

ASYLUM

REFUGEES OF MARS



REDWORLD

BY A.L. COLLINS • ILLUSTRATED BY TOMISLAV TIKULIN

SCIFI NITY

REDWORLD



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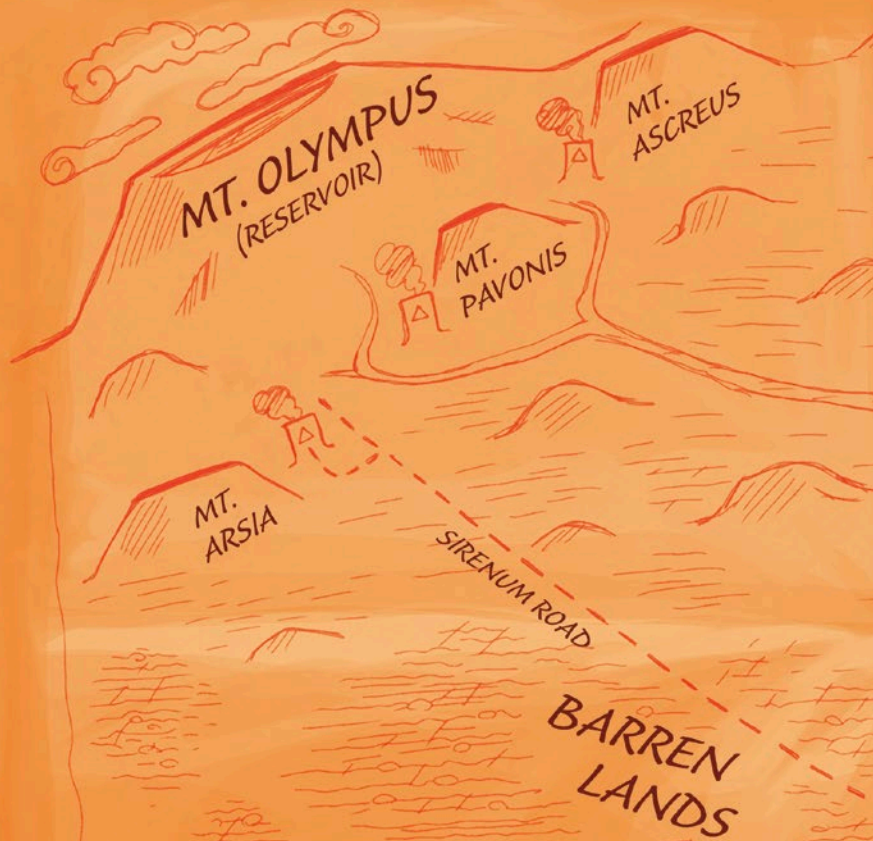


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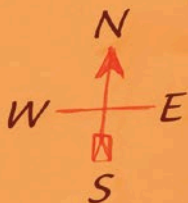


OLYMPIA PROVINCE

THARSIS CITY

FERRY LANDING

MARINE VALLEY RIVER



SUN VALLEY ROAD

TA'AL'S HOUSE

SUN CITY SCHOOL

AONIA ROAD

OUR FARM

WALKER FARM

RAIDERS!

DARWIN CITY





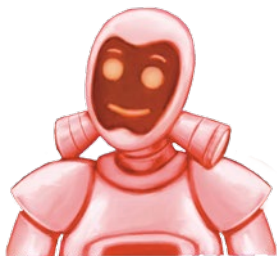
Belle Song

Fourteen-year-old Belle can be headstrong and stubborn. Her curiosity and sense of adventure often get her into trouble. Still, she has a good heart and is passionate about fairness. She is fiercely loyal to her friends.



Yun and Zara Song

Belle's parents sometimes seem really strict. But Yun has a great sense of humour, which Belle both loves and is embarrassed by. Zara has a generous heart, which has taught Belle not to judge others too quickly.



Melody

Melody is an old model 3X Personal Home Helper android. She was given to Belle by her grandmother before she passed away. Melody is Belle's best friend and protector, and enjoys telling bad jokes to seem more human.

MAIN INHABITANTS

Lucas Walker

Lucas is Belle's neighbour and classmate. He is part Sulux and part human. Meeting new people is not easy for him. But once he knows someone, his adventurous side emerges. He is full of ideas, which sometimes gets him and his friends into trouble.



Ta'al


Ta'al and her family are Nabian, an ancient alien race from another star system. Born and raised on Mars, Ta'al is intelligent and curious. She enjoys exploring and adventure, and she quickly became Belle's closest friend on Mars.



Raider

Raider is a hybrid wolf-dog. These animals were bred to be tame pets, but some of them became wild. After Raider was rescued by Belle, he became a faithful and protective companion.





It is the year 2337. Life on Earth is very difficult. Widespread disease, a lack of resources and a long war against intelligent robots has caused much suffering. Some Terrans, those who are from Earth, have moved to the Lunar Colony in search of a better life. But the Moon is overcrowded and has limited resources. Other families have chosen to move to Mars instead. With the help of two alien races – the Sulux and the Nabians – the red planet was transformed to support life nearly 200 years ago.

Yun and Zara Song and their daughter, Belle, moved to Mars about one Mars Cycle ago. Here they live as farmers. They work hard to grow crops and raise hybrid animals that are suitable for life on Mars.

Belle has just turned fourteen Earth-years old. She has made many friends and met several alien races. But on the night of her birthday, a major event leads her to meet the strangest aliens yet. Many people are afraid of the newcomers and their unusual abilities. But when Belle learns their sad history, she decides to do whatever she can to protect the alien refugees, and help them make a new home for themselves on . . .

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CHAPTER ONE
: BIRTHDAY :
WITH A BANG!

“Happy Birthday, to you!” Everyone sang at the top of their voices. Belle blew out the fourteen candles on her cake. Her friends, family and neighbours applauded. It was a perfect, late summer’s night. The sky was lit with stars, and one of Mars’ moons, Phobos, was on the rise.

“Isn’t it wonderful that even the heavens are celebrating your special day, Belle?” Yun said, with pride in his eyes.

“Oh, Dad,” Belle sighed. Her dad was always trying to be funny, and it often embarrassed her. But tonight, his words felt like a great big hug.

Melody had put out blankets and chairs on their back lawn. The guests sat or laid back and chatted happily as they waited for the meteor shower to begin. Newsreaders on RedVision had been talking about the event for days.

“There’s one!” Lucas pointed. Belle’s eyes followed his finger. She’d only just caught the end of the meteor’s flight. It lasted less than a second.

“Quick, make a wish,” Zara said, pointing out another meteor. Baby Thea squealed with delight.

“Do you believe in wish-making on a piece of rock hurtling through space?” Ta’al asked. Belle smiled. Her best friend was always the logical one.

“It’s an Earth thing,” Belle dismissed it with a laugh. It was hard to explain some human traditions to her Nabian friend. Perhaps they were too advanced a species to appreciate silly, Earth superstitions.

For the next few minutes, everyone was quiet as they watched for streaks of light in the night sky.

“I’m always looking in the wrong place when one appears,” Belle said. She was getting a little frustrated.

“When you do see one, notice the tail of light,” Melody said. The android was in her teacher mode. “It is due to the fact that a space rock creates friction as it enters the Martian atmosphere. The moment when a meteoroid crosses the sky, it becomes a meteor.”

Belle’s friends cried out when they saw another streak of light, but Belle had missed it again.

“I have a meteor joke,” Melody said. “Would you like to hear it?”

“No!” A chorus of voices answered. Melody was famous for her bad jokes.

“Why does a moon rock taste better than a Mars rock?” Melody said, ignoring the kids.

“Do we even eat rocks?” Belle couldn’t resist.

“Why does it taste better?” Ta’al asked Melody. She was too polite to ignore the android’s attempt at humour.

“It’s a little meteor.” Melody looked at each face to see if they’d understood the joke.

All the kids groaned, except Ta’al, who rarely got the human puns.

“In this case *meteor* sounds like *meatier*,” Belle explained to Ta’al.

Ta’al nodded, but didn’t laugh.

“It’s such a bad joke,” Belle said.

“It is meant to be ‘punny,’” Melody answered.

Belle rolled her eyes. “I’m going to climb a tree,” she said, standing up. She still hadn’t caught sight of a meteor or its tail. “Maybe I’ll have better luck up there.”

Ta’al, Lucas and Melody went with her. The kids climbed up the thick limbs of the giant apple tree at the end of the lawn. Melody engaged her anti-gravity function, and simply floated upwards. They stared out over the Songs’ farm.

“What a beautiful night!” Belle exclaimed. She took in a deep breath, as if to inhale all of Mars’ sky into her lungs.

“What’s that?” Ta’al said suddenly. Everyone turned to look in the direction that Ta’al was pointing.

“It must be the comet everyone was talking about,” Lucas guessed. “RedVision said the comet would bring on the meteor shower.”

Belle hadn’t realized that meteors or comets could burn so brightly. Instead of a bright white streak across the sky, this one was orange, as if it was on fire.

“That is very interesting,” Melody said. Her eyes turned blue as she contacted the Martian wireless network. “There have been several reports about that sighting already. It does not appear to be a comet at all.”