

SOLIDCOLD
By Richard Tornello © 2010

“Damn, I cut myself.” Sweet, I taste my blood. It is a bluish color and sweet. Some trainer I am. I cut myself. They look at me as if I’m some sort of clumsy old one. I watch as the skin seals itself against the cold. There are no visible signs of an opening. Good, the quick healing is a sign that I am healthy. “Let’s move on with the task at hand. Where did you say this object was?”

“Beyond the exposed ridges, above the solidcold line,” answers the young one who came to me with the find. The sharp jagged peaks push out just beyond the claws of the solidcold. The gray sky softens the edges of the ridges to the vision. When the local star does shine, the teeth-like peaks are imposing.

I look around at the young ones. They’re all excited about this discovery. They have no cares, jackets flying open in complete disregard of the weather. Light hats on some. A few will get sick and learn. The world is a solidcold mass that never goes away. When new solidcold blocks the roads we have to cut through or reroute if necessary. We are lucky today, the route is clear.

I am proud of our achievements. Our cities are protected and beneath the undersolidcold. We have mastered the planet. We are the only intelligent beings here. We’ve been here forever or so our myths indicate. There were others, it was said, but they disappeared. They left no trace. What junk. I believe none of that. Show me!

Our bodies are made for this. Our blood doesn’t solidcold like some animals we’ve captured from lower, warmer regions. Warm is a euphemism. Up here we get little light and heat from the local star. The lower regions get more, but not much. Our heat and energy come from the underground furnaces that the planet provides all of us. The industry and technology is planet based and our lives are rather complete. Travel is created through thermal driven vehicles. The core, almost liquid, is mined and the hot mass is used as a catalyst to turn all this solidcold into steam to drive our vehicles. Our whole society is based on steam generation. It’s been that way as far as we can remember.

I talk as we move closer to the location. Part of my responsibility is that of pedagogue to our future. I go on about a subject I feel might be of interest. “The animals we hunt in the south have a different mixture of bodily fluids and they solidcold at the slightest drop in temperature that we can run naked in. We know they are an older species, evolving from a line that just barely survives and will eventually die out. Why we know that? Look, as I cut one open that we’ve brought along for food, a red fluid, good to eat, but not at all sweet. And, it solidcolds almost instantly. You see that boys and girls. If you see red, it’s not our kind.” Sometimes I wonder if they exist might the myths hold some degree of truth. Why bother contemplating that. Where is the proof?

My thoughts are interrupted “Where did they come from?” asks one.

“They were always here,” I correct. She looks at me with an expression that I know means that she doesn’t quite understand me.

“Then why do we and our animals not go to solidcold and they do? Why are they even here?” I have no real answer.

Changing the subject and getting back to the subject at hand I ask, “Okay young one, where did you see this *thing*?”

“We’re close. It’s just beyond this peak.” The peak casts a shadow over a wide swath of solidcold. There is hardly any Star light warmth there.

“You all stay here, but You, the finder, you come with me. This is your find.” He’s all puffed up and proud. Can’t say I blame him, especially if he’s correct. The pack and solidcold are thin in this area. I can see the rocks below the solidcold. We’re a few feet above the ground. Most of the time the ground is miles below.

As the two of us round the peak I stop dead in my tracks. Hairless, solidcold and small. An arm reaches through the solidcold. Oh my, this is real. I’ve heard of these but never have I seen one. “Get the others, now!” I command. Where did this come from? No one I know has ever seen one of these.

He’s off and running, jacket open flying in the breeze. Kids. I didn’t have to tell him twice. And they’re all here surrounding what will be a momentous find.

“Who has the digging tools?” The steam penetrators are brought up to the location.

“You three, start 3 measures out and dig around this thing. Keep it encased. Keep the heat away from it so as not to melt it. Then we’ll decide what to do.”

Another thought hits me, “*Finder*, you’re in charge.” He has just been named for an historic moment that he contributed to. This is an honor that his family will cherish and receive respect for generations. Other names are given out as the young ones mature, but to have a name like this? That is something. He will be a leader.

They are yelling and sweating as they dig. The others watch. They switch places after a while.

The time is now High Star, and the two moons are out. They are pale to the view. What’s up there as I peer through the atmosphere, thick with moisture and visibility into the sky diminished?

They are finished and we look. The being is tiny by our standards. It's bipedal with material covering its body. It has a similar, if you can call it that appearance to us. It is adult but so small.

"Can they really have lived here," someone asks?

"How old is it?" comes another inquiry followed by myriad others.

"It's female, look!" shouts one

I hold my hand up, which is at least 2 times as large as the beings face I'm standing over. "I really have no idea. This is new and will be news to all of us throughout the world." I think to myself, this changes many a thing, maybe. Looking at the material on the encased being I do notice a degree of sophistication in design pattern and material. They are not of us.

AFTER A PERIOD OF TIME

We have all examined this find. Our people have gone back with sophisticated mining tools to discover any other remains and artifacts. All the artifacts are useless to us. Their utility is unrecognizable and so tiny too. A few pieces are large, bulky and unopenable. It takes 4 to carry the largest one. I noticed some designs carved into the side of one. It looked like 4 separated 180 degree angle- objects as a circle. Crude drawings on a big metal container. Odd but of no concern to us.

Our legends tell of beings that could fly and manipulate the cosmos. Then came a great catastrophe. The small tools that this female had were well made and of metals we've never seen. Their use can only be guessed at. We wonder about this. But like that huge container, not for long. We have life to live. That past, what ever it was, has no relation to us.

"I think that they may have been another line of being that died out. Or from out there," pointing up. "This place is not for such a small being. Look, phase transition! WE DON'T," calming down, "go through that," I declared. I am beginning to have doubts and want to investigate.

Up there, I think. Is there a warmer planet closer to the local star that they came from? Viewing this being I know they are not from here. I never express this to anyone. I will go to the main library and begin a quiet private search.

"Can anyone tell if it's glycol based?" Someone pipes up. My mind comes back to the here and solidcold.

“It’s not, *obviously*. What a waste of time this is. Throw it into the core with the tools it had. They are of no use to us. This is a dead end and is no relation to anything we are, were or will be. Get it out of here,” I command.

A vote was held. Finder was given the status and honor of the Find. His family was proud. He was allowed to throw the being into the heat source. It was melting and stinky too. The tools and all the artifacts were next.

My research turns up little except that the earliest writing we have do mention beings and the divine something or other. The information is ancient and missing sections that would add to my understanding.

“That being has made you curious?”

I jump surprised by the voice. I know it’s my partner. She will not say anything.

“Yes and I am not satisfied with the answers I am getting. We may have shared this planet with others that faded out, disappeared or, looking up at the roof, come from somewhere out there.”

“Leave it alone. What if they are from out there as you put it? There is nothing you can do about it. The presence of that being will only cause you mental strife and who knows what else. Get rid of it.”

“Yes I will. But still, the tools and associated artifacts are all in excellent condition, no oxidation, and if I am correct with my guess, useable. They were more advanced then we are.”

“Then why are we here and they are not? My partner demands.

“I have no answer for you. That’s my problem. I have no answer, just more questions.”

“You should put everything back into the solidcold where it came, and cordon that location off. It can only bring trouble. That is my advice to you, pedagogue.” She gives me a look. I know she’s correct but I have to answer, “A frozen body, trouble? Please.”

FIVE ORBITAL REVOLUTIONS LATER

We are back to our lives. Most have forgotten the biped incident. Finder is growing into a fine specimen fitting our world. His find has brought his family great distinction even if the reason for this honor is forgotten, or maybe just ignored. I wonder if I’m the only one who thinks about it.

“What a noise?!”

“What’s going on? The ground is shaking,” someone yells

“It’s coming from the core.”

A great blow up is occurring. In all our time here we’ve never had this. Never in any of our recorded history do we have any mention of this.

Our factories are being destroyed. Rock and ash are tumbling out of the sky. Homes are melting from the heat.

“This is impossible!” I shout refusing to believe this reality. “The artifacts, that bulky object, that’s what caused this! That’s why they disappeared. The inscription on the side was strange. It must have been a warning of some type. The heat from the core ignited this thing, some type of power machine, a weapon, a device that has a power I can’t even imagine.”

Once, I once came upon the word, human, in our ancient histories. No one had an answer to what it was. There was no description or definition. Any reference was either effaced or lost. I searched and searched but turned up nothing. The only data I had to go by were myths passed down by the old ones to us.

I take what I know to be my last look at our twin moons. For us, the planet, our home is dying. Red dust is everywhere. The sky is obscured.

Out there.

THE END