

## PROLOGUE 1 - The Fall

The Starship 'Good Hope' was the largest and last of the colony foundation ships to leave Earth. Built in orbit, she was the size of a small moon, and carried a crew of ten thousand hand-picked colonisers travelling in suspended animation. She brushed the speed of light as she hurtled in pursuit of an earlier robo-probe, heading for a distant star with a solar system containing a planet which came within the probe's definition of 'Earth-compatible'.

The task of the crew of the 'Good Hope' was to establish base colonies in preparation for the expected fleet of colony ships. They would build settlements and establish industries, rear domesticated Earth animals from frozen genetic material in biological engineering labs, and modify different types of crop to enable them to grow in the alien soil.

The 'Good Hope's own probes confirmed that the planet's atmosphere was indeed breathable, and that the climate and flora were earth like; but, like the original robo-probe, their instruments failed to detect the lack of any native fuel sources more power efficient than wood, and didn't register the strange vagaries in the planet's powerful geomagnetic field.

Most of the colonists and their equipment were dropped to the planet's surface in cheap and simple 'one-shot' craft, in an operation nicknamed 'The Fall'.

Back on Earth, scientists tracked the 'Good Hope's automatic signals as she sped away. Years passed. The signals suddenly faded and were lost in the distant background of star noise. No further signals were ever received, and the 'Good Hope' entered the annals of space history as the greatest ever space disaster, 10,000 souls 'lost in space'.

From the surface of the far planet which they called Newhome, the colonisers faithfully beamed their signals, watched the sky, and waited... and waited....

Within a very few years they began to split into factions; those who clung to the rapidly failing technology which they had brought with them, and who still saw their prime task to be continued preparations for the arrival of the colonisation fleet; and others who insisted that they must adapt themselves to this new life on Nuome.

Even in the first generation there were fanatics on both sides.

Within a few generations the descendants of those fanatics had turned principle into religion.

Those first colonisers couldn't have foreseen how society would progress - or regress - when deprived of power - and thus of technology - for a millennium. They never even doubted that all the established laws of Earth science held true on Nuome. Their empirically trained minds could never have grasped the significance of the subtle elemental differences which the planet was still concealing, holding in store for their descendants....

They might possibly have called the results 'magic'.

But they wouldn't have called it heresy.