

## SYNOPSIS



**The City of Survivors. The First Book of Evolution**

**By**

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**Synopsis by Dr. Sheridan Marshall**

The German teens Jem (Jerome) Ellis and Lucie von Winterstein meet on the train to Frankfurt and turn out to be participating in the same student travel programme. Delays on the rail network mean that they nearly miss their flight to LA, to the consternation of the exchange organiser, Connie. They get to know one another on the flight, as well as many of the other young people enrolled on the programme. Lucie is white-skinned with striking red hair and comes from a relatively affluent, traditional family while Jem is black and his parents are separated. Jem's Dad now lives in San Diego in the USA, not far from Jem's host family. Jem clashes with another of the exchange students called Marek, a macho type who tries to monopolise Lucie's attention as well as that of two other girls called Katta and Zoe. They also meet a trio of gamers – Olivia, Arthur and Paul – who are glued to their game of Pokémon.

Lucie has an almost magical synesthetic ability to perceive the world in a glorious array of colours. She has a highly surreal experience during the flight, waking up during a bad bout of turbulence to smell a peculiar odour and hear an intense whispering sound. She feels as though her body is full of light and then she faints. When it turns out that Jem, Olivia and numerous other passengers have experienced something similar they are suspicious. And their suspicions only deepen when the pilot announces that they will be making an unscheduled stop at Denver International Airport due to technical difficulties. Nobody's smart phones or other technical devices work and they make a terrifying emergency landing.

After the plane has been evacuated Jem and the gaming trio notice that something is seriously amiss. They would have expected Denver International Airport to be buzzing with activity and yet it is now devoid of human activity – there are no lights, no noise, and the place is deserted. Upon investigation, the airport building appears to have been abandoned and transformed into a giant greenhouse, full of exotic plants. The mystery deepens as the plane's captain, Bennett, recalls being in Denver scarcely a month ago when everything was completely normal. The group's investigations reveal a robot named MARS, short for Multifunctional Armoured Robot System, which is able to communicate that it is responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of the airport building. They also find a subterranean garage full of solar-powered vehicles and, most intriguingly, a dusty magazine dated in the future, published in March 2035. Unbelievably it seems that their flight has travelled into the future.

The following morning Jem commandeers a school bus from the garage and proposes driving it into Denver to investigate further. Lucie is impressed by his unorthodox skills in breaking into and hot-wiring cars. Jem is self-conscious about the approval he receives from the other passengers for his plan and its execution. The group of exchange students, their leader Connie, the pilot and the

plane's bad-tempered sky marshal, Jaeger, all volunteer to be part of the expedition. They take MARS with them in the hope that they will be able to use him to establish contact with other functional computer systems. The journey out of the airport grounds reveals scenes of mass devastation. There is no sign of human life and it is clear that an unparalleled catastrophe has taken place. The young people must come to terms with having landed in the future – a future in which their parents and other loved ones may very well no longer be alive. At the same time the lush tropical vegetation which is flourishing everywhere gives Lucie the sense of having travelled back in time rather than forwards. It is as though nature is triumphing over human civilisation.

On the way into Denver the bus runs over and kills an unidentifiable snake-like creature that is covered in slime. From this point on the narrative is interspersed with short chapters containing communications between unknown sibilant voices. The voices discuss the activities of Jem, Lucie and the others as they try to discover what has happened to human civilisation.

Denver is more like a botanical garden than a city and the expedition team struggle to get their bearings. While Bennett and Jaeger go off in search of a new tyre for the school bus, Lucie and Connie scour an underground supermarket for provisions and Jem and the others head for the public library. In the library they meet Roderick, a computer-simulated librarian who offers to help them find whatever information they are looking for. Roderick is unable to answer all their questions, however, because of pre-programmed security restrictions. The urban jungle outside the library proves to be highly dangerous: Connie gets separated from Lucie and is killed by a mountain lion, Bennett and Jaeger's expedition also proves fatal, Jem is pursued by an unknown and barely visible enemy which lurks at the limits of his sensory perception, and the group is attacked by a flock of vicious birds. Traumatized by their horrific experiences, the group hurriedly repair the bus and flee the city, just as their vehicle is encircled by wolves. The teens feel as though they are being observed by an intelligent life form which is somehow coordinating an attack on them from within the animal world, and these suspicions are confirmed by the cryptic chapters containing communications from unknown voices.

Computer whizz-kid Arthur manages to hack into Roderick and decipher the encrypted files to reveal a host of information about the extraordinary events that have taken place during the early twenty-first century. It emerges that in August 2035 a comet named Thor entered the Earth's atmosphere and a large part of it exploded over the Gulf of Mexico, releasing massive amounts of carbon dioxide. The resulting climate change altered the coastlines, creating huge shallow water zones from which hitherto aquatic life forms were able to move out of the water and colonise the land. The earth was

colonised by a newly intelligent species of squid, able to survive out of water and camouflage itself at will. Simultaneously, a process of accelerated evolution, caused by primitive matter that was released during the comets explosion and facilitated genetic mutations in existing organisms, led to widespread sterility in humans. They discover that human life was virtually wiped out fifty years after the comet made contact with Earth, but that a small group of people have survived in a NORAD army bunker at the foot of the nearby Cheyenne Mountain. The group decide to travel to the mountain and try to make contact with the survivors.

Their hair-raising journey into the mountains sees the group being pursued by all manner of hostile wildlife, seemingly acting under a central command. Finding no signs of human life at the army bunker and chased by a growing horde of animals, the group flees up the steep mountain pass in a bid to find a way out of their increasingly desperate situation. The highly dangerous journey tests the friends' nerves and resourcefulness, as the teenagers are pushed to their limits. Their perilous journey does in fact lead them to the City of Survivors, but by the time they get there, Paul is severely injured, the bus is a wreck and Jem is no longer with the group, after Marek drives off leaving Jem to fight for his life against a monstrous bear. Lucie, while deeply relieved to have found this last bastion of human civilisation and to have reached safety, remains distraught about Jem's uncertain fate and furious with Marek for abandoning him. Readers must wait to find out what happens to Jem and Lucie – and the whole human race – in the next instalment of this thrilling series of books.