

An Echo of Ancient Voices

by

Caractacus Bear

Assisted by Francisca Parva

To

Julius U Frontinus

This Book is a

Monument to Friendship

from an

Old Friend

Chapter I

The hunt was on, paws scampering, thumping, running, stamping, no corner left unsearched. Bright eyes, accusing, darted here and there, challenging all they met.

"Who is it? Who is it?" was the repeated call that carried through the air. "We must find him!"

Lionardo shrank further back behind the bed, shaking, and pulled the duvet over his head. He could hear *them* coming, pounding the stairs and landing. Doors opened and shut.

"Who's gone missing?"

"Who looks guilty?"

The door flew open and a wave of fur pushed its way inside the room, paw over paw, and stopped short. The duvet had started to slip.

"He's behind the bed!"

"He's hiding there!"

"He won't come out!"

"He must be guilty!"

"What are you up to there?"

"But who is it?" squeaked a young voice. "I want to know who it is!"

Large paws started dragging out the bed, small ones scabbled at blankets. The culprit covered his face with his paws and groaned. What would they do to him? What would they say? Slowly he opened his eyes and peeped out from behind his paws. He was surrounded. Dozens of eyes gleamed back at him, glinting in the low light of the thundery summer afternoon. He climbed back onto the bed, and putting up a brave front he faced his accusers. Incredulous faces stared back.

"You're Lionardo!" squeaked the young voice.

Silence fell, then the muttering began, slowly growing to a crescendo of chatter.

"Who would have thought it?"

"How did he keep it secret?"

"Do you think he's a genius as well?"

"He's kept it well hidden if he is."

"Stop standing on my paws... and stop pulling my fur!"

"My nose is trapped!"

"It's not trapped. It's wound round my neck!"

"We'll have to take him to Caractacus."

So hoisting him above their heads, they carried Lionardo along the landing and downstairs where, having passed through the house and conservatory, the procession finally arrived in the study.

"Look Caractacus, we've found him, we've found him! We know who it is!" squeaked the young cub excitedly, tugging at the fur of a large and robust bear, of indeterminate age. His dark chocolate-brown fur paled on his nose and hind paws, and usually covered his large eyes, so that they appeared closed for much of the time. Looks, however, can be deceptive and underneath, Caractacus' blazing eyes missed nothing. Now he merely opened one eye, said "of course I know he's Lionardo" and closed it again.

Caractacus had been sitting with his paws up having a few moments rest and gazing out of the window towards the hills which lay to the north, at a distance from the old, red brick house and its garden. Listening to the multilingual chatter of the household around him, memories flooded back to him, including those of his great ancestor, Caratacus, whose life and times had been far removed from his own, but whose memories were as vivid.

He was content. He had chosen the house well and considering the diverse requirements and demands of the household, had managed to satisfy most individuals, although the Romans were persistently cold and often complained at the lack of the finer luxuries of life. The Egyptians, Amasis and Necho, who genuinely had cause for complaint at this altitude, took a different approach to

hardships. Constantly having to be reminded to wrap up warmly in cold and wet weather, they were often to be found, in the depths of winter, snuggled up to the Vikings. The latter, in contrast, coped with the long hot summer months as best they could, but loved nothing better than a romp through the snow, or a cold swim in the small beck which ran alongside the field at the bottom of the garden.

It was hardly surprising then that conversations about the weather were frequent and often resulted in raised voices. As each season came and went, Caractacus, a Briton through and through, would often put his paws in his ears and shake his head despairingly. "What a bunch!" he was heard muttering one day.

"It's all very well for you," said a honey-coloured Roman. "You've lived with this atrocious weather for thousands of years, but we're simply not cut out for it. I can't understand why you want so much water. Water should be where it belongs, in rivers and lakes, not in fur, at least not Roman fur. It does it no good, you know."

"He's worried about his looks," giggled a young Viking. "He thinks he won't look so pretty with wet fur."

"I am **not** pretty," replied the Roman good humouredly, "but I can't help it if I'm the best looking Roman here, and when it comes to water, there's simply too much of it in this country and most of that in the wrong place. I suppose though, that **you'd** like to see even more. After all, your ancestors spent so much time in water, I'm surprised they didn't sprout flippers ... and with white fur too," he added with a shudder. "Even the natives don't go to sea purely for the fun of it."

"Humph," said Caractacus. "What's the sea ever done for us? Quite useful for trade maybe, but it didn't keep your lot away. In fact, I seem to remember the rot set in after we began trading with you. My father and grandfather started to build up good trading links with the continent, but then your Emperor Claudius decided to cause a lot of trouble. We should have kept ourselves to ourselves. Come to think of it, if you Romans disliked our weather so much, why didn't you stay in the Mediterranean?"

"Perhaps they had a drought in Rome and needed water," laughed the Viking, whose name was Olaf. "Now they think they're flooded in Britain and need the sun, so they've invited the sun-god to live with us!"

Apollo smiled and took the joke well. "Ah, but Apollo was also the god of prophecy and I'm very good at prophesying the weather, at least in this country. Anyway, if the Celtic sun-god Belenus can't be bothered with Britain, why

should Apollo be?"

"Because it might stop certain bears complaining all the time, not to mention the Simians." said Caractacus. "I don't remember all this complaining two thousand years ago, but perhaps Simian Celts were different. What do you think, Commius?" he asked, addressing a tawny-coloured Briton, who was intently studying some small stones.

"The Simian Romans complained about the weather as much as our Romans did, according to Socrates. He says their ancient texts are almost identical to ours. His family's spent so many centuries pawing over them that he knows them almost off by heart by now."

"But did their Celts complain?" asked Olaf.

"I don't think they did," said Constantine, the young cub with the squeaky voice. "They were Celts and Britons and we don't complain, do we Caractacus? So they wouldn't have complained would they Caractacus? Caractacus! Caractacus! Tell Apollo that Britons don't complain. Do we Caractacus?" he insisted, tugging on Caractacus' fur.

Caractacus looked down and for a long time stared hard at a small bundle of brown fur which was jumping up and down excitedly around his feet. "No, we don't complain... and what are you doing here? You're supposed to be in class with Socrates."

"Oh, that old Koala, he's... "

"What did you call him?"

"Well he is old and he is Koalese and all he does all day is chew eucalyptus and paw over old books which are so boring and I don't like learning... " without pausing for breath.

"And there was I thinking Britons never complained!" laughed Olaf, pulling a Koalese-like face. The small bundle of fur looked pugnaciously at Olaf and pulled a face back at him then, glancing at Caractacus, shot out of the room, propelled by a light cuff from the latter's paw. Caractacus then looked for Olaf but the young Viking had already fled, having learnt long ago that it was wiser not to push him too far. Apollo stood up, saying he would check that the cubs were all in class. As he left, a shadow of a smile crossed his face as he heard Caractacus and Commius muttering to themselves, to the accompaniment of the

sharp clicking of the stones.

As Caractacus reflected over the previous few years, he wondered if perhaps now was the time for the extraordinary history of the Ursans to be told, but who would believe it? "After all," he mused, "what do these Simians, even their scientists, really know about wormholes?" One or two of them were getting close, he conceded, but what was all this about imaginary time? "Imaginary indeed!" he grumbled to Commius. "If the last five hundred years of life on a planet full of talking apes has been imaginary, well, you could have fooled me!" He knew however that Plato had been right in saying that persuasion, not confrontation, was the answer.

Well-educated though he was, Caractacus was always happy to admit that literary matters were not his strong point, and best left to others, for he was at heart a practical bear, and used to a life of action. Additionally, whenever the idea of going public had been discussed, there had been a general consensus that a book would be more acceptable to the Simians if written by one of their own. So he had decided to employ a Simian to ghost-write the history.

Caractacus lay back again and closed his eyes, remembering back much further, to that fateful spring day when, as a youngster, he had first become aware that his people were facing dangers and difficulties. He recalled the conversation he had had with his father Cunobelinus, as the latter lay mortally injured from a dagger thrust.

Chapter II

"My son, I want to talk to you while I'm still able. Come over here and sit by me," said Cunobelinus, patting the blanket which lay over him.

"You're sick, Father. You must sleep. Perhaps later."

"No, I must speak to you now."

"But Father... "

"Come, I'll sleep when we've spoken."

"All right, but you mustn't tire yourself," said Caractacus, sitting down by his father's side and taking hold of his paw.

"You're still young, too young really, but there's no more time, so I must speak while I can. Our people are in trouble."

"We've always had problems, Father."

"No, this is different. Times are changing and there's a lot of danger."

Caractacus looked around for a while and shrugged. "Nothing's changed. The danger's been dealt with."

"I don't mean here, at home. I mean all over the country. Our people find it ever more difficult to survive. They need help... a leader."

"Father, you've been dreaming. There's nothing wrong. Go to sleep."

"They need you... they'll follow you..." said Cunobelinus, his voice faltering.

"Me? Why me?"

Because of who you are. They'll follow you, but you must find Togidumnus first. You must do this together."

"Togidumnus? Do what together?" asked Caractacus, wondering what help Togidumnus could be in any venture. "Father, you're confused. You're tiring yourself."

"No, I'm not confused, Caractacus. You need Togidumnus. When I'm dead, make sure your mother is cared for, then go immediately and find your brother."

He paused, searching for breath to continue, then clasped Caractacus hard. "Come closer," he whispered. "You must find your brother. Then you must go and find Commius the Druid... to the Yorkshire Dales... a copse near the River Nidd. You should recognise it. Tell him I've sent you. He'll help you... teach you. It was he who told me... it was time... and you.... he's waiting for me to send you to him... " and Cunobelinus fell back on his pillows.

"Father, stop worrying and forget all of this," but his father was already asleep. Caractacus scratched his head. What on earth had his father been on about?

His mother came over. "What was he saying? Is he in pain?"

"No, Mother, he's not in pain. I'm not sure what he was talking about. He was just rambling. He must have hit his head when he was attacked. But don't worry, he's sleeping now," and Caractacus wandered off and promptly dismissed the conversation from his mind.

Cunobelinus, never regained consciousness, dying a couple of days later and the next spring saw Caractacus, young, alone and just a little bit frightened, setting out on the journey of life. He had few belongings so was travelling light and knew no-one outside a radius of a few miles. He had in fact, already explored much of the area around his home, but further afield was in unknown territory.

Many of the older Ursans in his village tried to persuade him to stay until he was older, partly due to concerns for his safety and partly because he was much loved and would be missed. He was adamant, however, that it was time for him to leave and, in their hearts, they knew that he was different from them and a very important individual. So, having loaded him with provisions and advice, they bade him farewell and watched as his brown shaggy silhouette shambled out of sight.

Caractacus spent many years travelling and over a long period of time became well acquainted with both the land and its inhabitants, enjoying both summer sunshine and the howling winds of winter. In many ways he was no different from others of his age. He enjoyed swimming both in rivers and along shore lines, and spent many hours freshwater fishing for his dinner, usually salmon

and trout. He was not a bear for the open sea. "After all," he reasoned, "if bears had never put to sea, we would never have had all that trouble with the Romans".

Caractacus was at his happiest on the open road and spent long hours ambling around the countryside, studying and watching both Ursans and Simians, although he strove to avoid direct contact with the latter. For a large individual, he was remarkably adept at blending into the background at the first sign of trouble, despite long treks over open terrain, but skilled as he was, it was not always easy to avoid being seen. He did however make short and regular trips into the towns and cities which he passed by. He knew that if he was to acquaint himself fully with the ways of the Simians, he could not avoid city life, where he reasoned that they were probably to be seen at their most intolerant.

It was during these years that Caractacus heard news of an old cubhood pal. On hearing that a pompous Roman bear had passed through the area, sampling the best wines that the local establishments had to offer, his ears had pricked up. His village had often entertained families of Ursans, one of whom had been the Frontinian family. Over a number of years, these visits had forged a strong friendship between Caractacus and Julius, who was around the same age. Whereas Caractacus was a Celtic Briton, Julius was the direct descendant of a Roman governor of Britain who had played a role in subduing the very tribes which Caractacus' own ancestor had led against the Romans.

Julius, even at such an early age, had shown a love of those finer things in life which he instinctively felt would have gone hand in hand with a senatorial lifestyle. "After all," he would say with his nose in the air, "I **am** of noble birth, you know." More than once he had expected Caractacus and Togidumnus to carry him over streams and patches of nettles. They had good-humouredly played along until the day they had 'accidentally' dropped the venerable Roman in a muddy field, leaving him to paddle home muttering about barbarians.

Julius had loved to gather the Britons around him, making grand speeches about his noble ancestors and the sophisticated life of luxury which they had led and he had been deprived of. He could never understand why they laughed at him when he tried to teach them to be more refined and elegant 'in the Roman manner'. He would turn to Caractacus saying "I'm not pompous, am I Caractacus?", at which Caractacus would laugh, "of course you are" and Julius would look offended and sniff haughtily.

A few years on, Caractacus found no difficulty in picking up his old friend's trail and soon they were both contentedly sampling the wares of one of the better public house cellars in the area. Julius had discovered row upon row of good wines and was happily quaffing a highly regarded Burgundy while Caractacus helped himself from a barrel of ale. This was the first time they had shared a drink together, both having been too young previously, but now they sat and reminisced late into the night, and caught up on each other's news. Then, in the early hours of the morning, when Simians were safely asleep, they left quietly, having first thrown down a pawful of notes as payment.

Over the next year or so, many publicans were to find they had been visited during the night, but as Caractacus and Julius always overpaid, none of them felt inclined to report it, although some did try unsuccessfully to catch a glimpse of their nocturnal visitors.

During one of these forays Julius commented, "these wines are all very well you know, but I'd give anything for a bottle of Falernian. The taste was so superior."

"I'm surprised your ancestors didn't bring any with them," said Caractacus jokingly.

"Oh, but they did," replied Julius. "They just had time to grab some and it arrived intact."

"I wouldn't have thought there would have been time."

"Well, as such a prominent family, we had apartments very close to the Papal Palace and the Castel Sant' Angelo, near where all the trouble started, and one of our family mottoes is 'never leave a good wine undrunk'. So apparently, when all that shaking started, everyone ran to the cellar and held on as hard as they could, and they just happened to be holding on to the wine. Fortunately the entire household was at home that day, so they managed to hold on to quite a lot of it, and when they fell out of this end of the wormhole, they were still clutching it in their paws." Julius paused, sighing. "Sadly," he went on, "it was finished centuries ago. But what can you do? We've still got the recipe of course, but one can't get the grapes these days... at least not on this planet."

Chapter III

The two friends sat in silence for a while, then Caractacus asked, "who was your ancestor?"

"Frontinus. Sextus Julius Frontinus."

"Aha! Sextus Julius Frontinus" said Caractacus slowly and deliberately, as if trying to remember something. "Wasn't that the chap who said he didn't want a monument after he died? Something like 'our memory will endure if by our life we have merited it'?"

"Yes" said Julius proudly. "'memoria nostri durabit, si vita meruimus'. Such nobility of spirit! Such magnanimity! But how did you know?"

"Barbarians do know a few things, you know, old fellow," said Caractacus dryly. "Actually, I remember a friend commenting on it a couple of years ago."

"Really?" asked Julius. "What did he say?"

"That Frontinus was a great engineer and one of the better Roman governors of Britain."

"Yes, he was," said Julius, surprised that Caractacus knew so much, and then he added expectantly, "what else did he say?"

Caractacus' eyes glinted wickedly. "That he couldn't imagine the present generation of the family being so keen to refuse honours."

Julius was about to retaliate when it crossed his mind that it was true. "Well," he said "one of those grand marble monuments would be rather nice, especially for an Ursan of my standing." Then his face fell. "But I'm flogging a dead horse... I don't suppose I'll ever get a monument in this lifetime," he said gloomily.

"Cheer up, old pal," said Caractacus and he slapped Julius so hard on his back that the latter spluttered into his wine.

"Things just aren't the same," he said when he had finished coughing. "No luxuries, no soft living, no state recognition. In fact, nothing much has changed in Britain in two thousand years. It was always an outpost. Not to

mention the weather." He paused for a while, then asked "so how did you find me?"

"There was a rumour going round of a pompous Roman bear in the neighbourhood."

"Pompous? Pompous?" retorted Julius. "I'm not pom...pom...p..." and his voice tailed off as he caught Caractacus looking at him with a twinkle in his eye.

"We Romans," he sniffed haughtily "are all proud of our ancestry and there are plenty of us around. It could have been anyone."

"No, it couldn't. The reports definitely said pompous, not proud."

"Pompous indeed!" spluttered Julius. "If I'm so pompous, why did you want to see me?"

"Even barbarians appreciate sophisticated company occasionally."

"Oh! Well... yes... I suppose if you put it like that... in that case, actually, I'm delighted to see you again, old friend. We did have some good times as cubs, didn't we?"

"Yes, we did, especially around mud."

Julius glanced at his friend but said nothing and Caractacus was surprised at his lack of response. There was a pause in the conversation as they both settled back contentedly.

Presently Julius asked, "so, what have you been doing all these years? How's Togidumnus?"

Caractacus brought Julius up to date, telling him how Togidumnus had left home a few years earlier, at the usual age, and how he himself had been considerably perturbed by the idea of his brother wandering around by himself.

"After all," he said "how on earth does he take care of himself? Do you remember that time when I found him searching rock pools along the shore line, when the tide had already cut him off from the land?"

"Yes," said Julius, "and what about the time that we found him howling in the forest, after that close encounter with a wasps' nest. Do you remember what he said afterwards; that he'd fancied some honey, and how was he to know that wasps don't like just anyone sticking a nose and paws into their business? He did love the countryside though, didn't he?"

"Too much rolling round in the grass, if you ask me, although Mother did like the flowers he often picked for her. She used to call him her dashing cavalier."

"I bet she never called you that, did she?"

"No, definitely not."

For a while, the two friends talked about Togidumnus, and how, as he had grown older, the younger cubs had gleefully played tricks on him, and how he had frequently walked into their traps, often dug under his very nose. Togidumnus had always fallen into their holes with his characteristic good humour, but Caractacus had been worried about his 'lack of a sense of self-preservation' as he put it.

Then Julius asked, "how are your parents?"

Caractacus was silent and when he answered it was with a heavy voice. "Father died... was attacked actually, died of his wounds."

"I'm sorry, old friend. Your mother?"

"Died not long afterwards."

"Was it... was it Simians?"

"No," answered Caractacus.

"Then who? Not... ?"

"Yes," answered Caractacus almost imperceptibly. "It was an Ursan."

A look of horror crossed Julius' face. "But who? And why?"

Caractacus made no reply and Julius knew better than to press him.

It was during these nocturnal meetings that Caractacus had spent some time lamenting the lack of suitable transport for Ursans. Julius, in his travels, frequented comfortable, upper-class, leafy suburbs. He favoured such southern Roman towns as Verulamium and Aquae Sulis; pleasant, cultured places or 'loca amoena' as he called them. He also made occasional trips to places in and around Wales. He called these 'loca inculta', as he had done two thousand years before. He still considered them wild and uncivilized but they reawakened old memories which he enjoyed, although he never stayed long.

Farther south though, he was happy to linger quite a long time in places he liked and only travelled on when he was bored with an area, or felt that the Simians were becoming suspicious of his presence. He did so by way of major Roman roads where possible, somehow always managing to hitch a comfortable ride. Caractacus, on the other hand, travelled long distances on foot and regularly travelled the width and breadth of the island until his paws hurt.

One night Julius commented, "I know just the Ursan for you. I'm sure he could fit you up with something suitable. He's a military bear... Roman... and a wizard with mechanical things. I'll never understand those military bears. How could any self-respecting Roman enjoy getting so dirty and doing so much work, simply for the fun of it? Anyway, you really ought to meet him. His name's Vespasian, the direct descendant of the emperor of the same name, which only makes it worse."

"I thought his distinguished forefather was rather more practical than most of his kind. Emperors that is. I must admit I had quite a high regard for him at the time."

"Artifex machinarum. That's what I call him. Master of machines."

"Humph. I remember him being present during the battle of Medway in 43. We lost. He did a lot of damage in the south of England after that, including helping to conquer the Isle of Wight, so let's hope he's not making war machines," muttered Caractacus gruffly.

"Oh no, not anymore. Through the centuries, his family have kept up with technological advances, but Vespasian must be their greatest mechanic. He can turn his hand to all sorts of machines and he's always making something for someone, but his real interest lies with transport. That's why you ought to meet him."

"Transport? What sort of transport?"

"Oh, whatever you like. Why don't we go and see him? I'm sure he'd be delighted and honoured if you commissioned a special vehicle from him."

"Hmm, I have sometimes thought about a motorbike. Do you think...?"

"Oh yes, certainly. I know. We'll go tomorrow. I sometimes get a lift in a van which always takes the same route on a Wednesday. It passes close to Vespasian and its Simian keeps it very clean and tidy. We must be waiting in the right place at the right time though. Otherwise, the risk's too great. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course. It pays to be cautious. What time do we start?"

"Early. Very early. Far too early for my liking, and they call themselves civilized, but it's safer. I think he's a courier. Drives overnight and always stops for a break in a particular lay-by. So when he gets out to stretch his legs, we get in. It's never failed so far and it's reasonably comfortable."

"Better get some sleep then," said Caractacus and he rolled over onto his side and started snoring.

Early next morning, when their unwitting chauffeur pulled into the back yard of a shop in a small village, he got out of the car and entered the building by a back door.

"He'll be gone a while. He always has a cup of coffee before he starts unloading," whispered Julius. "If there's nobody about, we can get out. I'll just check the road's clear."

He crawled on all four paws into the front of the van and onto the passenger seat and then carefully raised his head to peep out of the window.

"The road's clear. So far, so good," and Julius quietly opened the door and climbed out, closely followed by Caractacus who whispered in a loud voice, "I can't be doing with these things. Too cramped and airless. Why do they put a roof on? Give me a chariot any day."

"Sh!" whispered Julius, frantically tugging at Caractacus' fore-paw. "We're not safe yet," and he led him into some bushes at the back of the yard. "It'll take about an hour to walk there, so we should get there in time for breakfast."

A good Roman breakfast obviously."

"Well, I shan't argue with that," said Caractacus. "At least you know how to eat, or rather how much to eat. You're a good fellow. Lead on!"

Chapter IV

Keeping to the cover of bushes and trees, the two friends made their way through the grassy undergrowth along a track which, although barely discernible to Simians, was a clear indicator of regular Ursan travel throughout the area. After about an hour, Caractacus spotted the roof of a small hut and a few more minutes brought them to what had once probably been a large chicken coop, but which had long been deserted by Simians. A quick glance revealed that it was occupied once again. Extensive repairs had been made which, although not always matching the original material, had been carried out by a skilled and meticulous paw. Lying around outside were numerous bits of machinery and materials, which were obviously Simian cast-offs. Amongst the wild vegetation, were numerous cultivated herbs, both native and exotic.

Julius went over to the door and knocked quietly and presently it opened to reveal a golden-furred Roman of military bearing, standing in the doorway. After the usual greetings and introductions, Vespasian declared that it was a great honour to have met Caractacus on the field of battle, and now to meet him in person and hoped there were no hard feelings. Then the three Ursans sat down to a substantial breakfast which was most welcome to the two travellers.

Having eaten, Caractacus had a good look around the hut and saw that it was much the same on the inside as the outside, that is very clean, and was decorated moreover inside with some rather good murals, as he expected of a Roman habitation. It was however, full of what he considered to be a lot of old junk, the possibilities of which seemed to him, well, not so much endless as end of the roadish. Being a bear of little social chit chat, even in those early years, he cleared his throat... "Harrrrrumph!"... and got straight down to business.

"Wheels, I need some wheels."

"Wheels? There's not much call for chariots these days. Too risky. What exactly do you have in mind?"

"Two, obviously!"

"Two? Not very stable, especially on rough ground."

"I don't think they make them with more. Are you suggesting I need a three-

wheeler?"

"I couldn't possibly build one with three. I doubt that it's ever been done. Destroys the centre of gravity. No speed and most unstable."

"I've never seen one with four wheels."

"I suppose it would be more of a cart."

"A cart? A CART?"

"Well, I could try and streamline it a bit for you, but what would you use to pull it? A husky?"

"A husky?" asked Caractacus, looking bewildered.

"A horse would be too big and there aren't many miniature ponies around. The Simians might miss them. A team of huskies would be perfect."

"Actually," intervened Julius, "Caractacus would like to commission a custom-built motorbike from you."

"A motorbike! Of course. I understand now," and Vespasian gave a hearty laugh.

"What did you think I wanted?" asked Caractacus.

"I thought you wanted me to build you a chariot."

"In this day and age?" asked Caractacus incredulously.

"Well, er... well... um, I did think it was rather strange, if you wanted it for travelling. Of course it could have been for ceremonial purposes. There's always plenty of demand for that type of thing. After all, I remember Julius Caesar was most impressed with the prowess of the Britons in chariots, even on steep slopes."

"Humph."

"I thought it would be just up your street," said Julius to Vespasian.

"Definitely. I'd be delighted. To tell you the truth, I've been wanting to get

my claws into something really challenging for a while. I'm busy enough, but most of the time, it's very routine stuff. Come to think of it, I haven't had a real challenge since I made that racing wheelchair for the young Carthaginian. Now that **was** an interesting job. Anyway," he added, looking Caractacus up and down, "I think I've probably got just the thing for you. Julius mentioned that you spend a lot of time in rural areas."

"Rural? Wild and uncivilized, that's what I call them," muttered Julius to himself.

Vespasian went across to the corner of the room and bending down, opened up a large trap door in the floor. Caractacus and Julius followed him and looking through the opening, saw a staircase leading down underground.

"Excavated this myself," said Vespasian. "Come on down and we'll discuss it down here." At the bottom of the stairs, they found themselves in a concrete lined vault, at least the size of the building, and possibly even more. The walls were lined from floor to ceiling with wooden shelves, which were piled high with rolls of parchments and papers. In the middle of the room was a large wooden table with a number of stools around it. Vespasian went straight to a pile of yellowish looking paper rolls and said to Caractacus, "give me a hand with these will you?" Making two or three trips and struggling, for the rolls were easily twice their own size, they carried them to the table.

"Now then," said Vespasian, "let's sit down and have a look at these. Any preferences?"

"Top of the range," said Julius.

"British," said Caractacus.

"It'll need to be sturdy," said Vespasian, glancing at Caractacus.

"Luxurious," said Julius.

"Reliable," said Caractacus.

"Off-roader," said Vespasian.

"Unique," said Julius.

"Old," said Caractacus.

"Classic," said Vespasian.

Julius and Caractacus looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

"Yes, classic," said Julius.

"Definitely," said Caractacus.

"Well then," said Vespasian, "We'll just unroll a few of these out and you can take a look."

He and Caractacus climbed onto the stools and carefully laid out those rolls which Vespasian indicated, three in total. Caractacus and Julius gazed in amazement at what lay before them. Each roll held the design plans for a different motorbike, down to the minutest detail. "Just look at these! Are they original?" asked Julius, when he had recovered from his surprise.

"Of course, or at least copies of originals."

"But how did you get hold of them?"

"Oh, we copied them decades ago. It's a tradition in our family. We try to collect copies of as many plans as possible. Bikes, cars, planes, ships of every sort, locomotives, we've got quite an archive now. Don't have much call for high-quality reproductions though."

"How did you get hold of them? Do the Simians know?"

"Oh, there's always a way to locate them, then it's just a case of copying them without being discovered. My grandfather had these done. Of course, we would never copy anything classified," Vespasian added, inadvertently glancing towards the top shelves.

"Of course not," smiled Julius diplomatically, gazing at the floor.

"Why ever not?" asked Caractacus, looking directly at Vespasian. "Could prove useful one day."

"What do you think of these?" asked Vespasian, hurriedly changing the subject and pointing to the plans.

The three Ursans studied the drawings and models, Vespasian pointing out

the pros and cons of each one. After about half an hour, Vespasian said, "as we're all looking at this from a different viewpoint, perhaps we should take a vote, if that's agreeable to you, Caractacus?"

"Certainly," said Caractacus. "After all, you're the technical expert and I have to ride it and Julius," he added wickedly "may have to be seen with it."

"My only concern," said Julius haughtily, "is that it should be a model fit for a high-ranking Briton. I've made my decision, if you want my opinion."

"Of course I do, old chap," said Caractacus. "so close your eyes and point on the count of three."

The three Ursans lined up in front of the table. "Unum, duo, tria," counted Vespasian and much to their relief when they opened their eyes, they were all pointing to the same bike. So that was how Caractacus Bear came to be the proud owner of a 1912 Wilkinson Touring Motor Cycle, known popularly as the Wilkinson TMC. The bike, described as 'a luxurious and advanced machine', was ready almost one year to the day after Vespasian accepted the commission. It was a handmade, precision-built scale model, which was to become known and loved by the Ursan community throughout the country.

Chapter V

Over the years, Caractacus frequently came into contact with other Ursans, some of whom were settled and some of whom were also on the move, for it was customary for young male Ursans to leave home and spend five years or more travelling by themselves. This period had become known as the 'Grand Tour', because the Simians had coined this phrase, in the seventeenth century, for much the same type of travelling in Europe. The Ursans had laughed, saying that they had been undertaking a Grand Tour themselves for a couple of centuries, but they had adopted the name alongside that of their own 'Peregrinatio', a tour of many lands and famous cities, which they made in order to become acquainted with the culture of the Simians and better understand their ancient customs. It wasn't unusual for Ursans undertaking the Tour to spend short periods of time in groups, enjoying a social life much as young Simians do.

The Grand Tour had been introduced for a number of reasons, mainly to give young male Ursans much-needed practical experience of the Simian world, but it was also intended as an ongoing extension of that great period of Ursan exploration known as the 'Recognitio Magna' or Great Exploration. The Ursan community had felt it important to keep up-to-date with events in the Simian world as far as possible, and the Grand Tour was one way of doing this, since the amount of information brought back was extensive.

Traditionally, yearly visits to the home village and an annual account of one's deeds were expected, which in the case of the Celts, for example, took the form of an oral storytelling, in that of the Pandese, a written narrative. All reports were Chronicled; they always left out a few facts and misdemeanours but were generally truthful. This was the time to make one's paw mark and introduce oneself to the world. The more unusual and useful the information brought back, and the braver and more noble the adventures and deeds undertaken, the more chance there was of being personally included in the Chronicles. Despite the death of his parents, Caractacus continued to report to the elders of his village and was fully aware that Togidumnus also did this, although their paths had never crossed and he felt no need for them to do so.

Of course, there were some who attempted to cheat the system and returned with glowing but false reports, but these individuals were few and far between. With so many Ursans on the move at any one time, news travelled fast between settlements and true tales of heroism were usually supported by witnesses. Additionally, the decennial Chronicle Convention, which brought together Ursans from across Britain, quickly identified discrepancies. It was

simply not in any Ursan's interest to misrepresent his years on the Grand Tour.

Female Ursans, or Ursanae as they were called, didn't complete the Tour. Following the arrival of the Ursans here, the number of female cubs born had fallen severely until the ratio of males to females was persistently out of proportion. Since there were serious dangers attendant on travelling throughout the countryside, it had therefore been decided that the Ursanae would only travel abroad when necessary and within the protection of large groups. The community could not afford to take unnecessary risks which might threaten the survival of their society on Terra Humana. So the Ursanae had taken on roles which were traditionally held in the highest esteem, which were those of Historians, Chroniclers and Archivists.

Superficially therefore there was nothing unusual about the number of Ursans whom Caractacus met. He was surprised however, to come across many who had lost all contact with their homes, saying that their villages could no longer support everyone. Some appeared bewildered at this turn of events, some lonely and a few even angry and resentful. Several seemed to be drifting aimlessly, although most were managing, often in the face of adversity, to maintain some adherence to the customs of their ancestors. Caractacus was also surprised to meet some Ursans who appeared far too young to be undertaking the Grand Tour. Why, he asked himself, had they been sent out so early?

It was little wonder then, that Caractacus started querying life, although admittedly it took him some years to do this. He was a 'doer and adventurer' not a 'thinker and philosopher', and like many young Ursans or young Simians for that matter, had until then done a lot of doing and not much thinking. Responsibility had yet to catch up with him. He knew that there was something wrong, but what? The Ursans had survived five hundred years in this land. True, they had had their problems and moments of crisis, but didn't everyone? They were fully Chronicled, often in surprising detail, so Caractacus was sure that if there had been problems with the Grand Tour, he would have heard the story. He spent many hours reflecting on his observations, but never once did he remember the conversation which he had had with his father, Cunobelinus.

Whilst travelling to Yorkshire one week, he decided to visit a certain Simian city, and leaving the TMC safely hidden away, he spent some time travelling across it. One night, he came across a couple of other Ursans, who were acting suspiciously and were apparently loathe to speak to him. He soon parted company and travelled further on. In the early hours of that morning,

he was passing through a rundown part of the city when he caught the sound of whimpering. He paused, but hearing nothing more, was about to move on when a whispered prayer, "di me servant" stopped him. Turning to catch the wind, Caractacus called on all those senses which, unlike Simians, Ursans had never completely lost and managed to catch a unique scent amongst the foul-smelling air rising from a pile of rotting rubbish bags, thrown out ready for the refuse collection the next day. It was the scent of an Ursan.

Swiftly he followed his nose, and moving the pile caught a glimpse of a small body, barely breathing. With his large paws, he gently lifted out the cub, an act which brought forth moaning and crying. He was a Roman, a very young military bear cub whose once golden fur was matted with dirt and falling out in pawfuls. Emaciated and obviously desperately ill, the cub was having difficulty breathing, but clutched desperately at Caractacus and looked up with eyes which showed some last remnants of hope. It was becoming light and Caractacus, sensing Simians nearby, cradled the cub close to him and made his way back to a disused building he had spotted earlier.

He knew there was nothing he could do for the cub, who was past help, so he held him tight and talked to him, while the cub gasped out his answers.

"What's your name?"

"Faustulus. Faustulus Plinius Secundus."

"Your family?"

"Family... village... all gone."

"What happened?"

"Simians. Cleared the woods. A new road... through our village."

"Where are your family?"

"I don't know. We had no warning... fled... separated from them all."

"When?"

"A couple of months ago."

"Why did you come to the city... and by yourself?"

"By accident. I crawled into a car to sleep and woke up here."

"Haven't you seen any other Ursans who could help you?"

"Only two, a Carthaginian and a Panda... laughed at me. Had some money with me... they took it. I couldn't get any food," said the cub, starting to cry and clinging to Caractacus who growled softly.

"I saw them," said Caractacus.

"They were horrible."

"We'll find your family. Together. You'll get better."

"My twin."

"Twin?"

"Yes, I must find my twin. He may be lost as well."

"What's his name?"

"Horatius. I miss him."

"We'll find him. I promise you."

"Thank you," whispered Faustulus and slept. Later that day, Caractacus heard him whimper and his head slipped to one side. He was dead.

Chapter VI

Caractacus held Faustulus for the rest of that day until darkness fell, when he made his way back to the TMC. Carefully placing the cub in the pannier, he set off and rode throughout the night southwards, towards the small copse where his family had been buried since the Casus Mirabilis. It was located near Prae Wood, his ancestral territory, which had been an important centre for his tribe, the Catuvellauni, two thousand years before. The next night he carefully dug a grave next to those of his mother and father and laid to rest the small body. Then, in the tradition of Ursans on Terra Humana, he scratched the cub's name on a piece of wood and threw it in the grave.

"You were right, Father," he said. "We **are** in trouble. I should have listened to you," and Caractacus stomped away and bellowed out his grief until it carried through the darkness and made Simians tremble. Then lying down, he went to sleep. Waking in the morning, his first thought was of Faustulus, his second of Togidumnus. "I need my brother. I must find Togidumnus."

For many months, Caractacus wandered again throughout Britain, no longer enjoying it as he once had done. He had returned immediately to the city where he had found Faustulus and scoured the streets for the two Ursans, but they were nowhere to be found, so he had moved on. He made a point of stopping at every Ursan community he passed through in that area, alerting and warning them, but no one seemed surprised. All had tales to tell, some their own, others heard second-hand, of broken communities, lost cubs and despair, and not a few stories in which violence featured. On more than one occasion, Caractacus wondered why he himself had never noticed. Reluctantly, he was forced to admit that the signs had been everywhere. He had simply closed his eyes to them.

For a long time he delayed returning home as usual and enquired everywhere for sightings of Togidumnus, but no one had ever seen him 'recently'. Most remembered him and all made much the same comments.

"Such a wonderful bear."

"Charming."

"A thorough gentlebear."

"Marvellous with the cubs."

"Yes, could teach them anything. Spellbound they were."

"He'll always have a home with us."

"We asked him to stay, but one day he just wandered off."

"That sounds like him," said Caractacus. "Wandering off that is. Probably got lost. I'm not too sure about the rest though. Are you sure we're speaking of the same Togidumnus?"

"I'm quite sure. Yes, he did love nature and he was a mine of new information. Introduced us to so many new edible plants and a number of medicinal ones too."

"He talked a lot about you, about all his family. We know who you are of course. Anything we can do for you, we're at your service," and they would offer Caractacus the best of everything they had.

So Caractacus left messages everywhere he went, but to no avail, and then one day, while he was in Scotland, he made a decision. He would go home and wait there for Togidumnus, even if he was forced to wait a full year. Quickly packing his few belongings into the pannier, he climbed onto the TMC and was off again. He travelled fast, stopping only during the day to eat and rest, and after two nights travelling he finally arrived home to the site of his village. It was gone. In its place, stood a large estate of Simian houses, which had gobbled up most of the wood where he and Togidumnus had spent their cubhood.

Shocked but by now unsurprised, Caractacus did not even dismount, but turned and accelerating hard, set off back the way he had come and rode all that night. He arrived the following night in the Yorkshire Dales, and there, as he made his way towards the River Nidd, he found long forgotten memories flooding back. He soon located, in the dark and unaided, the copse of the Druid, which was just as his father had described it. He dismounted and hid the TMC in a small cave, so as not to disturb the ancient spirits of the place, and made his way slowly forward, looking for signs of life. After about twenty minutes, out of the silence, which was broken only by the flutter of leaves in a gentle breeze, came a voice.

"I've been expecting you, son of Cunobelinus."

"Where are you?"

"Next to you," said a figure appearing by his side. It was Commius.

"Welcome, Caractacus. It's been many years since your father said he would send you to me."

"You? But you're only my age. Commius is old. My father said so."

"He was, but that was my father. He died a few years ago, but he expected to see you first."

"Ah," said Caractacus looking away.

"He survived your father by a couple of years."

"I've been busy."

"Then you'll be tired. Come. Follow me."

Commius led him to a cave, completely hidden by vegetation. Inside it was furnished in a simple but comfortable style, and instinctively Caractacus knew it had been inhabited for a long time. Before he had time to say anything however, Commius, having shown him to a bed, waved his hand in front of him and he promptly fell asleep.

"Sleep, son of Cunobelinus, we'll be busy enough shortly."

When Caractacus woke up, he felt more refreshed than he had done for many months.

"How long have I slept?" he asked.

"About fifteen hours."

"Fifteen! Impossible! I never sleep for more than six."

Commius smiled. "You have now."

"What did you give me?" asked Caractacus suspiciously.

"If you remember, you didn't eat or drink anything when you arrived."

"Humph. How long have you lived here?"

"About five hundred years, or two thousand, five hundred, depending how you look at it."

Caractacus raised his eyebrows. "The whole time?"

"Well, let's say, give or take a few hundred years. You know how it is."

Caractacus raised his eyebrows a second time. "How many lifetimes can you remember?"

"More than most. After we arrived here and suspected we were on what we'd now call a parallel universe, I came straight up here to have a look. It was amazing. My Simian ancestors had also lived here and though most of their belongings had long since rotted away, there were still a number of articles I recognized. In fact, some of them were actually where I'd left them myself. Incredible! Of course, it hadn't been used for more than a thousand years, so it took some work to do it up. But there were compensations of course. To start with, it's much roomier."

Caractacus laughed. "I suppose it would be, wouldn't it?"

"You ought to remember it anyway."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. You visited us here with your father and brother when you were a cub."

"So that's why I found it so easily. I can't remember anything specific though."

"Well, you were quite young and your memories probably haven't matured yet."

The two Britons chatted throughout the day, reminiscing about old times and Caractacus discovered they had met on a couple of other occasions and had much in common. At one point while they were talking about the murder of his father, Caractacus said, "I can't find Togidumnus."

"Why not?"

"There's no trace of him and our village is gone."

"Why not?" asked Commius again and when there was no answer, he repeated his question for a third time.

Caractacus looked up at him and then he whispered, "I ignored my father's wishes. I didn't listen to him. I had better things to do. I'm sorry about it and now I've lost my brother."

Commius picked up four stones and concentrated on them, slowly moving them around in the palm of his hand. "They weren't just your father's wishes. It was advice given to him by my own father. If you had taken that advice you wouldn't have lost your brother and Faustulus might not have died."

Caractacus started to talk to Commius about his brother, explaining how he himself had always had to watch out for both of them, despite being the younger by a few years. If Caractacus had summed up his brother in one word, it would have been 'unsophisticated' or 'guileless', for Togidumnus had combined a love of the simple things in life with a confiding nature. His younger brother had often been heard to mutter the word 'naive' under his breath, whilst rescuing him from yet another self-inflicted crisis, not that Caractacus himself had never found himself in trouble. Inseparable as they were, he had been adept at fabricating stories to account for the state of dishevel in which they were frequently discovered. "Hey, you!" he would say, "see what a mess you've got me into!" but very early on he had somehow managed to dissuade Togidumnus from relating true accounts of their misdeeds.

He told Commius how both he and his mother had frequently pestered his father to keep Togidumnus at home for an extra couple of years. Cunobelinus had resisted however, and Togidumnus had left home with others of his peer group. Caractacus had been surprised when his father had simply commented that things weren't always as they appeared to be.

Chapter VII

Commius continued to click his stones together. "Your father was wise," he said. "He's a great loss to us."

"Why did your own father visit him?" asked Caractacus.

"He knew what was going to happen and that you'd become the great leader that our people need, but he also knew you would need Togidumnus to succeed in your venture. He suspected though that you wouldn't heed your father's words and so we've kept track of Togidumnus for you. He's voyaging amongst the Scottish Isles. That's why you couldn't find him."

"Voyaging? Togidumnus? By himself?"

"Don't worry," laughed Commius. "He's in good paws. He's travelling with a Carthaginian, named Hanno. He's descended from that famous Carthaginian sailor who sailed from Carthage in the first half of the sixth century BC, with orders to found colonies on the coast. The Simians aren't sure how far he got, but our Hanno managed to circumnavigate Africa and reach Arabia. He also set up trading posts and relations with the Jungle Bears."

"That's a relief. How do I get in touch with him?"

"I've sent for him, but one thing you're right about, he's a wanderer and easily distracted from matters of business. The messenger I've sent will stress the importance of speed, if he manages to find him. How long he'll take to get here is a different matter altogether. That's why your father told you to find him at all costs, before he left these shores. Now we must await the consequences of your delay."

"How did you know I was coming?" asked Caractacus. "The stones?"

"Not exactly. We've been tracking you as well. You're not as elusive as your brother. My scout easily follows you."

"But how did you know I was coming here... now? I've often passed nearby."

"I knew everything that had happened recently and that you were finally looking for Togidumnus. It was inevitable that you would come here."

"Your father. Did he use the stones?"

Commius laughed. "My father was a very wise bear with many lifetimes' experiences. Yes, he saw, before it happened, the dangers that post-war development would pose and how it would split our communities. He also knew you wouldn't understand how Togidumnus could be of assistance to you in any great venture. That, he used to say, wasn't to your credit, but you were young and would learn. He remembered you when you led our people against the Romans and knew that you were honourable, brave and patriotic and also a great leader. But it was your brother's death in battle that roused our people to their greatest achievements. He was their favourite, was loved by all and his death made them thirst to be rid of the Roman oppressor, but it was to you that they looked for leadership. Now, almost two thousand years later, it's time once more for the House of Cassivellaunus to lead not only the Britons, but all of our people in unity and this time we'll succeed."

"So the stones don't have any powers then?" asked Caractacus.

"Not in the way you imagine. But they do have power. They concentrate and clear the mind in a way we don't understand. They clarify much of the confusion in life."

"How?"

"Who knows? I'm sure there's a scientific explanation, but it's true they're only of value to a few individuals and that's what makes us powerful."

"Your messenger, who is it?"

"Phaedippides the Greek. A descendant of the great Athenian who ran from Marathon to Sparta in two days, to seek the help of the Spartans against the Persians. The fastest Ursan on two legs, or four for that matter. Needs to be, to follow that bike of yours."

"The TMC! I must fetch it."

"I already have. It's safe and no, Phaedippides doesn't cover as many miles as you, nor do the stones tell him where to find you. We have a good network of scouts and informants, not to mention his good friend Hermes. Not quite as fast, but fast enough."

"Don't tell me he's descended from the winged messenger of the gods?"

laughed Caractacus.

"No, but he **is** descended from a runner in the early years of the Olympic Games, and that's quite good enough. He's not too sure of the precise date though. So now Phaedippides has gone for Togidumnus and Hermes has gone south, to find your friend Julius and bring him here."

"Julius? Here? You'll be lucky."

"He'll come. Your friend won't miss an opportunity to write his name in our Chronicles, but he'll come primarily because Hermes will tell him that his friend needs him urgently. He won't let you down. He's honourable and also a Roman. That's why we need him."

"Why?"

"If I remember correctly, the Romans, when they defeated you, took you to Rome and then freed you, out of respect for the bravery with which you'd waged war against them and the honourable way in which you conducted yourself in defeat."

"That's right."

"You may be a barbarian to them, but in their eyes, you redeemed yourself. The Romans will follow your leadership now and Julius will follow you because you're his friend. He's no leader, and he knows it, but he's many talents which neither you nor Togidumnus possess. He's diplomatic and crafty and he has a wide network of contacts. He'll be invaluable. Don't worry. We'll make him comfortable."

Julius duly arrived, muttering and grumbling in his usual manner and escorted by the Greek runner, Hermes. He was a lithe, wiry-furred bear who greeted Commius and Caractacus quietly, then retired after saying, "Don't bother asking me what kind of a journey we had. I couldn't begin to describe it!"

Julius' complaints reached a peak when he realized where he was going to be lodging. Once inside however, Commius greeted him and waved a paw over him, after which the blankets and bed to which he was escorted were so soft that even Julius was forced to comment on the comforts provided for him.

"How do you do that?" asked Caractacus later. "I thought you said you didn't have any strange powers."

"I didn't say that at all," replied Commius. "What I said was that the power of the stones could probably be explained away scientifically," and he volunteered no further information.

When they were settled, Commius brought out an unmarked bottle of wine and uncorked it. At first Julius sniffed it suspiciously, then suddenly his face broke into a smile of delight. "It tastes like... it can't be... Falernian. Where did you find it, old chap? It can't possibly be original."

"I've been saving it for an important guest," said Commius.

"You'd reserved it for *me*? That suits me fine," replied Julius and he immediately stretched himself out on the couch.

So for a few days, the three Ursans sat for long hours discussing the problems facing their community, while Hermes dropped in every now and then with news and messages and made occasional contributions to the discussion. Then one day, when the conversation had turned to more general chitchat, Caractacus suddenly said, "you know, I've been thinking. If we're to have any chance of helping our people, what we really need is a permanent base. Headquarters, so to speak. We could collect information from all over the country, a sort of Domesday survey of all our people. We could keep a register of villages and any threat facing them. Then we should be able to take action early enough to prevent disasters."

"That would require organized and daily access to Simian news sources," said Julius. "That's not easy."

"It could double as a centre for homeless Ursans," continued Caractacus. "Perhaps we could also have a register of missing villagers and act as a contact point."

"Hold on, old friend," said Julius. "That would mean a major enterprise and a lot of hard work. There are only three of us and where would we find a suitable base? The whole point is that our villages aren't safe anymore. Do you get my drift?"

"Yes. We'd have to consider that carefully, of course. We'd have to offer shelter as well. There are plenty of young Ursans roaming around alone who need a home. Our villages aren't capable of absorbing the number who lose their village sites. They take in the Ursanae, so we wouldn't have to worry about them, at least not for now. But they simply don't have the resources to

cope with the numbers who are dispossessed. Some are losing all contact with our culture and plenty are at physical risk in Simian society. Faustulus told me he had a twin. I must find him. If there'd been a national register, I might have found him so much more easily and Faustulus himself might at least have stood a chance, if he'd known where to go when he was lost."

"There are plenty of adult Ursans out there who need a home or at least some semblance of community life again", said Julius. "I know. I see enough of them. Perhaps they might be happy to help out. But it's a big undertaking and there's no guarantee it would work."

"I must make it work, but you're right. It'll take time to find a base."

"Why not set up your headquarters with the Simians?" asked Commius.

"The Simians?" asked Caractacus and Julius together, shocked.

"Yes, why not? You yourselves said our villages are precarious at best and even a large cave, however comfortable we make it, is no place for the young and there'll always be a danger of detection. So why not live amongst the Simians?"

"But we've spent centuries avoiding them and we can't buy a house," said Julius.

"So we lodge with them," said Commius.

"Lodge?" queried Caractacus.

"Yes. They're no different from us. In the circumstances I believe many would be delighted to help us out. It's just a matter of finding the right ones. That I agree, will take time and effort."

"Humph," said Caractacus.

"You're mad," said Julius and bidding good night to the Druid, the two friends settled down to sleep. For a few moments, Commius stood by them, then he gently waved his paw over them. "Sleep deeply, my friends. You have a long way to go, farther than you can imagine and even I can't foresee the outcome."

Chapter VIII

The next day, Julius took his leave of Commius and Caractacus, promising to broach the idea with his acquaintances, although he held out little hope of support for the idea.

"I can't help wondering if I'm mad," said Caractacus, after Julius had left. "How would we begin to tackle such a task?"

"How would you have tackled a military campaign?"

"That's different."

"Is it? Success here will depend on much the same skills you've used plenty of times in warfare."

"Such as?"

"Am I to do your tasks as well as my own, son of Cunobelinus?" That was Commius' last comment on the subject and try as Caractacus did, he couldn't get another word out of him.

So Caractacus also left, to assurances from Commius that he would notify him if Togidumnus arrived and would also keep a careful lookout for Faustulus' twin. Over the next year, he systematically rode through the country, discussing his idea with all he met and a couple of times met up with Julius. There was plenty of interest in his idea and there was no doubt that the Ursan community considered Caractacus their leader. Most said they would follow him in any undertaking, but few seemed eager to get started. Julius reported much the same response from his own network of informants. Neither had identified any potential Simians, but Julius had a number of close friends who were working on it, as he put it. So yet another year went by and Caractacus' great plan lay unfulfilled. There were growing numbers of reports concerning missing Ursans and at least two more villages were destroyed and their inhabitants dispossessed.

Then, suddenly, everything seemed to happen at once and almost took Caractacus by surprise. A message arrived from Commius, saying that Togidumnus had reached him and was staying with him, and that a second message was waiting from Julius. Caractacus made his way up to the Dales and arrived at the Druid's cave, finally setting eyes on his brother for the first time in many years. There, taller than Caractacus, with fur of a mid-brown

colouring, was a dignified and dashing bear, dressed in the manner of a cavalier and wearing a cavalier hat with a dark green feather in it. Caractacus came to a halt for a few moments in front of him, taken aback by his appearance, and then the two brothers, in silence, clasped each other closely in a bear hug.

Commius brought some refreshment, then retired, leaving them alone, and there they stayed for the rest of that night and the next day, Commius rejoining them at lunchtime. Caractacus then opened his letter from Julius which said that he had moved into a Simian household and would he and Commius like to visit. He gave directions to a meeting place a few days later, by which time Togidumnus had already set off again round his old haunts, telling Caractacus that he would go on ahead to rally support. At the appointed time Caractacus went to meet Julius who told him how he had found a suitable home.

In truth however, he hadn't found it himself but had come across a young French military bear who had heard about the idea whilst undertaking his Grand Tour. He was descended from Anne de Montmorency, who here on Terra Humana had been Constable of France in 1538, a leading soldier and statesman under both Francis I and Henry II and a major player in the early stages of the French wars of religion, being fatally wounded at the Battle of St-Denis in 1567. His Ursan counterpart had disappeared from Terra Ursa at the age of twenty-six, and how that changed the course of French history on that planet will surely never be known here.

By chance, Montmorency was staying with an Ursan who was already living with Simians. He was a Jungle Bear, one of those colourful nomadic bears who, on Terra Ursa, had roamed the equatorial forests of the West Coast of Africa. His name was J.C. (no-one had ever found out what the initials stood for) and he had been found when in difficulties, and, unwittingly giving away his identity, had been invited to stay, an arrangement which had proved remarkably successful. There was now much toing and froing, whilst Montmorency discussed the idea with J.C., who was sure that his Simians would be perfect hosts, and everybody discussed it with everybody else. So Montmorency, later described by someone as a young swashbuckler who at that age couldn't be told anything, reported back to Julius who asked to move in and prepare for the arrival of Caractacus.

"After all," Julius reasoned, "it's obvious that Montmorency, though somewhat young and arrogant, has a most refined manner and is undoubtedly of good breeding and noble birth. He would hardly be living in poverty, so

the house must be suitable for me, or be as good as it's going to get." It was therefore somewhat of a shock for him, when Montmorency arrived with the Simians to pick him up, without the Rolls, and an even bigger shock when they finally drove up to the house. It was not in the south of England, as he had hoped, but in a large Yorkshire city, nor was it a mansion, but a small semi-detached urban bungalow. He was just about to make his excuses and leave, when he was greeted warmly and courteously by J.C. and suddenly whisked off his feet by the female Simian and given a big hug and a kiss. He was then shown to a huge, comfortable sofa in front of a fire and promptly decided to stay put.

So when the time came for the story to be written into the Ursan Chronicles, Caractacus was given the credit for the idea but claimed to have had a helping paw from Commius. Commius gave Julius the credit for finding the house, but the latter admitted he would not have found it without Montmorency who claimed that the credit was due to J.C., and that he himself had only acted as intermediary. J.C., a typical Jungle Bear, was oblivious to all of this and declared that the only thing important enough for the Chronicle was the long-term success of the venture. He himself became a living legend as the first Ursan to cohabit with Simians.

The great day eventually arrived when Caractacus moved into his new home and, setting up his headquarters, waited for Togidumnus. Within a few weeks, Commius followed with Phaedippides and Hermes, who were both immediately sent out again in response to messages from the wider community. Montmorency's cubhood friend Mountjoy, a heavier, more robust English military bear without any of Montmorency's refined manner soon arrived. He was the descendant of the fourth Baron Mountjoy who, in 1499, only a few years before the Casus Mirabilis, had entertained, in England, that leading exponent of Christian Humanism, Erasmus. Montmorency and Mountjoy, though complete opposites in temperament, were so inseparable that someone once commented that they might as well have been twins.

There followed a never-ending trickle of Ursans. Some were in good health and robust, some sick, neglected or old and in need of care. Some were rescued, whilst others arrived unexpectedly, having heard of the new enterprise. Many came after meeting Togidumnus, who easily persuaded them of the practicalities and advantages of this new lifestyle. Meanwhile, Caractacus got to grips with the job of organising a rapidly growing household and Julius appointed himself as adviser.

Around this time, the Ursans were settling in well to their new house and had undertaken some exploratory searches of the house and garden. Caractus organized numerous forays into the surrounding suburbs. The location merited some concern, for he was never comfortable amongst such a high density of Simians. Within the safety of the house, however, both adults and cubs loved to lounge around chatting, a pastime many of them had done far too little of in recent times, and always whilst on alert for danger.

So for a few years the Ursans stayed in the bungalow and the arrangement once more proved unexpectedly successful for both themselves and the Simians. One quiet morning, a few months after they had moved in, Phaeddippides suddenly rushed in and went straight to Caractus, telling him that he had been in the city centre and met a couple of Koalese. They had heard that a young Roman military bear had been spotted nearby, but Phaeddippides himself had been unable to locate him.

Chapter IX

Caractacus immediately put the household on alert, asking the Simian to go quickly and check the shops which the Ursans were unable to enter during the day, and to take Greatheart, the smallest Briton, with him. So the two of them set off and spent a couple of hours searching until finally, in a shop which was only half stocked due to imminent closure, Greatheart was lifted onto a shelf, disappeared for a while and then returned. They left the shop and Greatheart reported back to Caractacus. He had found the Roman cub but had been unable to get a word out of him as he was speechless with fear, so had urged him to stay hidden and had promised that they would return for him.

As soon as it was dark, Caractacus, Greatheart and Vespasian returned with the Simian and waited until the coast was clear. Then the three of them headed for the rear door of the shop, and in no time at all Vespasian had dealt with the locks and they slipped inside. Using their keen senses, they quickly located the cub who was huddled in a large basket, shivering with fright and sucking his paw. Caractacus suspected that he had found Horatius and lifting him gently out of the bin, they headed for the door once more and left, but not before Vespasian had carefully replaced the locks. In the car Caractacus found his initial instincts confirmed, for the cub was the identical twin of Faustulus, though now a few years older.

It was many months before Horatius talked. Traumatized, he would sit sucking his paw all day and often had nightmares, during which Caractacus and Togidumnus would take it in turns to sit with him. Gradually he opened up, due partly to the friendship of a young orphaned Briton of the same age. The two young bears became inseparable and Horatius slowly told his story. After getting lost he and Faustulus had been separated and although he had managed to survive, he had finally been driven to the city by cold and hunger. A few days before they had found him, he had been sheltering in the shop's yard, half asleep, when someone had dropped a box of soft toys and quickly picking them up, had mistakenly thrown Horace in with them. Finding himself trapped in the shop, he had managed to creep to the back of some shelves, but as the stock went down, he had finally been thrown into the bin, which he knew was soon destined for the skip. He had had no food or water and had been forced to hold his breath for long periods to avoid detection.

Caractacus unofficially adopted Horatius who decided to anglicize his name and since they did everything together, his friend the young Briton, who was still nameless, decided to take a Roman one. He chose Marcellus, after the

white bear who used to spend long hours entertaining them both and who had been the first to make Horace laugh. At the time, of course, he didn't realise that Marcus was actually a Viking who, in adopting a non-Viking name, had followed in the long-established tradition of Ursan Vikings. For historically, they had, like their Simian counterparts, been great travellers and colonists, and considered themselves Ursans of the World as much as Vikings of Scandinavia. Their adopted names often harked back to the adventures of an ancestor and although they did, of course, have Viking names also, they were quite often known only by their pseudonyms.

One rainy day, the younger Ursans were talking about their respective backgrounds and histories. Some of the cubs were describing what they thought life would be like in a real Roman Villa and Apollo, who was helping to keep an eye on them, was answering questions. Marcellus had just been commenting that he and Horace would have liked to be Roman senators like Julius, and asked whether Britons were allowed to be senators.

"But why," asked Genghis, a young Mountain Bear, "do you think so much of the Romans? Surely you can remember what they did to your ancestors? They pillaged your land, killed your people and enslaved them and I bet thousands," he went on, "were fed to wild animals. Do you think Apollo's ancestors listened to lions crunching their bones?"

"That's horrible," said Marcellus. "I wouldn't have liked being fed to wild animals."

"Do you remember being crunched to death?" Genghis asked wickedly, baring his teeth at Constantine.

"No, I don't," said Constantine. "I won't remember anything like that when I grow up, will I Apollo?"

"No, you won't. No-one can pass on their memories after they've died," said Apollo, "so no-one can remember dying. Memories are passed from fathers to sons, so a son can't carry memories of events which happened after they were born."

"You could be reincarnated and then you'd remember," said Genghis.

"That's quite enough, Genghis," said Apollo. "You're frightening the cubs."

"Yes," said Tamurlaine, trying to pull Genghis away. "Stop it or we'll all be in

trouble."

But Genghis wasn't listening. He started prancing around, and Segovesus and Bellovesus, the Mountain twins, joined in growling, "We're Romans and we're going to eat you up, so we'll feed you to the lions and any that are left, we'll put in a pot and have 'em for tea!"

"Tell him to be quiet, someone. He's frightening me," squeaked Constantine, although Apollo suspected more for effect, than because he was trembling with fear.

Very soon there was uproar and hearing screams, various Elders rushed into the room, to be greeted by the sight of all the cubs trying to hide, whilst the Mountain Bears chased them round and round the room. Without saying a word, Attila, the Mountain Bear Elder, walked across to Genghis, picked him up by the scruff of the neck and walked out of the room with him, beckoning for the twins to follow him. No one knew what happened on these occasions, nor what Attila said to the young Mountain Bears when they stepped out of line, but true to form, it was a very quiet threesome that reappeared later. For the rest of that day, Genghis remained subdued, but by the next morning, he was back to his usual ebullient self. His mood fell again noticeably however, when a message went up on the blackboard, requiring everyone under a certain age to attend a special class with Socrates that day. The adults had decided, in light of the previous day's proceedings, that extra lessons would quieten them all down, or so at least they hoped.

Following the upset, Olaf had, for once, been rather quiet. Much as he loved his friends the Mountain Bears, he had to admit to just occasionally being wary of them and on this occasion he asked Genghis why he was always looking for trouble.

"I'm not. It just happens. It finds me."

"But why?"

"I don't know. I just get excited. I didn't mean to **upset** the cubs you know. I was just being funny, but Attila says I have to learn to control myself. He says I have to think more. That's a terrible thought in itself."

"What is?"

"Thinking," said Genghis gloomily. "I don't think I'm cut out for it."

"Perhaps you should let Aurelius accompany you everywhere, like a shadow. Then he could do your thinking for you."

Genghis gulped. "I think," he said, "I'll try to do my own thinking, thank you. Anyway, Attila says if I do, one day I might be like him, though I'd rather be like Achilles. He still seems to enjoy life, even though he's an adult."

"I can't imagine you growing up at all. What do you think happens to us between now and then? Do you think it's painful?"

"Well, nothing much will happen to you. You're normal. I think you'll grow up to be like Marcus, not Alexander, but **we're** different. We Mountain Bears are special."

"Why?"

"Because we are," said Genghis "and that's that."

Chapter X

Sensing he would get no more information from Genghis, Olaf wandered off to find Marcus, who was sucking fish-flavoured ice cubes with Alexander, a habit which the Romans in particular found teeth-chatteringly terrible, especially in the depths of winter.

"Why," began Olaf, "do Mountain Bears behave the way they do when they're young? Are they different from us?"

"It's because they're Mountain Bears," replied Marcus, balancing an ice-cube on his forehead.

"But they're so... well... uncontrolled sometimes. They're always in trouble."

"They're always like that at that age," said Marcus, sliding the ice cube down on to his nose.

"Was even Attila like that when he was young?"

"Yes, he was," and Marcus flicked the ice cube off his nose into the air and caught it in his mouth.

"How can you be so sure? You didn't know him, did you?"

"No, but sit down and I'll explain," said Alexander, the Viking Elder, rolling over on his back and having a good stretch before settling back down again. "As you know, Mountain Bears are descended from nomadic Ursans, who for thousands of years lived and travelled in the highest mountains of Europe and Asia. They finally settled, about two thousand years ago, in the area of the Celestial Mountains or Tien Shan and those called the Roof of the World or Pamir. These ranges lie today in this world at least, on the borders of the former USSR, Afghanistan, and China. These Ursans originally evolved from a species of wild bear, called the Isabelline Bear, which still survives on this earth, and inhabits the Pamir and Tien Shan. Hmm, perhaps you all ought to learn about Ptolemy and ancient geographers... sed... er... what was I saying? Ah, I know... the Mountain Bears don't have a parallel culture on this earth. That's probably because Simians couldn't sustain a culture at those altitudes, at least not permanently."

"That's because they've no fur," grinned Marcus.

"And they're bare and wrinkly all over," giggled Olaf.

"That's right. But even Vikings wouldn't like it that high, whereas the Mountain Bears evolved to cope with it. We evolved from polar bears so we can cope with cold and water but not with high altitudes."

"That's why they've all got large hind-paws," said Olaf.

"Well, hind paws don't actually grow much, so they look very big when they're young, in proportion to the body."

"And they've got very pronounced paw pads to stop them slipping on snow and ice."

"That's right."

"But why should that affect the way they behave?" asked Olaf.

"Well, they also evolved psychologically. Young Mountain Bears have to be able to cope with even harsher conditions than us, very early on in life. After all, it would be very easy for them to get lost as cubs, and if they panicked they wouldn't stand much chance of survival, so they never have too much fear of their own environment... only a healthy amount which would stop them doing anything too stupid. Basically, Mountain Bear cubs are pretty fearless and have excessive amounts of energy."

"But if Genghis were to behave like he does here, up in the mountains, surely that would be too dangerous?"

"And that's where the problem lies. In their own environment, all that energy and fighting spirit is directed at coping with the hardships of early life. The harsh training they undergo in early cubhood channels it all, so they have the highest chance of survival possible. I suppose they're just too tired to cause trouble after all that. But when we arrived here, it was soon obvious there were going to be problems. How do you channel all that energy into something safe, when it simply isn't needed? However busy you keep them, they all boil over sooner or later. In the early days, the Mountain Bear leaders even considered trying to relocate somewhere by themselves, such as Snowdonia or Scotland, but after much deliberation it was decided it was simply too dangerous for the group to split up. Anyway, nobody wanted to lose contact with them. So they stayed. I must say, there have been plenty of times when some of us wished they'd gone back to Asia. I know Attila does

sometimes."

"I can't imagine Genghis ever being like Attila. When will he change?" asked Olaf in a worried voice.

Marcus laughed. "He's not going to change into a werewolf you know... at least I don't think he is!"

"No," said Alexander "but he will quieten down a lot more than cubs usually do when they become adults, and by that time, you'll be older too. I think he'll mature well."

"Like a cheese," said Marcus "until he's so mature, that he does nothing much but reflect, but by that time he'll be a very old Mountain Bear."

"By then he'll be too mouldy to be any fun at all," giggled Olaf.

"Look at Achilles," said Alexander, "he's an adult Mountain Bear, but he's younger than Attila and still very energetic, but by his age, a Mountain Bear's no longer so... so... well..."

"Pugilistic," said Marcus. "That's what Montgomery calls Genghis."

"Julius calls him 'the barbarian terror'," said Olaf.

"Julius thinks we're all barbarians, although he'd probably exempt the Greeks and Egyptians," said Marcus.

"It's funny then that you and Caractacus are his best friends and why does he think the Pandese are barbaric, when they had a very high civilization?"

"Well, he gets round that one because 'barbaros' actually means foreigner. That means he can include anyone he likes in his definition of barbarian, when it suits him."

"So I suppose," said Alexander, musing to himself, "that Mountain Bears have five stages of development, and that means of course, that sooner or later, the very young cubs will start causing trouble," and he lay his head on his paws and groaned.

Marcus soon settled himself down next to Olaf, who was already leaning on Alexander, and made himself more comfortable. They were joined, one by

one, by the rest of the Vikings and soon they were all fast asleep in the heat, dreaming of long voyages through the icy waters of the Northern Seas and of great feasts, where tables spilled over with the bounty of the sea.

Chapter XI

On other occasions, the adults and cubs would get together and have general chit-chats, the younger Ursans having much to learn about their heritage. One day, the adults had been explaining how the Pandese had evolved from the giant Panda and how their ancestral home bordered that of the Mountain Bears. The conversation went something along these lines.

"Did we ever come into contact with the Pandese?" asked one of the Mountain twins.

"Yes, we used to come across them frequently," said Achilles. "Sometimes relationships were good, sometimes bad. I remember trading with them in the frontier lands, but that was during peacetime. It wasn't always like that though. Often we used to raid their lands when times were bad and we were short of food. When food was abundant, we didn't have to spend much time hunting, so then we used to raid them for luxury goods."

"Of course," said Attila, "the Pandese quite often invaded across the border and tried to occupy large tracts of our land. So really, we both had to keep on the offensive. It stopped either of us gaining the upper hand."

"What did you do to the Pandese if you caught them?" asked Marcellus.

"We boiled them up in a big pot and ate them," said Genghis, licking his lips.

"Did they taste nice?" asked Horace tentatively.

"No, they were too chewy, but it's the thought that counts," said Genghis without any hesitation. "That's what happens when you eat too much bamboo. You become chewy."

"Did you eat the Mountain Bears when you caught them?" Marcellus asked Aurelius, a young Pandese cub, whose best friends were Constantine and Theodosius.

"Oh no," replied Aurelius, quite horrified. *We* were civilized. We had a proper legal system very early on. We always gave them a proper trial. Then we chopped their heads off. Anyway," he added seriously, "we're vegetarian."

"Even the ones who were found not guilty?"

"I don't think there were any. Well, there couldn't have been any, could there? I mean, if they were on our side of the border... and had been given a proper trial..." and Aurelius tailed off. "I don't know, really. I suppose some of them may have just been lost... or looking for food... or even been on their own side of the border. Oh dear, do you think we might have made a few mistakes?"

"Probably quite a few," muttered Commius to Caractacus, "if I know anything about civilized societies."

Aurelius tugged at Caractacus' paw. "Caractacus, do you think I should apologize to the Mountain Bears in case we executed any of their ancestors wrongly?"

"Er... well... hmm... well, perhaps you ought to ask them."

Aurelius turned to Attila, but the Mountain Bear had overheard. "No, Aurelius," he said, gently picking up the young Panda and sitting him on his knee. "If we took your ancestors prisoner, then they went into the pot with the rest. That's how it was then, but apologizing for something which happened before you were born means accepting responsibility for it and how can you be? The important thing is to recognise that injustices did take place, and to do what you can personally to ensure they don't happen again."

There was a general murmur of assent. "He's right, you know."

"Yes, all this apologizing that the Simians do now... it's no good for anyone."

"It doesn't stop them fighting, does it? They'll have just as much to apologize for tomorrow as today."

"Causes resentment and ill feeling if you ask me, and we all know where that leads us."

"Revenge. That's what it is really, a subtle form of revenge."

"Call me old-fashioned," said a very laid-back Carthaginian called Hannibal, who was the direct descendant of the great Hannibal Barca himself, "but... well... this present state of affairs! Deeds do indeed speak louder than words. We remember what the Romans did to us all those centuries ago as if it was yesterday, but the important thing is that we moved on and learnt to live together. I'm sure I speak for all us Carthaginians when I say that I'm proud

to have so many Roman friends today."

"Yes," said a Roman with unusually dark chocolate-coloured fur, called Scipio, who was often to be found passing the time of day with Hannibal, his ancient opponent. "I don't think any of us would like to return to those days. We were very frightened of the Carthaginians then, but times were different. It was fear that made us so determined to destroy them. I can remember the very day that the great Cato brought the danger home to us. 'Carthago delenda est'. That's what he said. He made us think it was us or them. I suppose, in hindsight, we were wrong."

"I don't want you to apologize to me either," said Genghis. "It's no fun. Come on, Aurelius, let's go and find something really interesting to do. How about a leg-up to the third shelf of that bookcase you're reading?"

"Don't mention shelves," whispered someone, but it was already too late. One of the Carthaginians, Elibear by name, had already turned a paler shade of grey and was visibly shaking. "I... I'm all right," he said, but was nevertheless assisted from the room by his friend Venutius, a freckle-faced Briton who was Commius' younger brother. Any mention of shelves was guaranteed to have the same effect, but nobody, except perhaps Caractacus and Venutius, knew what had happened to Elibear to cause it.

"It's a good job we don't have bamboo bookcases in this house," continued Genghis, without a pause. "Then you might really have to do some apologizing," and as Aurelius' face lit up, he lifted him down from Attila's knee and the two of them went off together.

"Phew, that was close," gulped one of the Carthaginians, turning, if possible, greyer. "I might have felt obliged to apologize to the Romans for trampling so many of them. What a terrible thought."

Chapter XII

Caractacus was now in the prime of his life and fully aware of the effect which his imposing presence had, for he had matured into a fine figure of a bear. Both Ursans and Simians had been known to visibly quail when in moments of forgetfulness, he opened his eyes wide. He therefore tended to keep his eyes covered with fur, a habit which incidentally enabled him to have a snooze whenever he wanted, without anyone being any the wiser. It appeared to all who knew the Simians of the household, as if Caractacus belonged to them, although some people remarked on how strange it was that two adults sometimes went out accompanied by a large brown bear. Caractacus himself could see nothing strange about this arrangement. Descended from a noble lineage, it was natural to expect his Simians to chauffeur him around whenever he wished to go out. After all, he reasoned, his ancestors had always had the services of a charioteer, and he saw no point in getting his paws grubby without good reason. He had them full enough already, with the responsibilities of running a household.

It was the size of this household which after a few years convinced Caractacus that he must seek a new home. There were in fact about two hundred and fifty inhabitants, which, despite their small stature, is a large number to fit into a small bungalow. Caractacus had often meant to draw up a register of new arrivals (nobody ever left), but by the time he got round to it, no one could remember when he or she had arrived, so it seemed pointless and Caractacus never wasted time on pointless exercises. Additionally, life in the city was no fun for the Ursans, young or old, and he yearned to take his household away to the countryside, where he felt they would have more freedom.

Caractacus therefore started to discuss the idea with the Elders and once it had been agreed that the time had come to move, Caractacus convened the Council of Nine or Enneadicum. They retreated into the only place where they could expect to find privacy, which was a small room used as a study by the Simians. Notice had been given that the Council was meeting and this kept all other Ursans out of the room.

Caractacus did not desire privacy from the Simians however, so they continued to wander in and out, an arrangement which served two purposes. The Simians were indirectly notified of proceedings while Caractacus avoided the need to publicly request their co-operation in moving the household. He had, of course, privately discussed his plans with them, knowing full well that they were equally keen to move. Most of the Ursans knew this, but officially,

as leader, Caractacus had the final word and this had to be reflected in procedures.

Months of searching finally led him to a two hundred year old semi-detached house, which appeared to fulfil his requirements. Once his trusted friends Commius and the well-travelled J.C. had given their approval, Caractacus informed the Enneadicum. A special trip was made by the Council members and they ratified the decision. The matter was then discussed with the Simians, whose agreement was required, and as they were equally delighted with the house and location, within a few months they had left the city. The move was not easy however. The Simians had their fair share of problems, the type which all Simians have when moving house.

"Revel in it, absolutely revel in it. That's what they do," said Montgomery one day. He was an English military bear, and a direct descendant of the powerful French noble Roger de Montgomery, who had arrived in England with William the Conqueror in 1066, commanded a wing at the Battle of Hastings and featured in the Domesday Book. "I've observed many of them moving and they're all the same. Absolute chaos. No method to it at all. If only they'd take time to plan it," he said to his friend Vespasian.

"You're telling me. If you ask me, things would have gone a lot better if we'd been asked to organize the whole thing," said Vespasian, picking up with one paw two baby bears from under a dust sheet, for the fifth time that day.

"Constantine! Theodosius! How many more times? Once more and I'll package you up. Now scam!"

"But... but... Aurel... ," stammered Theodosius in a small voice.

"Don't be silly," interrupted Montgomery. "Aurelius has far too much sense to run the risk of having a box of books put on his head. Now off you go" and then, addressing Vespasian again, "things would be a lot easier at the moment if they were both like Aurelius."

"I suppose so, but in peacetime, things would be a bit quiet around here. After all, I suppose we were just the same".

At that moment, they were interrupted by a squeaking, coming from under the dust sheet.

"Help, please, I'm stuck."

The two military bears looked at each other and taking one end each, they picked up the dust sheet, and placed it neatly folded on the floor. Then they turned and located the voice in a box which the sheet had been covering. There, sat amongst a pile of books, was the young Panda, who was gazing up at them and rubbing his head.

"I'm sorry Montgomery, but I fell in and I can't get out again," he said very softly. "Would you mind, Vespasian, lifting me out? Thank you."

Montgomery tried not to laugh. "What were you doing in the box?" he asked Aurelius.

"I wanted to look at the books. I can't reach them usually on the book shelves and I don't like asking for help all the time. So Constantine and Theodosius were holding a leg each, so I wouldn't fall in. That's what they were doing when you pulled them out," he added ruefully, looking at Vespasian. "I landed on my head".

As Aurelius padded off, Montgomery stood looking out of the window, then he said, "of course, these accidents wouldn't happen if this move had been treated from the start as a military manoeuvre. No doubt it'll be regretted."

Caractacus was indeed having regrets. What had once been simply a dream, and had then turned into a necessity, had now become a logistical nightmare. It was a new experience for them all to carry through a major undertaking with Simians. Additionally, everyone had their own ideas on how the move should be completed, and there were plenty of comments from certain members of the household concerning the fact that they were moving north, not south. After a few days, some of the younger Ursans had also started to ask questions, which didn't cease until they had arrived in North Yorkshire.

Chapter XIII

One day when the council was in session, Constantine demanded, "what are they doing in there?"

"Can we go in?" asked Theodosius.

"Where are we going to move to?" asked Aurelius.

"Will it have a landing strip?" asked Horace.

"Will there be lots of trees to climb?" asked Constantine who, with Theodosius, was at that moment hauling himself up the back of Togidumnus.

"Would that save my fur from being pulled out in chunks?" replied Togidumnus, lifting them both onto his shoulders.

"No! No! No!" squeaked Constantine. "Never!" agreed Theodosius, shouting at the top of his small voice.

"I think we ought to move to the far north where there'll be lots of snow, and it'll be so cold there'll be icicles hanging from your noses," laughed Olaf.

"I don't think the Romans will like that," said Aurelius seriously. "I wonder if there'll be lots of bamboo nearby?"

"Bamboo doesn't grow in this country, silly," said Genghis.

"Yes it does, in gardens. We might move next door to a very large garden growing bamboo. I'm sure they wouldn't miss a bit. I'm only little and I wouldn't eat much."

"But then you'd be a thief," said Theodosius.

"I don't think I would," answered Aurelius. "I would be on our earth, but on this earth I'm a wild animal. On Terra Ursa, we wouldn't accuse monkeys and apes of being thieves if they stole food from our gardens. On the other hand, monkeys and apes wouldn't know they were stealing, so they couldn't be thieves, whereas we shouldn't be here, but do know right from wrong, so on this earth, I can be a wild animal but not a thief. I know what I mean anyway."

"I'm glad **you** do," said Genghis. "If you ask me, you've been spending too much time with Socrates."

"Well, I didn't ask you."

"What it means," said Theodosius gloomily, "is that whether we're on this earth or that one, we have to behave ourselves. It's just not fair. I wish I was a puppy, then I could have lots of fun and misbehave and steal things and everyone would still love me."

"Oh who cares what we should and shouldn't be doing?" asked Genghis, stamping his large mountain paw. "You're just too little to do anything interesting. It's all boring."

"A landing strip wouldn't be boring," said Horace. "I could ask Vespasian to make me a scale model and then I could learn to fly and take you all for a flight. Wouldn't that be exciting?"

"Ha!" said Genghis with contempt. "You and your plane. Who wants to fly in an old Gypsy Moth? I want speed and thrills. If you get a Tornado then, maybe, I just might come and fly with you. What we want is adventure, isn't it Tamurlaine?"

"Yes, that's right, but my idea of adventure doesn't include being swept off my feet. What **I** want is a good old-fashioned land campaign."

"Chariots! That's it! That's what we need! We can buy a house with a large field and ask Vespasian to build us all individual chariots," went on Genghis. "Then we could build a track and have chariot races. Now that *would* be exciting... full speed ahead!"

"I don't want to be in the chariot races," said Marcellus, who was sitting on Togidumnus' knee. "I'd rather fly in Horace's Gypsy Moth."

"I want a library. Will there be room in the field, Genghis?" asked Aurelius.

Genghis rolled his eyes in horror. "On a chariot track? Grrrrrrr!"

"Actually," said Hermes, "most Greek gymnasia did have lecture rooms and often libraries, so if you want to make it a multicultural site, the idea's perfect. Plato and Socrates would be able to hold philosophical meetings there."

"Montgomery and Mountjoy might appreciate a cricket pitch," suggested Togidumnus.

"I think Mountjoy would prefer a boxing ring," said Tamurlaine. "I'd second that".

"I don't want a boxing ring but Horace and I could watch cricket in between flights," said Marcellus.

"I hope there'll be lots of trees," said a young Carthaginian called Carthalo. "That would suit the Forest Bears and Koalese as well. Of course we Carthaginians also need lots of water."

"I can just imagine J.C. and Socrates shinnying up trees," said Tamurlaine, which made them all start laughing.

Olaf suddenly sat up straight. "I've got it! We'll buy a very large field with a lake in it. Then we can swim in it and the chariot track can go around the edge of it. Then in the corners, we'll build a library, a cricket pitch and a boxing ring."

"There won't be much water left if the Carthaginians are going to use it. They'll have to be rationed."

"What about my plane?" persisted Horace.

"You can have a seaplane and land on the lake, and then you really will be the centre of attention," and Olaf collapsed laughing on the floor. Then, noticing Horace's fur droop, he continued "of course, it would be a Catalina, the best kind, you know," and Horace's fur picked up again.

There was silence for a moment, then Theodosius asked, "will it be a three-cornered field?"

"It'll probably be four-cornered," answered Tamurlaine. "Why?"

"What are we going to build in the fourth corner?"

There was another silence as they all considered the matter. Then Olaf started giggling again. "A heated bathhouse for the Romans of course!"

"I'm a Roman," said Horace, "and I'd rather have a plane."

"But that's because you're a military bear, like Vespasian," said Tamurlaine. "I think Vespasian would enjoy a bathhouse though... but only as relaxation after hard work. Most Romans would like it **instead** of hard work."

After a short pause Aurelius asked, "I thought Catalina was a Roman. How could Horace land him in a lake?"

"That was Catiline, silly," said Genghis. "He was a Roman and he was nasty. Grrrrrr," he growled at Aurelius, "and that's what happens when you spend too much time reading. You learn too many things at once and get confused."

"I don't get confused, but I haven't studied the history of flying yet," said Aurelius.

"THIS is flying," demonstrated Genghis as he whirled around the room with his forepaws outstretched, "and THIS is Catiline," baring his teeth at Aurelius.

"What did he do?" asked Aurelius.

"He tried to destroy the Roman Republic," said Apollo who was half listening whilst helping to keep an eye on them.

"Togidumnus, can we go in and tell Caractacus what we want?" asked Constantine. "Please, we'd be very quick."

Togidumnus raised his eyebrows, then frowned disapprovingly. "You want to do what?"

"I want to go and see Caractacus."

"We're not allowed in there," said Theodosius. "Everybody knows that."

"But why not and what is a symp... sym... symposium anyway?" asked Constantine.

"It's a council," said Tamurlaine.

"It's a drinking party," said Genghis.

"Sh! You're not supposed to tell them that," whispered Olaf in Genghis' ear. "It's Greek," he said out loud.

"But it IS a drinking party and the word's not symposium, but Symposion," said Aurelius. "I read about it a while ago."

They all turned towards Aurelius. "Wow, fine words! What else do you know about it?" asked Genghis, impressed. "Was this Symposion always restricted to adults?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"I think," said Tamurlaine to Genghis and Olaf, "that we should go and see Socrates."

"I agree," said Genghis. "I think this would be a wonderful opportunity for a history lesson."

"But I don't want a history lesson," squeaked Constantine. "We don't have to go to classes when the council meets."

"It'll be so boring," said Theodosius.

"That's because he's such an old Koala... what are you doing that for?" Constantine asked Theodosius. "Stop pulling my fur... and why are you all laughing at me?" as indeed they were.

"Have you ever taken a close look at your friend Theodosius?" asked Tamurlaine.

"Why?"

"Because he's Koalese too."

"No, he isn't. He's my friend."

"But he's Koalese too."

Constantine peered closely at his friend. "Well, he's not old and boring, so I don't care," and he gave Theodosius a big hug.

Chapter XIV

Once in North Yorkshire, no-one had cause to regret their decision. The house was larger and the younger Ursans revelled in the work and decorating which had to be done, getting in the way rather than helping. At other times, they spent hours wandering through the field down to the beck and playing, or undertaking excursions farther afield under the supervision of the adults. They were allowed a few months holiday from lessons, since the move had been made in summer, but once late autumn arrived, life resumed much as normal. Caractacus himself was delighted. The Ursans were, for once, able to go out sometimes during daytime, as long as they kept to the cover of the trees or long grass. There were also plenty of places in more open territory, where they could spend hours at a time, without running the risk of detection.

One day, the whole household had left at the break of dawn for a picnic. Lying around on the grass, they were discussing the Simians' attitude to history and how it was so much different from their own. Life would hardly be worth living for Ursans, without a detailed knowledge of and identification with their past, and the cubs were trying to understand how the Simians were different.

"How do the Simians know who they are?" asked Carthalo.

"What's it like not being able to remember anything about the past or to know so little about it?" asked Hilarius, a young Briton who was a friend of Marcellus and Horace. "After all, even the Pandese and Koalese learn everything they can about the past."

"Well, not being able to remember the past is like, well, it's like losing your memory. Just imagine that. Who would you be?" asked Plato, a grey-furred Greek who was a descendant of the great Plato himself.

"I'd be no one. I wouldn't be me, anyway."

"Precisely. So if you couldn't remember your past and you couldn't learn about it either, who would you or your people be?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps you should ask Aurelius."

Everyone turned towards the young Panda.

"You never talk about your past much, Aurelius. Why not?"

"Because I haven't got one."

"Why not?"

"Because," announced Aurelius, as he climbed onto a large log to address them all, "my people lived in the area which on Terra Humana belongs to the Chinese. We are not Chinese, but on Terra Ursa, our civilization evolved much like theirs, and we apparently spoke a very similar language. Very early on we developed a highly sophisticated society and were skilled in many arts and sciences. At the height of our civilization, we stood second to none, and our most highly esteemed possession was our literary tradition. We wrote everything down. We had done for thousands of years. Our libraries, our archives... they groaned and strained under the weight of bamboo manuscripts. Thousands of years of our history, society and customs were recorded, even the daily news and weather. From our earliest moments we read. Even before we could chew bamboo, we could read, and we learnt and memorized everything we could. As cubs we read more than Simians do in a lifetime, not only about our own culture but about all nations and lands.

Why did we do this? Because we, like the Koalese, do not possess the genetic memory which you bears and Carthaginians do. So we wrote our present down, to be a written memory, but in our zeal to know our past, we didn't consider the possibilities of the future. We didn't possess an oral tradition. We didn't tell stories or pass on by word of mouth what we learnt. Each Panda studied and read to further his own knowledge. Unlike us, the Koalese, over their long history, developed both literary and oral traditions. When disaster struck and their libraries burnt or they endured long periods of illiteracy, they continued to pass on their knowledge by word of mouth, much as the Britons do. When literacy re-emerged in their society, they once again committed it to paper. Most Ursans revere the Koalese for their knowledge. We Pandese revere them for their wisdom.

So, when my people found themselves on this planet, they soon discovered the weakness of our society. They were few in number and even between them, they had very little of the total knowledge which our people possessed. Without their manuscripts, they could learn nothing new about themselves, and as they had never learnt the art of storytelling, what they did know became confused and fragmentary. It became a game of Chinese whispers. So today, all WE know of our own people, is that our leader was called the 'Grand Panda' and our country the 'Land of the Grand Panda'. Everything else

we know has been taught to us by the Koalese and that is why, unlike other cubs, I choose to spend so much time with Socrates. But it isn't right to learn about one's past second-hand, because it's always another society's view of us which we learn.

I have no real past, so I don't know who I am. I'm not really anyone... " and two big tears started to roll down Aurelius' face. "You were right, Genghis, and wrong. You were wrong to say that too much learning is bad for you. You should learn about lots of things, but you were right in that it's all a waste of time unless you take care of your knowledge. Once you lose your past, it can't be recovered."

"He's right," said Philippus, a mature Carthaginian with white eyebrows. "The Simians are losing all sense of their history and who they are. They'll live to regret it."

"Perhaps," said Hanno, "we could help them find themselves. After all, we Carthaginians never forget anything."

"I thought he said he didn't have a tradition of story-telling? Sounds quite promising to me," said an old Greek, wiping a couple of tears away.

"Yes," said Commius, "perhaps we should encourage it. Make him feel better. How about a competition?"

"It'd certainly keep the cubs quiet for a while and we could initiate a weekly recitation," said the Greek. "It's a long time since we heard the Iliad and Odyssey in full. That would really be something."

Commius gulped. "I was thinking of something a little shorter really. How about five minute slots?"

So the idea took hold and very soon it was decided to hold traditional storytelling feasts throughout the winter months. There was plenty of discussion as to which story should be told first, but very quickly it was decided that it should be the story of the Casus Mirabilis itself. The adults reasoned that the cubs, and a few of the adults, had never been taught their own history in full, so a date in September was agreed upon and the household looked forward to its first feast.

Preparations were made and care was taken to ensure that all customs and traditions were strictly adhered to. When the appointed day came, there was

so much excitement that it took most of the morning to round everyone up and by that time, it was lunchtime. After a sumptuous feast, the likes of which most of the cubs had never seen before, it was finally time for the story. But who, everybody asked, should tell it?

"Who knows the story best?" asked Achilles.

"None of us were there," said Hanno.

"Oh yes they were," said Caractacus.

"One of us," said Commius, "is in possession of a scroll which tells the whole story."

"Who, and which scroll?" asked Attila.

"An original scroll, giving a first-hand account of the Casus. It's in the possession of the writer's descendant, Andronicus."

"Andronicus? Well, I never!" said Julius. "I thought he was the descendant of Livius Andronicus, the Roman poet of the third century BC."

"I am," said the bear concerned, "the descendant of both."

"Well then, if he's inherited the oratorical skill of the one and the scroll of the other, I suggest he tells the story. It's only right," said Julius, "even though Andronicus was actually a Greek."

So it was decided that Andronicus would be the narrator and when everyone was settled, he began.

Chapter XV

"It was a time of change, a re-awakening, a new beginning. It was a time of wonder and mortal terror. A blackness had come over the land, spreading its fingers, creeping, outwards from Venice, whilst from Padua a new age sprang forth and people once again marvelled at ancient glories.

The great Petrarch won the hearts of men of power, carrying the message to the noble cities of Italy. Rome echoed again to the sound of silenced voices, awakened by the revival of interest in ancient culture and the first flowering of archaeology. Forgotten texts emerged from dusty corners, no longer decaying from disuse and disrespect. To the Courts of Italy they came, those heroes of classical literature. How the mighty had fallen, throughout long centuries of shameful neglect, but now they stood tall again, prepared to do battle with the armies of ignorance and mediocrity.

Throughout that century and the next, a flowering of artists graced that country; Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo. Europe flocked to study the classics, absorb the spirit of the Italian Renaissance and carry it homewards, spreading its grandeur throughout the continent. Science flourished; medicine, physics, maths and astrology, alongside the arts of music, art, architecture and sculpture, while philosophy and literature had already claimed their rightful role on the late medieval stage.

But now, the living mighty fell alongside their poorer neighbours, and took their place beside the ancient dead, swept away by the rising tide of plague engulfing all. From great Venice it spread, onwards across Western Europe until finally, with a full wind in its sails, it crossed the Channel to England. The Black Death had arrived, travelling companion to the Renaissance, each one fighting for the souls of the living. Whilst one, merciless, slew a third of Europe's population, the other brought rebirth, a light amongst the shadows of death.

Those carrying news of the glories of the one, carried also the death knell of the other, for the increase in travel propelled the plague ever onwards, to clutch at the throats of all it shook the paw of, tearing fur from skin and anointing the bareness with bloody lesions. They met again, united for eternity, in the Decameron, the work of Boccaccio, himself a child of the Renaissance and first-hand witness to the Black Death. It was indeed a time of death and rebirth, a time of hope and despair.

It was the mid-fifteenth century and Tuscany's green fields resounded to the

echoes of the Renaissance. The fertile Valley of the Arno River, which flows from its source in the Apennines and empties into the Tyrrhenian Sea, was heavy with vineyards and olive groves bursting with the new growth of spring. The town of Ursi, nestling at the foot of Monte Albano, lies in the shadows of Tuscany's great medieval centres of Florence, Siena and Pisa. No cultural backwater this however, but fit to oversee the rise of the age's greatest hero. Once an Etruscan settlement and then a Roman Castrum, by 1000 AD Ursi's skyline was already dominated by the Castle of the Conti Guidi.

It was April 15th, 1452 on Terra Ursa, and in the small village of Anchiano, a cub was born and christened Lionardo in the neighbouring town of Ursi. Five years later he moved to his grandfather's house and went to school, then later started work as an apprentice in Florence, in the workshop of the artist Andrea del Verrocchio. There he learnt the arts of painting and sculpture, excelling also in technical skills and finally, in 1472, was accepted into the Florentine Painters Guild. The year 1482 saw the career of the great Ursan begin in earnest. Now thirty years of age, Lionardo went forth from Florence to the court of Milan where he was employed, for several years, by Duke Ludovico il Moro, painting and exploring more fully his other skills in engineering, architecture and mechanics.

When, in 1499, the French took control of Milan, he wandered between Italian courts before entering the service of Cesare Borgia for about six years, as senior military architect and general engineer. Then, returning to Milan, he devoted time to his studies and research before finally, in 1513, arriving in Rome by invitation of the new Pope, Giuliano dei Medici, known to the world as Leo X. Finally, on that fateful day in May 1515, Lionardo and around five hundred Ursans disappeared and were never seen again on Terra Ursa. Here on Terra Humana, we continue to tell the story of the 'Casus Mirabilis', the wondrous event which brought us from our home planet to this one.

It was late afternoon and the city of Rome had risen from its afternoon slumbers. Ursans from all walks of life were going about their business, some hurrying hither and thither, others loitering and chatting with friends or passers-by. Some hugged the shadows, for the late afternoon sun was still hot and lay heavy on the languid city. Rome was full, for many had come to stare and marvel at the drama taking place that month. The eternal city, once more a melting pot of races, and now the centre of Christendom, hummed with life even more than usual and the thousands who could find no accommodation slept in the surrounding fields and vineyards.

From every corner of the known world they came, for a celebration of the

Order of Ancient Lineage. For one month, Rome gave herself up to this decennial event. For one month, Rome rang with ancient cries and languages. Whilst its distinguished visitors gathered in private, the city put on a public spectacle unparalleled since the days of ancient Rome. Once more the clash of weapons and the voices of combatants filled the Colosseum, to cries of victory and to screams from those actors who offered to be torn to pieces by exotic beasts, or to die at the hands of a gladiator. No longer did anyone die, but winners and vanquished alike lived to take part in the celebrations once again. Ancient skills and crafts flooded the streets and markets, and in every quarter of the City, Ursans flocked to watch the performances of timeless tragedies, comedies and epics. It was a celebration of their ancestors, their history, themselves.

Today, we understand that some Ursan races carry a gene for inherited memory. Back then, however, and until quite recently, we believed it to be a gift from the gods and those who carried the memory of a single ancestor, rather than more general memories, were considered especially blessed. Our ancestors and our heritage have a significance for us which the Simians, who are in no way equal to us in their respect for antiquity, cannot understand at all, though they could learn much from it. Consequently, the Ursan world threw itself into the events, each individual contributing from his or her own memories, each one playing to the full the role their ancestry had given. Some travelled hundreds of miles to participate for the full month, whilst others only managed to attend for a couple of hours, but the dream of every Ursan was that one day, one year, he or she would visit Rome in May and partake in this great event. Nobody was refused. All were welcome.

By the third century, an official decennial meeting was already being held during May, so that it coincided with the end of the Floralia, the Roman festival of Flora, the goddess of flowers who bore the mystic name of Rome. It continued throughout the centuries between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, even when war, destruction and lack of infrastructure severely reduced the size and success of the celebration. A few members of the Order always managed to travel to, and find each other, in Rome, even when the event was forced underground to avoid the attentions of those who wished to eradicate all true memories and replace them with a false history.

The danger was real, since the event was always held during this same month in Rome, to ensure that those who wished to attend could be sure of its location and date in advance. But somehow it survived and the Middle Ages found it slowly expanding and prospering until it was officially adopted by the city of Rome, under Pope Julius II. The Leonine City around the Vatican

was thrown open to the public, who were kept in check by a band of volunteer militia and now in May 1515, the distinguished visitors arrived in large numbers, were greeted by the city fathers and cheered by the crowds.

Chapter XVI

The second day of the month always saw one of the most popular events. For hours, the streets from the edge of the city to the Vatican Palace were lined with onlookers, eager to see an event which only happened on this occasion. Around half past ten in the morning, news would reach the city gates, that THEY had been spotted approaching along the Appian Way and a murmur would spread through the waiting crowds. "They're here! They're here! The Carthaginians are coming." At 11 o'clock precisely, they arrived at the Porta Appia, the city gate, and halted. They trumpeted a response to the welcome given them and entered the city. No-one cared whether they were all in tune or not, which they usually weren't, and a good number of onlookers always fainted on the spot.

They advanced past the Baths of Caracalla towards the Porta Capena, within sight of which Hannibal had come with two thousand elephants in 211 BC. Then, continuing their march to the Circus Maximus, which still survived in regular use on Terra Urso, the procession wended its way around it before moving north towards the Colosseum, where they stopped to acknowledge the greetings of the roaring crowds which thronged it. Then they turned and continued on their way towards the Capitoline Hill and Forum, turning west in front of the Pantheon and crossed the Tiber by the Ponte Sant' Angelo. At the Castel Sant' Angelo, which on Terra Urso was by this period a palace, the visiting dignitaries were being entertained and there the Carthaginians were graciously received.

Most had never seen Carthaginians before and possibly never would again. They were a people who had never settled in Europe. Following the sack of Carthage, the survivors had dispersed into the interior of Africa, for many centuries living in small family groups to avoid detection, until news reached them, via the Jungle Bears, of the breakup of the Roman Empire. Only then had they deemed it safe to make direct contact with Western Europe once more.

Many had perished at the hands of Rome, often forced to fight to the death in the arenas and even now, many of them were almost overwhelmed by the strength of memories from those centuries. Yet they never showed it, and these days they were always the most popular contingent with the crowds. Indeed, citizens of medieval Rome vied with each other to provide lodgings for the retinues of the Carthaginians, who never travelled without their families. It was a point of social standing to have the resources necessary for such an enterprise and everyone, even the Pope, prayed that the city's water

supply wouldn't fail that month.

Meanwhile, in his rooms within the Leonine City and close to the Castel Sant' Angelo, Lionardo was bustling around his studio. It was a bustling's paradise, the type of room which nowadays one would perhaps associate with an eccentric professor. There were manuscripts littering a number of tables, some of which were piled so high that it was impossible to see over them and not a few of them flew through the air every time a draught passed through the room. It was already hot in Rome that year and the stuffiness of the room meant that Lionardo habitually opened the shutters when he was working.

If a visitor had listened carefully, he would have heard odd noises, trickling, gugging and plopping, interspersed with whirrings, whistlings and wheezings. He would have seen, scattered throughout the room on both the floor and on various tables, pots and tubes, vials and flasks, some of which contained coloured, others clear liquids from which came gurgling and fizzing noises. There were wheels and cogs which were spinning and clicking. A number of peculiar machines hung from the ceiling, some almost looking as if they were flying. There were pieces of glass, some aligned in rows, through which all sorts of colours could be seen when the sun shone.

There were charts and maps, both celestial and terrestrial, and diagrams and technical plans. Pushed back against the walls were a number of easels, most of which held paintings in various stages of completion, and on a couple of which were displayed the most vivid and beautiful paintings imaginable. If the visitor had walked around the room, he might also have been repelled by odd, disgusting smells. On closer inspection, he would have found numerous small animals and insects in all stages of dissection, sometimes accompanied by complimentary drawings, all meticulously drawn and with every blood vessel and nerve precisely mapped.

This was the workshop where Lionardo felt truly at home. It was here that he spent days at a time, painting, experimenting and studying. He ate willingly the meals his assistants brought him and continued his work throughout, often toiling late into the early hours by candle light, only to rise again as soon as the first rays of dawn filtered through the shutters. He would amble around in an apparently aimless way between his many projects, humming, tutting and talking, sometimes to his assistants and sometimes to himself. His assistants rarely got a word in edgeways in reply, but when they did venture to make comments or seek an explanation, he answered, always taking the time to explain and teach, but never indulged in general conversation. He did, however, hear theirs, and was constantly aware of what went on around him.

Although they never knew it, he was familiar with their families and lives, but what they did know was that thanks to his generosity, none of them ever wanted for the necessities of life.

On the day in question, Lionardo was, as usual, engaged in a number of experiments simultaneously. Around half past three in the afternoon, there was a knock on the door and a messenger informed Lionardo's assistant that his master, Leo X had requested his presence. He was desired to bring with him the drawings and plans which His Holiness had commissioned from him. The assistant rolled his eyes, then raised them heavenwards and muttering pleas to all the saints whom he could think of, approached Lionardo.

"Master, His Holiness wishes to see those plans he requested... at five o'clock."

"They're done! They're done! They're over there."

His assistant locked in horror at the table. "Which pile, Master?" he croaked, staring at the mountains of manuscripts.

"I don't know, I don't know. It's obvious what they are, when you see them. They're named. I'll just finish here," and Lionardo went back to his experiments.

His assistant started to work his way through the piles, then stopped. "Master, time is passing. His Holiness will be most displeased if you are late."

"No matter. I know where they are," and Lionardo walked straight to a pile at the corner farthest from himself. "They're in here," he said, rummaging through the pile. "At least they should be. They were in here, where are they?"

"Perhaps they fell on the floor, Master."

"The floor?" said Lionardo, casting a cursory glance over it. "No, they're not on the floor."

"But... perhaps they were on the floor... and... I picked them up."

"Picked them up? Whatever for? I can't find things on the floor if you keep picking them up again. Where did you put them? Which pile?"

His assistant gulped. "On one of those," he said, pointing vaguely to the piles on the table, "or those," waving his paws in the direction of two more tables which were similarly piled high, "or perhaps that one," as he pointed to a wooden chest covered in still more manuscripts.

"Well, which one?" bellowed Lionardo. "Don't stand there muttering. Which one?"

"Ah, well, Master... er... there are always so many manuscripts to pick up that... "

"Which one?"

"I don't really know... better mislaid than walked on, I always think... usually... "

"Never mind, stop wasting time. We'll soon find it," and Lionardo started sifting through pile after pile until there were again manuscripts flying through the air. Then he would have an idea - he was full of them. "I've got it, I remember... it's over there... no, over there... or perhaps..."

Rushing round the room after his master, the assistant clutched desperately at the manuscripts which Lionardo hurled around.

"Oh no! What a disaster! The experiments, Master. Be careful."

"There won't be any experiments if we're late, especially if there aren't any plans when I do appear. We'll both want the ground to open up and swallow us."

So they redoubled their efforts until suddenly, with a crash, Lionardo knocked over one of his experiments. It flew up into the air and landed on its neighbour, starting a domino effect throughout the whole series. Cogs whirled, liquids fizzed, sparks flew and strange lights flashed and then suddenly, there was silence. Lionardo and his assistant looked at each other, then the latter pointed to a small black dot which was balanced, hovering in mid-air over the remains of the disaster. As they watched, the dot, blacker than night, grew bigger and started to glow white around its perimeter, until it was so bright that it made the daylight dim. As it grew, it started to change shape forming a funnel with a tail like that of a tornado and a murmur like a distant swarm of bees. At first hardly audible, it slowly rose to such a pitch that their ears hurt and felt as if they would burst.

As it grew, it started to attract to itself loose objects lying close by. First, the dust on the surrounding surfaces was swept towards the funnel and disappeared, streaming to a single point. Then gradually heavier objects, as if weightless, started hurling themselves into the growing funnel, until at around one Ursan foot diameter, a constant stream of small objects was being sucked in, circling faster and faster as if into a whirlwind and disappearing into the vortex. As its strength and size increased, so too did its hunger until, when a chair beside them suddenly hurtled away from them, they stood, side by side, master and assistant, struck rigid with fear. Afterwards they swore they had tried to back away but could not do so, for they were gripped by an invisible force which, for a short time, matched their own strength but then started pulling them towards the darkness of the funnel, now about five Ursan feet in diameter and continuing to expand. Powerless, the last thing they remembered was a sensation of being pulled apart as if, as they later put it, they were being stretched on the rack, spinning and falling.

Chapter XVII

Meanwhile, out in the courtyard and streets, Ursans started to look around, attracted by the distant hum.

"What is it?"

"Whatever **is** that noise?"

"Better take cover, sounds like a large swarm to me."

"But look up there, that glow, what is it?"

"That? Oh, it'll just be the master blowing something up. Lionardo, you know. The great Lionardo himself. That's his studio up there," said a passer-by pointing upwards with a finger that suddenly started shaking. "He's really done it this time," he stuttered, as a large section of the wall appeared to evaporate and a glowing black disc took its place. "Run!" he shouted and tried to follow his own advice, but his feet felt like lead and he remained transfixed, whilst a number of birds and a screeching cat flew past his ears and disappeared.

The Ursans in front of him and closest to the disc, were swept up and followed the cat, bumping into each other as they went. Desperately trying to pull away, he turned and looked in horror at the throng which was rapidly closing in behind him. Then suddenly, sensing the inevitable, and spotting a couple of rather large Carthaginian Ursanae swiftly advancing on him, he turned and flung himself voluntarily into the hole, worrying more about who was pursuing him than what was awaiting him ahead.

"Like water going down a plug-hole, that's just what it was like," remembered one of his descendants centuries later (after plug-holes had been invented), "and no escape. The last thing I remember is continuously bumping into someone or something heavy."

By this time, Ursans of all sizes were flying down the street, some snatched from their houses through open doors and windows, so strong was the force. Just at that moment a door, which led into a series of courtyard gardens, suddenly opened on the opposite side of the street. Behind this door, the visiting dignitaries had been enjoying a late afternoon feast with their families, in honour of the arrival of the Carthaginians. Hearing the commotion, they had started drifting through the courtyard towards the door

which one of them had now opened. Many were now pressing forward, trying to identify the cause, and those at the front were just in time to witness the last few Ursans and objects spiralling into oblivion, before the door itself flew off its hinges and set off in pursuit.

At that moment the whole group, now numbering around three hundred, was wrenched off its collective feet and sucked forcibly towards the doorway, leaving a large pile of most undignified dignitaries who were slowly pulled into the hole, at first in twos and threes. Then, as the pull of the vortex started to demolish the courtyard wall, the remaining Ursans were swept unceremoniously up into a pile and launched as one into the blackness, accompanied and buffeted by bricks and mortar. The last thing that those remaining conscious remembered was an uprooted tree pursuing them like, as their descendants tell these days, a torpedo locked on target.

Meanwhile, far, far away in a forest glade, late afternoon sun was filtering through the canopy to the woodland floor below, on which lay scattered the debris of their journey. As the Ursans started to regain consciousness, those who were able staggered to their feet, and hearing the groans of their fellow voyagers, started to view the scene of destruction. Everywhere lay wounded Ursans amongst the shattered remains of objects which had accompanied them. Some were smashed, some entire. An undamaged chair stood in the centre of the site, surrounded by glass, wood, plates and bricks, whilst overhead, fluttering in the breeze, were the remains of Lionardo's precious manuscripts.

All the Carthaginians remained unconscious, possibly more seriously affected an account of their superiority in weight. The cat and the birds appeared to have disappeared, and there was no sign of the tree, much to their relief afterwards, when they had time to sit and think about it. The military Ursans immediately took charge.

"Everyone who can on their feet please and over here. We must assess the situation. Come along, hurry. The sooner we get started, the sooner we can find our way home."

"But where do you think we are?"

"That's what we have to find out."

"What happened?"

"Where's that tree that was chasing me?"

Who's that groaning? Where are you?"

"I don't know where we are but I've never seen trees so big."

As they made their way towards the appointed spot, they stopped to help those who were unable to stand and started muttering again.

"This grass is long."

"And just look at the size of those flowers."

"What was that?" shrieked a cub, almost knocked over as a mouse scuttled by him.

"Can we have some help over here? We've got some serious injuries."

So they attempted to take stock of their situation. They had been deposited in the forest glade, about five hundred of them in total, although of these, eleven were seriously injured and five already dead including one Carthaginian, one Panda, two Celts and one Greek. The priority seemed to be to make the injured as comfortable as possible and find water, but it was getting dark and no one really wanted to risk looking for water in unknown territory. As they hummed and hawed about it, a cub who had wandered away looking for still more adventure suddenly ran screaming into view, shouting that he was being chased by a monster with tusks. The ensuing clamour which broke out obviously scared 'it' away, for when a couple of Koalese shinnied up a tree, which seemed to them an endless task, they could see nothing. A cursory, and not too convincing, search by the military did however reveal footprints belonging to some animal of a fair size.

At this point, the Carthaginians started to wake up, but as they remained dopey for much longer than the others had, it took some time to explain the situation to them. Meanwhile, Lionardo's assistant had remembered that there had been a couple of flagons in the studio and started searching amongst the debris. With some help, one was found missing its lid, but the other, retrieved intact, provided enough water for the injured and youngest cubs for the night. There appeared to be a plentiful supply of wine, but no-one dared drink it undiluted. It was water that was needed, so it was decided that the Carthaginians would seek supplies at daybreak, when they would hopefully be less wobbly on their feet. Then, frightened, exhausted and hungry, they

settled down to try and sleep, whilst a few of the adults took it in turns to keep watch.

So they passed their first night in exile after the Casus Mirabilis which brought us to this planet. When the first rays of dawn filtered down through the tall canopy in the morning, a dozen Carthaginians set out, in twos and threes, in search of food and water and were gone only three hours before returning well supplied, but bearing bad news.

The forest, they said was dark and difficult to negotiate, even for them. The ground vegetation was thick and the tree cover gigantic. They had encountered a number of creatures, much like wild boar but three times the normal size and had with difficulty repelled them, one of their number receiving a tusk wound in the process. Everything in the forest was both alien and strangely familiar.

After a few more encounters with giant insects and rodents, a general sense of irritability set in and a number were showing signs of panic. So a meeting was rapidly convened in order to decide on a plan of action. "Why not call it a Symposium?" muttered one wit and as the idea made them laugh for the first time, a Symposium Enneadicum was voted in, a worthy successor of the ancient Ursan Enneadicum.

It was soon agreed that the priority was to leave the forest behind them as quickly as possible, given the apparent dangers, and that an early start should be made two days hence, to allow for some rest and collection of food. After close examination and deliberation, it was decided to assume that anything recognisable to them as food was safe to eat, whatever its size. It went unnoticed for a long time, however, that it was the Britons and English amongst them who seemed most familiar with the flora and fauna, although one Roman family appeared well versed in natural history generally.

When the time came to depart, the group was up early. The Carthaginians carried the injured and elderly and, when necessary, some of the older cubs, on special stretchers carried or strung between them and hastily woven by the jungle bears, whilst the other adults loaded themselves up with the smaller cubs and emergency provisions, hoping however to find adequate fresh food and water available along the way. So it was an apprehensive but hopeful column that moved out from their first camp to make its way through the Great Forest as they had named it, led by the military bears and flanked by those amongst the Carthaginians who were not engaged in other duties. The latter also brought up the rear whilst the most vulnerable travelled in the

centre of the group. So had begun the 'Recognitio Magna', as their exploration of the land in which they had found themselves would become known.

Food was just about sufficient, although certain members of the group were less than impressed with the diet at times. There was nothing in the way of fruit or nuts and from this and the state of the vegetation, they surmised that it was still Spring. The Britons, working alongside the Roman family, were able to recognise edible plants and tubers, and they also succeeded in trapping the odd 'small' animal, which they cooked over a fire and shared out between the bears who were in a majority. There were more than a few burnt paws and feet following mishaps with fires, and the Carthaginians were more than once called upon to act as emergency fire extinguishers. Consequently, no-one noticed when, at various points along the route, the number of bottles of wine slowly diminished, even though no-one was drinking them, so that by the time they were all too exhausted to carry anything surplus to requirements, they had all miraculously disappeared.

Chapter XVIII

During these first couple of weeks, four more of the seriously injured died and were buried, as the others had been, according to their individual customs. A couple of the dead left relatives behind who found it difficult to cope with their loss, but who were well supported by the group as a whole and a couple of orphans were quickly adopted. By the end of the third week, most of the injured had recovered sufficiently for everyone to be hopeful that they would lose no more of their party. One night, a number of the party heard the Carthaginians on the move and watched as they congregated away from the camp. No one challenged or queried them. Most were unnecessarily wary of them, a fact which they themselves neither abused nor sought to allay.

"We couldn't possibly," one was saying.

"Well, we'll never get anywhere at this rate."

"That's right, and we'll only get slower. We're all getting weaker and the sick and elderly just can't go on, not to mention the cubs."

"We'd be better doing something about it now, before we're too weak to do anything to help."

"But it's never been done before. I mean, honestly!" said a rather upper-class female.

"That's how I feel. Turns me grey, the mere thought of it. He's right though, and it'd only be for a while."

"You're hopeful. It's... it's... well, it's taking liberties."

"There's no point getting upset about it. I don't think anyone will consider it a liberty under the circumstances and we **are** all in this together."

"They ought to consider it an honour. It's never been done before, except of course, by enemies to humiliate us."

"Oh, be quiet... and don't be so haughty. It might even be fun," said a young female.

After about an hour, the Carthaginians nodded in agreement with each other and disappeared into the forest, having first woken up Lionardus and a

considerable number of Jungle Bears and Koalese, all of whom, after a hurried conversation, accompanied them. The next morning, they lined up and carefully lifted the sick, injured, young and old into hastily made adapted versions of that famous Ursan Carthaginian pannier, the 'amphastrabe', which would allow the Carthaginians to walk on all fours, something they could do equally well when necessary and which enabled them to move faster whilst carrying heavy loads. Only the few who were still too ill to ride were now carried on stretchers. The rest of the party spoke not a word. They knew well enough that nobody ever, ever, rode in this way 'on the back', so to speak, of a Carthaginian, carried as if by a beast of burden, and that they were probably the first Ursans in history to be invited to do so. The Carthaginians however had been right. The party progressed much more rapidly for they were by far and away the most robust and powerful of the Ursans, and as one of them had pointed out, "we are the strongest and must therefore support our cousins."

The days came and went and by the end of the sixth week even the strongest amongst them were tired and weak, not to mention anxious and frightened, and they were all dismayed to reach an even more impenetrable part of the forest. Here, there was widespread coppicing of the wood, which made progress much more difficult than amongst the tall forest trees, which were relatively free of very low branches. Fighting through this, they were even more disheartened by the unexpected death of a Panda who had been making a good recovery from her injuries. A number of cubs and a few adults had become ill and the restricted diet was taking its toll, particularly on the Pandese who were accustomed to a specialized diet. The Pandese themselves, experts as they were in natural remedies, found that even their knowledge was inadequate in these desperate circumstances.

The Koalese were by now taking it in turns to climb the taller trees, a task which they found increasingly tiring as time went on, but day after day, they reported back the same news. "More trees ahead!" Then, one morning, not long after they had set out, they came across the freshly killed body of a deer with an arrow in its flank. The Symposium hurriedly convened and came to a decision. Not far back, they had passed a large, deserted and derelict house. They would retrace their steps and stay there for a couple of days and rest. At least the bears would eat well. So the party slowly set off for the house, those who were still strong enough dragging and pushing the body as best they could. Suddenly, a couple of Koalese came running towards them, pointing and gabbling incoherently. "Giants! Apes! Dressed in clothes and... and talking... English!"

For one moment, the entire group stood aghast and then pandemonium broke out as almost all those who could, fled. "The building!" shouted one Ursan of military bearing, whilst the Carthaginians started running for the shelter with the sick. The walking wounded and youngest were snatched off their feet by whoever was nearest and carried or dragged in the opposite direction to that in which the Koalese had pointed. The military, taking stock of the situation as it happened, did the only thing possible. The bears made a mental note of who went where, whilst a couple of Carthaginians quickly started covering the party's tracks as well as they could, as they had done all along, sweeping the forest floor with their trunks. Then, when everyone had 'disappeared', they hotfooted it to the house.

Those still in the open wood cowered as low as possible in the vegetation, some hiding behind trees, whilst the others shrank into the shadows of the house, those with youngsters desperately clutching paws over their mouths to stop them crying. Try as they might to keep quiet, no one could prevent a gasp of horror escaping as three giants walked into view. They were definitely a type of ape, but with little or no hair on their faces and none at all on their hands. They were dressed in the fashion of English peasants, as the English later confirmed, and spoke English.

"Can't see anything over here."

"Light's failing."

"I've found the arrow... but there's no body"

"It's got blood on it though... and there's some here, too... on the ground."

"Might have only grazed it."

"Did you hear that noise? Sounded like a scream."

"Isn't that the old woman's hovel?"

"Definitely heard a scream... and, heaven have mercy on us, what was that?", pointing at something running away from him at knee level. "It's got clothes on!"

"Clothes? Wasn't the old woman burnt... alive... as a witch?"

"That's right. Well, I'm not hanging around here."

"What about his Lordship's deer?"

"He can do without it, for all I care. Wipe the arrow clean. We'll tell him the truth... that we found it on the ground."

"We're being watched. I can feel it."

"Devilry, that's what it is. I'm off," and just as he spoke, a horrible noise came from the hovel, a shrill trumpeting mixed with shrieks and groans. The three apes gazed at each other in horror, then turned on their heels and fled.

Chapter XIX

A couple of hours later, the entire party had been rounded up, including a couple of injured Ursanae who, climbing off their stretchers and hitching up their skirts, had been the quickest to flee and flown the farthest. "I know somebody who'll be walking from now on," whispered a young Mountain Bear to one of them, who sniffed and pretended she hadn't heard.

For the next few days, the party decided to stay near the house, constantly on the alert and with guards posted all over the immediate area. Scouts were sent out, amongst them the Koalese, in an attempt to verify their situation. A couple of tense days later, they returned with good news. They were reaching the edge of the forest which was thinning out and they could see open terrain ahead. There was much deliberation and the Symposium had trouble maintaining order, such was the effect of the news. Some, relieved, wanted to push ahead and gain open ground before nightfall. Others, more cautious, queried the sense of venturing out of the forest at all, given that there would be nowhere to hide from the giant apes and suggested setting up permanent residence amongst the trees. Much heated argument followed, some of it less than reasoned, and by now, tempers were frayed enough to allow not a few scuffles to break out, a couple requiring forcible termination. Finally it was decided they would remain in camp for the rest of the day, since there was no need for haste.

"If I know anything about anything," said one old Carthaginian, "the local people won't go back to the hovel, especially once those apes return with a tale of witchcraft still being at work there. Devilry's devilry in any language or country. It'll prove a blessing in the long run that they saw some of us, I dare say. People don't want to spend the rest of their lives scurrying round in the grass squeaking. They won't risk returning. If you ask me, the hovel's the safest place we could be."

"He's right, of course. We won't find anywhere better."

"It would be convenient for us to stay there until we've checked out the area."

"And most comfortable, I dare say!"

"Yes... reconnoitre, that's what we should do."

So there they settled, having realized by now that wherever they were, everything in this alien place was around three times the size it should have

been. They decided to set up a temporary base where the most needy would have the shelter of the hovel, the others making do with whatever they could find. It was now also clear that summer was indeed on the way, and therefore it was agreed that they would use the hut to rest and gather their strength and survey the area and its resources, while trying to find a larger, more suitable home before winter set in. Minimal work on the inside of the building (the exterior being left untouched to avoid arousing suspicion), and a collection of material to make some brushwood and leaf beds (a speciality of the Koalese) gave some small comfort. As it happened, they were destined to stay longer than they had intended, but at this point ends the tale of the Casus Mirabilis."

When Andronicus had finished, Constantine asked him, "what happened next?"

"Well, they stayed there until the end of the following winter and then commenced the Recognitio Magna, but that's another long story, to be told another day."

Theodosius asked him, "who was your ancestor? Was he in the story?"

"Yes," replied Andronicus. "He was also called Andronicus and was Lionardo's assistant."

"What happened to Lionardo?" asked Segovesus.

"He was the one to blame for all the trouble," said Bellovesus.

"Did they do something really nasty to him to punish him?" asked Genghis.
"Did he have to suffer for it?"

"No," said Andronicus. "They sometimes felt like it, but he was so well respected and such a genius, that they decided he'd be more use to them in one piece. Actually, he proved such an asset to them in those early years, that it's possible they wouldn't have survived without him, so really, he made up for what he'd done. Of course you must remember that it was an accident, and to this day, we don't know if Lionardo ever worked out how it had happened. They did however institute a special ceremony which lasted throughout Lionardo's lifetime. On one day every year, Lionardo was forced to pay a penalty which was decided by the cubs."

"What did they do to him?" asked Theodosius.

"Oh, all sorts of things."

"So we were wondering," said Togidumnus, "whether we ought to reinstate the ceremony."

"How can we?" asked Tamurlaine.

"Because," said Andronicus, "Lionardo's direct descendant lives here."

"Here?" asked Segovesus.

"Where?" asked Bellovesus.

"Who is it?" asked Genghis.

Togidumnus laughed. "If you can find him, you can decide on a penalty."

"How will we know who it is?" asked Constantine.

"He'll be hiding."

So that was the reason the entire household spent the late afternoon searching for Lionardo, with most of the adults joining in with the fun. With so many in the house, it was difficult to notice if anyone was missing, and it was only when the bedclothes started slipping that Lionardo's hiding place was finally betrayed and his identity revealed. As most of the younger cubs were by now far too tired to stay up any longer, they were packed off to bed whilst the adults stayed up long into the night. The next morning everyone under a certain age met to decide on the penalty to be paid, and Lionardo was led away to spend a full week attending private classes with Socrates. While pretending to be hating every minute of it in front of the cubs (who also gave themselves a week's holiday), the revelation of his identity meant that he could now freely discuss his illustrious ancestor and his work. Socrates was delighted to have the opportunity to dedicate a whole new section of the Koalese Histories to the life and works of Lionardo d'Ursi, and afterwards the two were frequently to be found deep in conversation.

Chapter XX

"Well, well, well," said Montgomery one morning, wandering into the study where a number of the adults had assembled. "I see the Simians are going to excavate the hill fort at Breidden Hill."

"Humph," said Caractacus.

"Yes, the one near Welshpool. They think it's yours."

"Aha!"

"Any truth in it?"

"Maybe. Maybe not," answered Caractacus, taking the paper and reading it intently before passing it to Commius.

"Didn't you leave something behind there?" asked Venutius, addressing his brother.

"That's right. Perhaps they'll find it. Perhaps they won't," said Commius.

"If they do, are we going to reclaim it?"

Commius laughed. "Do you think they'll give me it?"

"I was just thinking that if we were to give them a bit of information... "

"You mean we could do a bit of bartering?"

"Why not?"

"That'd be a waste of time. Nobody knows how to barter these days," said Togidumnus.

"Humph," said Caractacus. "We could just let them do most of the hard work this time and do the last bit ourselves."

"This time?" queried Julius.

Caractacus and Commius looked at each other. "Well, we've tried a couple of times in the past but we just couldn't manage it by ourselves," said Commius.

"It's buried too deep."

"He means he can't remember where he left it," said Hasdrubal, who was Hannibal's brother. "Terrible memories you bears have. Not at all like elephants."

"Anyway, does it really belong to you?" asked Montmorency.

"If our ancestor put it there, it should be ours," said Venutius.

"But you'd have to prove who you were," said Montmorency "and the only way to do that is to tell them what it is and locate it precisely, before they find it themselves."

"That's true," said a brown woolly-furred Greek called Hector. "Of course, it doesn't really belong to Commius anyway. If it belongs to anyone, it's his Simian double and we don't even know he exists, and if he does, he wouldn't know who he was, and we wouldn't be able to find him anyway and one thing's for sure, the Simians would never give anything to us, even if we dared reveal ourselves, which we wouldn't because if we did, they'd banish us from Simian society and put us in a zoo or... "

"Or dissect us," interrupted Marcus.

"They might pickle us," said Hector.

"Not a terrible idea, if only they'd use a good vintage," said Julius.

"You could always carry a special card you know," said Hector, "just in case they ever catch you, inscribed with the name of whatever you prefer to be pickled in. Last request, so to speak. The condemned bear chose a full-bodied pickle and all that. Anyway, I think we should all go on safari, that is to Wales and use it as a test case... try hard to recover Commius' possessions and then we could go and recover anything any of us ever left anywhere... what... ?" and he tailed off when a paw was placed over his mouth.

"Does he ever stop talking?" asked Hasdrubal wearily.

"Very rarely," laughed Achilles, holding his paw more firmly over his friend's mouth, but a stream of mumbling continued. When he removed his paw, Hector was still talking. "... I thought my three companions and I might go to Greece, conduct an expedition so to speak. I'm sure we could recover plenty

of buried treasure if we ask around a bit and I **would** like to visit my homeland sometime and I can vaguely remember one particular place, always have been able to. Perhaps I left some great treasure there."

"More likely it's the location of the speaker's platform or whatever they had in Athens," muttered Hasdrubal.

"That was the Bema," said Automedon, a Greek who was one of Hector's three companions. "It was much the same as the Roman Rostra."

"Ah well now, that's an interesting subject," began Hector again. "Do you think, senators, that I was an official?"

"Probably so," said Julius, making Hector sit up proudly.

"He has a point you know," said a Roman called Augustinian. "We **are** running short of funds. We're all right for now, but we need to consider the long-term future. I know this isn't really the time to discuss financial matters, but as the subject's been brought up... " he continued, inviting various reactions from blank looks to dismayed groans. "It has to be done," he said huffily. "We've got very few resources left as a group and as for the wider community, it'll have to make some decisions and soon. I can't be expected to manage financial affairs unless I've got money to manage."

There was a pause, punctuated by sighs and mutterings, whilst everyone thought about it then Caractacus asked, "what's the problem?"

"As you all know, over the centuries we've recovered plenty of treasure and belongings and there's always been enough to maintain a liquid financial situation, but times are changing. After all, we wouldn't be living here in a Simian household if they weren't."

"What are you getting at? What's changed with the financial position?" asked Alexander.

"To start with, nobody's come forward in recent years with new locations of buried treasure, unless of course you count those which would be too difficult to get at. What does this mean? Are we losing our memory or have we simply exhausted private resources? After all, only so many of us came here and after five hundred years, it's unlikely any new memories will surface. That limits us severely."

"We've always tended to recover private wealth. What about public wealth? We know there's still plenty of that," replied Alexander.

"That brings us to the legal issues," said Julius.

"Legal? What do you mean?"

"As Alexander said, up until now we've confined ourselves to reclaiming our private wealth. But it's no longer such a simple issue. The question is whether we consider ourselves British subjects or whether we consider ourselves outside the law."

"Does it matter? If it was owned by some of us then, surely it still belongs to us? We haven't had this problem before."

"No," replied Julius, "but laws on such matters are very strict these days. If we continue to dig up articles, legally we ought to declare them to the state."

"Declare it? How can we declare it?" spluttered Hasdrubal indignantly. "Do you really think we can walk into a museum? Just like that? Us? Forget it!"

"I can just imagine their faces if a pygmy elephant walked in carrying ancient treasure. Fully clothed into the bargain," said Marcus laughing. "What species of man is it... And what a getup he's wearing!"

Hasdrubal laughed. "I suppose I would be a funny sight to the Simians. 'What an unusual appearance he has!' Do you think they'd let me talk before they carted me off?"

"They might, but I don't think they'd believe the treasure belonged to you. You're not from around here," said Togidumnus.

"Did it ever really belong to us?" asked Montgomery. "As someone said earlier, surely it belongs to our Simian counterparts?"

"Yes," said Julius, "and that was fine as long as they were the only issue. They could never have remembered where they'd put it, even if they'd known they'd ever owned it. It was a simple case of 'finders keepers', or a case of legal ownership one planet removed if you like. But all these new laws make our finances a completely new ball game. I'll say it again. Are we subject to British law?"

Chapter XXI

There was another long pause and dejected faces all around. Then Automedon rose to his feet.

"I can't help thinking about Greece whilst you discuss this," he said. "I remember very clearly how even we Ursan Greeks felt, when so many antiquities were taken from our Simian country in the nineteenth century. I know times were different then, but some of us remember them from our past when Greece was the glory of the known world. It was very sad to see them destroyed and even removed from Greece."

"Yes," said a very old Greek called Ladas, whose ancestor had been a courier in the service of Alexander the Great and had won a crown at Olympia. "I remember some of them when they were newly constructed, give or take. I never thought then that I would see them dismantled as well. Perhaps one-day I'll see them being re-assembled back home."

"What's all this got to do with us?" asked Hannibal.

"It's just that I wouldn't feel like taking treasure any more. It should stay where it belongs," said Automedon.

"But where does it belong?" persisted Ladas.

"Well," said Hannibal, "whoever it belongs to, it won't stay where it is". "The archaeologists will dig it up. Then they'll put it in their museum vaults and nobody'll see it except them, certainly not us."

"At least it'll be safe though and kept for the country, which it won't necessarily be if it's dug up by treasure hunters. It'll be conserved and brought out sometimes for viewing."

"What's the alternative?" asked Augustinian. "We must have financial security. Otherwise, our communities will have nothing to fall back on. We can't survive unless we have access to our own supply of wealth. It's as simple as that. We're all right, living here, but others aren't so lucky."

"If the Greek antiquities go back to the Greeks," said Venutius, "and Aboriginal artefacts to the Aborigines, why shouldn't we have the Celtic treasure? After all, we're the only genuine Celts on this planet."

"I don't think the Simians would agree to that one," said Elibear. "Who'd be entitled to the Sutton Hoo treasure? Our Anglo-Saxons? And our English? Or their English? Come to think of it, perhaps the Dutch and Germans would also like a share. But if we're giving everything back, you Romans can give us back the site of Carthage."

"You'll have to apply to the Vandals for it, then," said someone, "and the Simians have plenty of them!"

"So, what should we do about it?" asked Alexander. "Caractacus?"

Caractacus had been following the conversation closely. Now he looked at Commius who nodded quietly. For a few moments, everyone waited, listening in silence to the clicking of the stones, and knowing better than to interrupt. Finally Commius raised a paw and motioned to J.C. who climbed onto a desk with a helping paw from Togidumnus and began to speak.

"I remember that when we first came to Terra Humana, we had a similar decision to make. We didn't make it until we were quite sure of our situation, so it was more than fifty years after our arrival here that we sat down and drew up a set of laws by which we would live. We asked ourselves the very same question. Were we English subjects or not? It was put to a vote and after much debate, there was a clear majority in favour.

Everyone wanted to belong to a greater community and to a country, and we were by then living in what is now known as Elizabethan England. It wasn't perfect. For what country is there in which there is nothing wanting and nothing reprehensible? But it was respected and we were starting to feel a part of it and to take pride in the country which we inhabited, so we made a momentous decision. We decided that we would be subjects of the English Crown, that we would take our own oath of allegiance and, as far as was possible both as a people and as individuals, we would live by English law. We accepted that our circumstances would be such as to make it impossible to live completely by Simian law. Land laws and such like clearly weren't applicable, but we would strive to live by the spirit of that law.

As a community, we've never wavered from that decision. We've lived through good and bad times alongside the Simians, sometimes relying on their scraps, sometimes giving our help even though unseen. We've fought their wars, although they didn't know it. We've paid our way when dealing with Simians, always paying at least the going rate for what we took and often more, so that they wouldn't mind. To many of them we're known as the

'honest thieves' and are welcome. We've taken, unpaid for, only those things that were free to Simians. We've lived, as far as our circumstances permitted, within the law. We are part of Great Britain and Great Britain is a part of us. Is there now good reason to forge another path? If not, shouldn't we be faithful to our customs?"

"J.C. is right," said Greatheart, after he had made his way, via Togidumnus, onto the desk to join his friend. "We made our decision and it's served us well, but we're still Ursans and it's not our way to abandon our customs without good reason. We've advanced alongside the Simians technologically, but kept alive the traditions and skills which they've lost. Unlike them, we have the best of both worlds. Why should we change our ways now? We're not faced with famine and the destruction of our society. The challenge is simply one of changing times. We must adjust accordingly, but does that mean that we must betray our heritage in the face of a few obstacles? No! It is our past that will carry us through to a thriving future. It will unite us and make us stronger and we will emerge with new customs that will enrich, not replace the old ones."

Greatheart stopped speaking and after a few moments of silence, Caractacus spoke. "Exactly. Just what I wanted to say. Any other comments? No? Well, I have something to add. There's no immediate problem. Commius and I have a er... ahem... well... a small... quite large actually... haul that we collected individually a long time ago... when it was still legal," he stressed, glaring at Julius, as if daring him to challenge the remark, but Julius simply smiled blandly and directed his gaze away to a spider hanging over Hannibal's head. "It's no secret," continued Caractacus "that plenty of others in our community have similar hoards, all obtained legally and therefore available for our use."

"Perhaps," said Julius "we could ensure they are disposed of in a manner which will return them to the state and make us a good profit at the same time. I'll start looking into the legalities. It's really just a case of dealing with the right people."

"You mean shady but patriotic?" asked Vespasian.

"There's nothing shady about them, unless of course it's a willingness to make deals with talking animals. We get paid, they make profits and the State gets the artefacts. Everybody gets what they want. As J.C. said, it's within the spirit of the law. I was also thinking it might be worth looking into the legalities on ores and minerals."

"Ores?" asked Caractacus.

"Well, nuggets. You know, gold," said Julius sheepishly.

"I know what a nugget is," said Caractacus. "How many do you have?"

"A few. Quite a few actually."

"All gold?"

"Along with a few other things. This and that."

"He could probably flood the market all by himself," commented Commius to Caractacus, after the gathering had broken up.

"Never mind this and that," said Caractacus. "I'd be interested in the other odds and ends he's not mentioning."

"What percentage of his wealth do you think he'll give up?"

"All of it if it's necessary, but he'll be praying to all the gods of Olympus and ours too, I shouldn't wonder, that it won't be."

"Looks as if he's recruiting the Christians too," laughed Commius as Julius went off deep in conversation with a cream-furred military bear called Alban.

"I bet he wishes there was a town named after one of his ancestors in Britain."

"Not if he'd had to be beheaded on the site first! Do you remember Montmorency's trip to Bath with the Simian when he went on that business trip? Julius was rather put out that he couldn't go. He was looking forward to a luxurious visit to some 'proper' baths, until someone reminded him they were closed due to poisonous fumes. He was appalled that the Simians weren't looking after them properly. Do you remember him saying 'they haven't done right by them'. He was right to be so cross of course... and the waters **are** good at Bath. I can remember the spring there being used for medicinal bathing long before the Romans arrived."

"Which lifetime was that in?"

"An earlier one than **you** remember. I think archaeologists would call it the Bronze Age now. Times have certainly changed since then!"

Caractacus could think of nothing to say, and the conversation came to an end.

Chapter XXII

There had been uninterrupted rain for a number of days and the beck had broken its bank and flooded part of the field which lay behind the house. Now the rain had ceased and the waters had receded, leaving the evening sun filtering through the trees and playing on the swollen waters. Caractacus and Julius made their way through the garden and down to the field, enjoying the unexpected break in the weather and reminiscing about bygone days.

"Do you remember when you were in Rome and we freed you?" asked Julius.

"Yes."

"Simian history books say you remained at liberty but in Rome."

"Yes."

"Are they right?" asked Julius, casting a sideways glance at Caractacus.

"What do you think?"

"I wouldn't have thought you'd want your descendants living as Romans. That would surely have been the greatest dishonour of all."

"No, I didn't. We stayed for a while, but once all the fuss had died down, I managed to bring the family home. We'd taken great care to disappear within Rome, so by then nobody noticed we were missing."

"That was a great speech you made in the Curia."

"I didn't know that you'd heard it. It wasn't quite as the history books tell it."

There was a pause, then Julius said, "I didn't really, at least not in person, but my father could recite it word for word." Then he added, "*libre ac magnifice in hac Curia nostra hodie locutus est.*"

Caractacus turned and looked at him, remembering the day when he had been taken in chains to the Curia, the Senate-House of Rome. Passing the waiting crowds, he had caught the attention of a richly attired Roman of noble bearing, about his own age, possibly a little younger, who was watching with a youngster barely in his teens. The Roman's gaze had wandered to the Briton's wife and children and then back to Caratacus. No words had been

spoken but something had passed between them. Later that today the Curia was in uproar, some demanding the prisoner's death, and support was growing for them when an older Roman, bearing a remarkable resemblance to the younger man, had stood up and started speaking.

"Fathers of Rome, listen to me. I will not waste your time repeating what others have already said more eloquently than I could ever hope to do. It is no secret that Caratacus, in defying Rome, has caused us great loss and hardship, nor that he has pursued that fight courageously and honourably in defence of his country and kinsfolk. We ourselves would do no less and would take pride in ourselves for doing so. He has spoken freely and passionately here today in our Curia, but with how much nobility in his speech! With how much dignity! He will not ask for clemency for himself and pride forbids that he should beg for it for his family. Their fate lies in your hands.

To what advantage will you condemn them all to death, or leave his wife widowed and his children orphaned? Do you think the Britons will succumb more readily if we pass a decree of execution? Do you think they will heap blessings on us for shaming their leader by leading him in chains? No. If you execute Caratacus you will do so because of your own fear. But why should you fear? We are already victorious. We have already conquered him honourably in the field of battle.

Fathers of Rome, the world looks to Rome for leadership. We should surely demonstrate that Rome is a merciful victor and not a petty tyrant. Let us show the world we do not fear our enemies, nor fear to let such a great warrior walk our streets in freedom. Let Rome stand tall in the knowledge of her greatness and in the wisdom of her city fathers. Senators, does it add to our greatness to hold women and children in chains and imprisoned in eternal darkness? Are we so weak that we fear the tears and wailing of children crying for their father? Let us show the world that Rome can afford to forgive her enemies.

To kill Caratacus on the field of battle would be a double honour, an honour for him to die bravely in defence of his country, and an honour, for the man who killed him, to free Rome from such an enemy. But is it not shameful to kill a man who stands before you chained and unable to defend himself? There have been calls for him to win his own liberty, and that of his family, fighting as a gladiator here in the Forum. Yet he is here, not because of some courageous Roman act, but because one of his own people betrayed and handed him over, already chained, to win our favour. We ourselves condemned it as a cowardly and treacherous act. By our decision here today,

we will either place ourselves below that traitor or raise Rome to a greater glory."

The Roman finished speaking and was greeted by silence. Then a voice rang out. "My honourable friend is right. Let us seek not a cowardly revenge, but rather the glory of Rome," and another voice answered in agreement. One by one the senators started to clap and then as one, the Curia rose to its feet to give a standing ovation. The vote was taken and Caratacus and his family set free.

Now, almost two thousand years later, his descendant Caractacus looked at his friend. Not until prompted by Julius' remark, had he recognized him. "You really are a **very** old friend," he said and he slapped Julius so hard on the back that he lost his footing in the mud from the flooded beck, and slipping, landed on his back. Laughing at Julius' undignified landing, Caractacus bent to help him up. Julius took the paw he offered then suddenly, and without warning, pulled Caractacus forward so hard that he fell flat on his face. For a moment, Caractacus was speechless, then the two friends started laughing and were very soon rolling round in the mud, mock fighting like a pair of cubs, until eventually they fell asleep.

A few hours later, as dawn flooded the field, they awoke and strolled back up to the house, caked from head to foot in mud. The household, on alert at their disappearance, stepped quietly aside as the fierce Celtic chief and the proud Roman senator passed arm-in-arm through their ranks.