people escaped; three-hundred thousand. We tried to settle on Freito but, they fought us off because they don’t have the resources – we found Stracknent-9, it has sustained us in the short-term but, it has few animals, very small seas and no biological fuel sources. Then we heard about Freitous. I learned Freiter in space school, not on Freito. I have no son and I did not fall in love with a Freitan, it was simply a story to draw you in.”

My head is spinning, I knew these were lies but, there are so many of them.

“We need your planet, it has the renewable fuel we need and abundant sources of fish. I’m afraid we rigged the Pels algae to release spores, we know how to work with it and can reduce it very successfully.”

“So, what will happen to us?” I ask.

“You will go to Stracknent-9 and we will take over Freitous.”

At least she is honest.

“Why all the subterfuge?” asks Besgo.

“Would you have gone willingly?” she asks.

“No.”

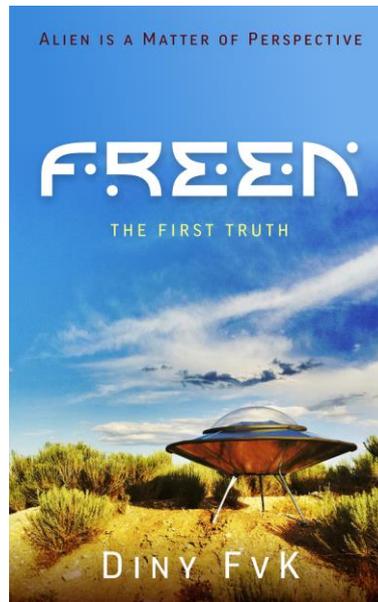
We are the last to board the ship and I watch as the murk of Freitous is replaced by the velvet darkness of space and finally, the luscious green foliage of Stracknent-9. It is perfect, and there is no Pelsopher.

I love this woman.

FREEN

THE FIRST TRUTH

by Diny van Kleeff



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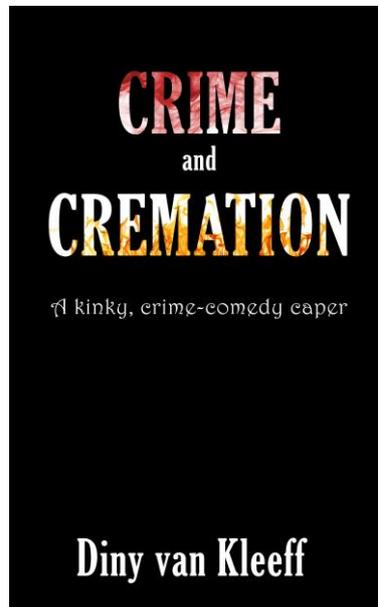
What if everything you knew about human evolution was turned on its head?

When fourteen-year-old Gem loses her amber necklace at her new boarding school, in the sleepy sea-side town of Eastbourne, she and her friends are only concerned with retrieving the precious, family heirloom – little do they know it will draw them into a world of conspiracies and cover-ups as old as mankind.

Together with archaeologist, Cessi, Americans Jack and Mac and a strange girl with an identical necklace, Gem and her new friends must keep the truth from being revealed – IF that is what they truly believe they should do.

Crime and Cremation

By Diny van Kleeff



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Emily and Louella are in need of jobs. When they accidentally kill, cremate and collect stolen cash from the pervert who has been stalking Emily, they decide that taking down criminals could be a lucrative career choice - if only they can survive the Russian mafia, satanists, fraudsters and corrupt cops who are after them.

Will they get away with theft and murder and more importantly, will the super-hot postman think Emily is cute?

Meanwhile, Louella is intent on turning their morally questionable escapades into a steamy blog to raise even more cash.