

A glowing green alien robot with a translucent body and four limbs, standing on a rocky, mossy ground. The robot has a bright green light emanating from its chest area. The background is a dark, rocky terrain with some green moss or lichen.

THE CHILDREN OF
C.O.R.E.

DE EDEN FORMER

RAYO VERWEIJ

THE CHILDREN OF C.O.R.E.

De Eden Former

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PROLOGUE

C.O.R.E.; Thursday 19th of April 2012

It was a nice day. Not that there was a lot of bad weather in C.O.R.E., on the contrary. The Eco's would make sure all the rain fell at night and that the sun would shine during the day. But still, snow could fall over day too and Furo didn't like that a lot. Much too cold.

Furo was sitting on the forward deck of one of the Raiders of C.O.R.E. The boat was nearing its destination: Biosphere, the living quarters and workspace of Yana Rodriguez. The Raider moored at the dock, Furo thanked the Barracuda with whom he was allowed to sail and stepped off the boat. The small, fast pirate boat sailed away.

Furo walked over the banister of the floating workstation and eventually went inside. Yana's Ark, as the workstations were called, looked pretty. Furo knew Yana had made the design herself and had put white and a lot of different shades of green. You could see the green very clearly: the whole Ark was based on nature, although it was futuristically built. In the centre of the Ark you could find a greenhouse. Furo was never been in the greenhouse before. In the greenhouse Yana welcomed her most important guests and he was definitely not one of them.

Furo approached Yana's normal conference room. He heard arguing voices coming out of it. He hoped they would be finished soon, because Yana and Josh had been talking for

ages. They had even been talking for so long, that Furo had been sent out to see how long it was going to take.

He could hear the voices clearly.

"I told you before, this is what I know, and the rest has vanished because of the blow. I couldn't choose what I still knew after the blow and what I didn't! You're already asking about it for four years, asking me any longer has no use. On top of that Furo is waiting outside."

The folding doors slid back. Furo walked inside and Josh Steen continued his story.

"I've made new plans for the Eden Former and we've been busy with it for ages. Okay? By the Way, it's probably going to take much longer before the Eden Former is finished."

His voice was filled with bitterness.

"Why is that?" Asked Yana shocked. "If you're missing materials, you should go to Trenchcoat, you know that."

"It's not the materials, it's the people. I already started this project with less bio technicians and now Rodney, one of my most important technicians, wants to do some research for himself at S.P.I.R.I.T."

"He's a jerk." Furo talked for the first time. Josh and Yana looked surprised at him.

"He always teases me, he ruins my homework, and so forth. He just hates me."

"Well, it can't be that bad?" Josh asked. "By the way, when does your education finish?"

"My education? In two weeks." Furo answered. "I'm now doing my final exams."

"Then you know what you'll do when you finish your education, I presume?" Josh said.

"Yes, I'm going to take over E.T.O. from my uncle in ten to fifteen years."

"Do you think your uncle would mind if that would be postponed for about five years?"

"Well, I think you could better ask him that yourself. His e-mail address is hiroebashi@saat.tec."

"Yes, I know. What do you think of working on the Eden Formers with me, before you take over your uncle's company? You've been living with us for six years now. You've done your education on Helios. Would you like it if you would stay with us a bit longer? Rodney is leaving, so you won't have any trouble with him."

"Are you sure?" asked Yana. "He hasn't got any experience at all."

"Yana, I'm sure he'll succeed. He's smart, like the rest of his family. He'll do great things in the future: he's already on good terms with Tori. As long as I know Rodney just has a business relation with her. By the way, Furo, if your education is finished you can address people by their first names."

"Cool!" said Furo. "Strindberg will like that as well."

Immediately he knew he had said too much.

"What business do you have with Thor Strindberg?" Yana asked suspiciously.

"Don't tell anyone else." said Furo.

"Promised."

"Err... there is something going on with him, that scares him." Furo began carefully. "A sort of paranormal power he

possesses, but which he doesn't like. That's what we talk about. He seems very rough and arrogant all the time. Often he is, but erm... Mister Strindberg also has a deeper, hidden side."

"I understand." Yana said. Josh nodded.

"Please don't tell this to mister Thorne." Furo begged. "Mister Strindberg really doesn't want that."

Yana smiled. "Do you really think I would share such confidential information with my direct rival, Rufus Thorne?"

"Of course not." Said Furo quickly. "I just wanted to emphasize it."

"If we're already talking about things Rufus Thorne isn't allowed to know" Josh said. "I guess if you're sure you want to help with the Former you should know about it and its history."

"If Hiro, my uncle, thinks it's okay, which probably is the case, I do want help you."

"Good." Josh looked happy. "From now on you may refer to me as a friend. Yana, could you contact Hiro about this?"

"Maybe it'll be more efficient to call Tori." Yana said smiling.

"Then entire C.O.R.E. will know it in ten minutes." They all had to laugh at that comment. Because if Tori began to talk, she could talk for hours. Yana walked outside. Furo could just hear her asking E.V.E. to get in touch with Hiro. Furo felt happy. Excited. Proud. He couldn't wait to see Rondey and Tori's faces when he told them. But first Josh had something to tell him. "Right, Furo. I'll tell you the short version of what happened with the Former before. It started in March 2002. I was thinking about a new system that would clean water and air.

That's how I thought of the Eden Former. Yana liked the idea and took care of the financing. Back then I was just a normal *executive* and I thought it quite something to walk here in the Biosphere. There was an island devoted to my purposes, about 400 kilometres outside C.O.R.E., where I could work this plan out with a couple of technicians in peace and quiet. We had worked there for six years, until the Former was finished."

"But erm... what are you doing on Helios then?" Furo asked.

"That's what I'm going to tell you now. When I was sailing to C.O.R.E. with the first Former, Neo Skulls attacked. The Former sunk and I lost my memory. When I was fully recovered after half a year, I could only remember a few things."

Furo started to laugh. "So that's why everybody always says "That's before your time." to you! I was already wondering why."

"Yes, that's right. When I was finally recovered Helios, that was virtually uninhabited before, was made available for me. I could work thereon the Former, basically starting over, with the people that were still left. Luckily they could remember a few things as well. Only because of a shortage of people willing to help me will the Former only be finished in 2018, instead of the planned 2015. On top of that, by the way, Rufus knows something's wrong."

"Indeed, mister The Ghost." The hologram of a triumphant Rufus Thorne appeared. "I was just at Tori when Yana talked to her. I wanted to congratulate Furo and pass something on to Yana. And what did I hear? The project of the competitors is delayed by three years? That's wonderful! Congratulations Furo, from the whole board of directors. I think I should

discuss this with Yana.” With a twinkle in his eye he disappeared.

Josh sat down depressed. Furo looked at him. “Why is that shortage there anyway?” he asked.

“In C.O.R.E. there are not enough people and I can’t bring in temporary workers, because C.O.R.E. should stay secret.” Josh answered.

“Why temporary? A few new people won’t mind, would they?”

“Of course.” Josh said sarcastically. “That’ll work. Nobody would notice if about ten people would suddenly disappear.”

“That doesn’t matter. Tori is a good friend of mine and she’s one of the smartest researchers I’ve ever met. She’ll find a way.”

“Okay...” Josh sounded uncertain.

“And if you’re bringing new people in, bring some children.”

“Children? Your fantasy is really on overdrive today, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely not! I’ve lived on Helios since I was nine and I’m still the only child here. Without Tori or Trevor I would be bored to death or I would crack because of all the teasing of Rodney. Please do it. They could follow a sort of... adapted education and help you with your project in a year. Then the Former will maybe be finished by 2015.”

“Okay, but I can’t guarantee anything. First the big bosses will have to be convinced. And I want you to discuss a way for the ten-that seems the best number to me-children to disappear without anyone noticing with Tori.”

Furo smiled. Yana wouldn’t be happy with Rufus’ triumph, but he, he couldn’t believe his luck.

PART 1

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

1. AFTER SCHOOL

Eindhoven, the Netherlands; Tuesday 22nd of May 2012

It had been a normal day. In the last ten minutes home from school Lieke cycled alone, through the calm neighbourhood where she lived. The summer had just begun and you could luckily see that on everyone's faces. There hadn't happened a lot at school that day. They had made an easy test for Dutch. Lieke had written something extra on her answer sheet and she hoped that her teacher, Cuno von Rembold, would approve of it.

Funny name actually, Von Rembold. He was a nice teacher and he only gave you extra homework when you didn't call him by his first name. He hated his surname.

What had happened as well? Latin, biology... Oh, that's right. They had to write an essay for biology about "The environment and global warming". And Lieke, to make a long story short, thought environmentalism was pretty boring. She already knew that the earth was getting warmer, that you're not supposed to shower long and that you shouldn't turn the heater on too hot. But why did they have to learn it for biology and for engineering and for geography and probably for physics next year? One time was enough, she thought. But the grade she would get would determine a big part of her final grade, so she would have to make something good out of that geography, no, biology essay.

In front of her she could see Luke and Sam cycling. They had been in each other's class for nearly a year now, but she still

didn't know a lot about them. Luke was very good with computers, she knew, and Sam was the only one of the class ever to have gotten top marks on an engineering test. They were both pretty friendly. Also, Sam had a very smart sister, Rose, who was about seven or eight years old. Lieke almost never talked to them. She only talked to her friends most of the time. She had enough of them and she liked that, because it gave her a feeling of security. Not that it was dangerous at her school, no. She just didn't like to be alone.

She was very content with her grades at school. She was doing Latin and Greek and they spoke English in most classes.

(Which was pretty difficult considering she lived in Holland).

She did the highest of the highest, which was the only level appropriate for her. The subjects weren't too difficult (That's what she thought, lots of people disagreed with her.), but the teachers would give her more difficult subjects to work with to "keep her motivated". The teachers that could do that the best, Von Rembold for Dutch and Flores for Latin, clearly were her favourite teachers. They were friendly and righteous, without being too strict. They could estimate what every individual student could do and often made funny jokes in class.

Generally she was quite happy, she noticed. And that gave her a good feeling.

The last street was in sight. She geared up a little, cycled on to the pavement and stepped off her bike in front of the garage. She opened the garage and walked her bike inside. It was a bit of a mess in the garage. They always tidied it up at the start of the summer, but hadn't come round to it yet.

Bike locked, garage locked, back door unlocked. Her younger sister already ran towards her.

"Hi! Do you have a lot of homework again?" Myrthe, Lieke's sister, always teased her with that.

"Yes, I have to write an essay for geography about global warming."

"About what?"

"About global warming, but you're too young to understand." Lieke already felt less happy then she had felt on the bike.

"Girls, please stop bickering for a moment!" their mother shouted. Their mother was a sporty woman in her forty's and didn't like arguing.

"Lieke started it!" Myrthe shouted.

"No, Myrthe, you started it." Their mother replied. "And you shouldn't lie."

Lieke got something to drink for herself and went to her room. Reluctantly she began her geography essay. *The environment...* she typed everything she knew about it. What global warming was, why people should do something about it, why there is so much uncertainty about it, which things are uncertain, the consequences of a higher temperature on global scale and things we can do to fight it. What could people do to fight it? Filters only reduce the effect and durable energy doesn't slow global warming. What really reduced the effect? She booted up the Internet. Were there actually options to generate ozone for instance? High in the atmosphere ozone stops radiation and the less radiation, the less warmth. She pictured it in her head: a giant zeppelin floating in the air and pumping out ozone through big pipes. But it would be a modern

zeppelin. Not one of those enormous monstrosities they used a hundred years ago.

She picked up a piece of paper and sketched the zeppelin. Different tillers were attached to the balloon. Of course there would also be a motor in it, the balloon itself would be filled with ozone gas. She drew a big O_3 on the zeppelin and wrote: "Ozone maker station" above it. Maybe she could include the sketch in her essay. According to *Google* there currently weren't any machines that generated ozone, so she had to make a new subtitle. *My idea*. Yes, her geography teacher would like that. She scanned her sketch and put it under the new subtitle. What would she write to go with it? *The Ozone maker station makes sure nobody has to worry about the thinning ozone layer*. That sounded good. She finished typing her text about the zeppelin and thought of a good end for the essay. She printed it and put it in a nice cover. Three pages, she thought that should be enough. She looked in her agenda to cross off "essay geography" but where it should have been there was a note saying "learn §3". At first she was surprised, until she saw "essay global warming" in the corner of her eye. Under biology. On Friday. In other words in three days. She sighed and asked herself if her mood could only get worse that midday.

Nobody was online at that point, so Lieke had nothing to do. Except learn paragraph 3 or make the exercises for French. But in that she was even less in the mood than for telling Myrthe she'd made the wrong homework. On the other hand, Myrthe could keep her busy.

"Myrthe?"

"Yes?" she answered.

"Do you fancy playing Monopoly?" Lieke knew Myrthe always liked that.

"Of course! I'm coming!"

Myrthe came in to the room with the Monopoly box in her hands. She was eight years old, but despite her age she was really good in the game. Myrthe was a tender girl with blond hair. Most of the time she and Lieke got along nicely.

In silence they put up the board and chose a figure to play with. Myrthe chose the dog. Lieke smiled, she knew very well Myrthe wanted a dog very badly but that their mother didn't want a dog. She herself chose the battleship.

"Who do you think is going to win, a dog or a battleship?" she asked her younger sister.

"With you as the captain the dog, for sure." They started to play.

For Myrthe this wasn't the best game she ever played. Lieke got a lot of money in very short time and began spending that on expensive streets. When she finally got the most expensive street, Myrthe looked at her jealously.

"I'll sell it to you for five hundred." Lieke offered.

"No." Myrthe answered. "I want to lose fair and square."

Lieke appreciated this a lot and began to play a bit calmer in the last rounds. She won by a mile, but all in all it had been a fun game and Myrthe didn't seem to mind. When Lieke was chatting with her friends later they told her it was good she made her biology essay already. On Friday they already had an important test for English and she could learn more for that now. Paragraph 3 wasn't very long and French, well, their

teacher never checked their homework so it didn't really matter.

All that made sure that that evening, at three past ten, she went to bed fairly happy.

2. LIEKE'S TEST

That same day, a few hours earlier, Cuno von Rembold had a free hour between classes. He was teaching Dutch and was middle aged. He was a content man, except when it came to his last name. Who would want to have a name like *Von Rembold*? His students were to call him Cuno at all times otherwise he'd get really angry. In his free hour Cuno didn't have much to do. He could check the grammar tests of G1B, which they had just made. He hadn't discussed with the other Dutch teachers what the standardization would be yet, but he would at least be able to tell them how much errors they had made. He searched his brown leather bag for the tests. Finally he found them, in between the Vwo-textbook for the third class and his sandwiches. He didn't know what was on those sandwiches, as he had overslept that morning and his wife had made them for him. He thought to recognise peanut butter and something like luncheon meat or chicken filet. Cuno put the stack of tests down in front of him. He picked up the top one. The name of Ben Ripès was written on top of the test. Ben was a nice student, Cuno thought. The only thing was that he got confused with different things very quickly. Also in this case, Cuno saw. He already knew why. Somebody had once asked how the *adjectival modifier* worked. Now Ben had pointed out all the *adjectival modifiers* instead of the *adjectives*. Other than that he had done it with nearly no mistakes.

Cuno thought for a moment. What would he do with this? Officially he had to consider it all an error, but then Ben would get a note somewhere in the region of 4/10, while he did know how to do everything. Finally Cuno decided to count everything as half an error. In that case he would get about a 7/10. He thought that would be more acceptable and made a mental note to look out with what he said in the presence of Ben in the future. The next test was Nico's. Nico was pretty noisy and Ben's best friend. Or was that Sam? No, Nico was that noisy sporty boy, that by the looks of it had made the test pretty good. And so it went on for a while. There had been a lot of mistakes in the terms *comparative* and *superlative*, which were mixed up more than a few times. Actually that was pretty strange, for a class that took Greek and Latin. Cuno thought those terms came from Latin.

After eighteen tests or so, he stumbled upon Lieke's test. She hadn't made a single mistake and her explanation of the question 'what is the difference between *comparative* and *superlative*?' was half a page long.

Cuno wrote a 10/10 on her test and turned the test upside down to put it away, when he saw that there was something written on the back.

Cuno started to read.

*"Dear faction of Dutch teachers,
You've taught me that sentences containing only one finite
verb would be given in the first class."*

Cuno already knew what her letter would be about.

“But in this test we had to parse a few compound sentences, with more than one finite verb. We weren’t supposed to point out the finite verbs however, but this could lead to some confusion. I would therefore advise you not to count items 1, 3, 6 and 12.

*Thanks in advance,
Lieke de Ren”*

Cuno smiled. With the faction of Dutch teachers they had decided these sentences in the test wouldn’t really mind. He knew for sure their decision wouldn’t be revoked, but he would at least show the letter to the others of the faction. He put down Lieke’s test and continued checking the other tests. After a while he had finished checking the tests. He expected the average note to be about 7/10, as that’s what the case in most of the tests was. When Cuno put the tests back in his bag, Helena came in. Helena Flores was a young teacher in Greek and Latin. She had long brown hair; which had a red fake rose in it. Helena was a very good teacher besides being a very fun teacher to have. The average notes her students scored were good. Of course that could depend on the students too, which was partly the reason, but the major part was really because of her experience and competence.

Cuno knew Helena was also a teacher of G1B and wondered if Lieke was as good in her lesson as she was in his. So he made sure he fancied a coffee at the same time as she did. Once he arrived at the coffee machine, 20 meters further, he began a conversation with her.

"Helena?"

"Yes?"

"Don't you teach Lieke de Ren in G1B too?"

"Yes, that's right."

"It occurred to me that she, well, she gets remarkably positive results in my class. Does she do just as well in your class?"

"Well, *positive* results... I barely manage to think of something new for her each time. She's does everything so fast."

"Do you give her extra work? I usually let her work on another subject or she helps me explain the subject to the class."

"Help you explain? I think that's a good idea. That can come in handy for Latin."

"Yes, or you could let her check the tests beforehand."

"Check the tests?" Helena reacted surprised.

"Today at a grammar test, she wrote a whole story about why a few of the used sentences were wrong."

Helena laughed. "That's just a stupid mistake of your faction."

"Of course not. We decided it didn't matter."

"Didn't matter?" Helena laughed loudly.

The bell rang and they went to their classrooms. Grinning Cuno opened the classroom for the third class. This class would have a reading test. He had a lot of tests planned today. The hour after lunch break his fourth class would have a spelling test.

Cuno put the students to work and thought for a moment. What kind of extra work could he give Lieke? He had a few puzzles but she'd probably finish them in no time. He had to think of something that was more challenging. An extra assignment or presentation? There were a few subjects in the

textbook that they skipped with the whole class. She could do them, maybe. He decided to start with talking to her about her criticism on the test. Then he'd see what he would do next.

3. LAST DECISIONS

C.O.R.E.; Wednesday 23rd of May 2012

Everyone would be there. The whole senate, the media, even the three big bosses. Okay, F.A.T.H.E.R. would be there for basically nothing, but that didn't take away the excitement of his presence. It'd already been a nerve-raking week.

Furo Ebashi sat on the front of the hoovercraft he had borrowed from Josh Steen for a while. They were sailing towards Vortex, Professor Doctor Salman Devi's Ark. Dr. Devi was one of the most important people in C.O.R.E. That's why he was one of the seven members of the Senate, the board of directors in C.O.R.E. A while ago he had even been chosen to be the chairman of the Senate. That's why they were now sailing towards his Ark for the top consultation about next Friday.

Friday was the big day. Then Furo, Josh and a few others would pick up a few eleven children, who would help work on the Eden Former. Eleven children were selected: One from Oxford, England and ten from the vicinity of Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Furo had no idea why so much came from Eindhoven and even less why one came from Oxford. Why nobody from Japan, for instance? Hiro, his uncle, always told him Japan was the smartest country in the world. Had Josh had something to do with it? He was from Australia. Probably not.

The hovercraft neared its hypermodern destination. While Furo and Josh walked of an aeroplane landed on the landing bay of the Ark. It was a Hawk: A sturdy aircraft with a lot of cargo space. With one of those they would be fetching the children, which is how those children were already known as by the media. Once in the conference room Furo sat down. He looked around. He recognised everyone from face, but most of them he didn't know personally. Tori Bartok sat down next to him.

"Hi!"

"Hi" answered Furo. "You've thought of something, right?"

"Of course, everything I had to do was upgrade an old invention of mine."

"Really? What do you have then?"

"Just wait and see." Tori looked at him mysteriously.

In the meantime everyone had arrived. Dr. Devi rose and cleared his throat.

"It is a pleasure to welcome you all here. As you have probably known for a while now we are going to bring eleven children to C.O.R.E. to help the staff shortage of Mr. Steen next Friday. Again, if you want to know why it had to be children you should look at Furo Ebashi instead of me. He's the one who came up with this; the extraordinary plans apparently run in the family." A few people sniggered. Everyone knew Hiro and Devi always argued. One time it was about a budget change, the other time about a license... Most of the time Furo liked Devi, but he hated it when the professor talked so negatively about his uncle. Then there came nothing but bad from his mouth.

Next to Furo Tori was swaying left and right. She couldn't sit still anyways, but now she was very nervous as well. Furo wondered what the twenty-nine year old scientist had thought of this time. Her nickname wasn't 'the Inventor' for nothing. Dr. Devi continued his story.

"Let's first mention again who the children are. Egon Dare, one of our scientists, had some spare time and offered to scout the children. I thank you for that."

There was a polite applause. Egon Dare, who was sitting diagonally from Furo, gave a short nod. With his light blonde hair his pale skin looked even paler. His clothes were entirely white as well. Furo had never seen him before.

"Right, the eleven children." Devi continued. "To start off: Thalia Bond, eleven years." On the screen behind him the face of a girl with long black hair and even black eyes appeared.

"Intelligent, a bit perfectionistic, knows how to care for herself. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Nico Bos, twelve years old. Smart, sporty, a real strategist. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Sam Charma, thirteen years old. Smart, skilled, has a technical vision. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Rose Charma, seven years old. Very clever, recognises lies and emotions immediately. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Sven Raunic, fourteen years. Intelligent, innovative, has an eye for good deals. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Kim Raunic, ten years old. Smart, knows what risks she should take and which ones she shouldn't. Could've been Skylar Banes' daughter. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

Furo looked at Skylar Banes. As one of the most successful business women of the world she would be pleased about the two Raunics. Her brown clothes contrasted with her white hair. She had the typical English voice you would expect with her. A lot of people would say she was the living example of power.

"Luke van Reijssel, thirteen years old. Smart, fantastic with computers. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Lieke de Ren, eleven years old. Extremely intelligent, a so-called allrounder. Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Myrthe de Ren, eight years old. For description see her sister. Unanimously permi... no, wait, what do we have here?

Cancelled through veto right from Skylar Banes."

There was a murmuring in the room. Furo looked at Tori surprised.

"Since when...?"

"I have no idea," Tori said. "Skylar would have her reasons for it I expect."

"Oh well, the sisters won't like that."

"No, I don't think so too."

Skylar Banes said nothing. She only had a smile on her face that wouldn't come off.

"Okay erm... Ben Ripès, twelve years old. Smart, speaks five languages fluently and could learn a few more in no time.

Unanimously permitted by the senate."

"Then number eleven, eh, ten: Ellie... Strindberg?"

Strindberg? Was she family of Thor Strindberg? That couldn't be, surely... Two rows behind Furo someone cleared his throat. Thor Strindberg rose.

"This was indeed my idea. I nearly never see my daughter and luckily she made it through the permission procedure." He sat down again.

Furo looked at Tori with wide eyes. It was about three years ago that he and Thor had started their talks about Thor's paranormal dreams. In all those years Thor hadn't uttered even one word about his daughter... or his wife.

Was Thor married? That wasn't something for him. He had dedicated his life to his business, Strindberg Inc., which provided electricity for half America. Most of the time he presented himself a bit grumpy. He wasn't the kind of person who you'd expect to raise a family... Furo made a mental note to ask him about it when they saw each other again.

"Where was I? Oh yes, Ellie Strindberg, ten years old.

Intelligent, disciplined, but what would you expect with such a father? Unanimously permitted by the senate."

Those were the children. Has anyone got any questions?"

Nobody asked something, but Furo knew that this introduction had raised a few questions for everybody.

"Nobody? Okay. The tasks are as followed: Keto Anaconda will be flying the plane, a Hawk. Egon Dare will be holding a quick presentation to distract everyone, while Tori Bartok will be encrypting the minds of friends and relatives. Erm... could someone come and explain that please?" He gave Tori a questioning look.

"What did you make?" Furo asked Tori.

She beamed, stood up and walked forward.

"Years ago I have invented a way to shut down particular areas of the brain. With mindencryption you make someone simply

forget a thing or person. From tomorrow on, my people will be going out to wipe out the traces of the children. Friday we'll be flying to Oxford. First we cover up all evidence of Ellie on the boarding school she attends. Luckily she doesn't have a lot of acquaintances outside the school, so we won't have to worry about that. After that we'll be flying on to Eindhoven, where we'll pick up Rose Charma and Kim Raunic first. By then my team will have almost finished their job. Afterwards we'll go to the school the other children attend to. Egon and I will pretend to do a medical research at the school. I'll encrypt all the minds while Egon tells them what we're doing. He speaks Dutch. He even grew up in Eindhoven."

Aha, thought Furo. That's why almost all of them come from Eindhoven: Egon has selected them all from his birthplace.

"We'll pretend seven children can have an exclusive look inside our laborotry: the Hawk. When they're inside we'll fly away and Furo Ebashi will tell them what we're really doing. Nobody will care about us flying away; their minds are encrypted after all. My team will address some last problems and then they'll come back to C.O.R.E. as well."

"Okay, Tori, thank you for your explanation," said Dr. Devi. "I think everything's clear now, or are there still questions?" Somebody rose. Furo recognised her as Tilda Jorgensen. "And the children? Do they have something to say about this? What if they don't want to go?"

"A team of psychologists has looked at the files of the children. The expectations are that they will actually think it quite exciting and will therefore probably cooperate." Dr. Devi said. In the mean time Tori sat down next Furo again.

“Are you sure it works as it should?” He asked her.

“Of course, I tested it thoroughly. Besides I could also undo it if I wanted to.”

“Okay...” Furo still had his doubts about her mindencryption.

Not one of her inventions had gone wrong until now, but still...

Furo thought it was a bit unnatural anyway. But still, he had asked for it himself. He couldn't go back and he didn't want to.

Dr. Devi invited Tilda Jorgensen to tell something about the bedroom of the children. She still looked questionable, as if she still wasn't happy about the answer on her last question. Nevertheless she still started to talk. Furo already knew what she was going to say, because the bedroom was cut out right next to his. Cut out, because most of the rooms were placed *in* the mountain on the small island Helios. Actually Helios was just a pice of rock of about one squere kilometer sticking out of the water.

The room was very cosy. Tilda had chosen to put them all together in one big room, which could be devided in different sections by holograms. Also she had chosen for hammocks instead of beds. Since the tv-program 'better living' was broadcasted hammocks became more and more popular. Furo nearly never watched the tv-programs that were made in C.O.R.E. itself. They namely consisted out 'how to do this and that' programs, wich he didn't really like. The Japanese television he hated, so he often watched the BBC or an American channel. That's where they at least broadcasted fun programs. In C.O.R.E. they could find every channel in the world, just like all the radio channels. Sometimes Furo made the computer pick a random radio signal and then he would

listen to that. Sometimes that brought up very funny things: once he'd stumbled along a radio connection between the NASA and the ISS.

At that point Tilda finished her story. There was a polite applause and when she sat down again the hologram of F.A.T.H.E.R. appeared. F.A.T.H.E.R. was the supercomputer, which organised nearly all the daily processes in C.O.R.E.. To make him recognisable in public he appeared as the projection of some sort of robot head, but actually he wasn't more than a few very fast computers working together.

He had calculated that, seen as humans ran the whole operation, there was exactly 2.16021503% chance that the whole project would fail. He also said he thought it was impressive that humans could come up with such a project. There was 0.2070% chance that the plane would explode and 0.1404% that Myrthe de Ren would still be coming. So it went on for a while, until Dr. Devi thought it was enough. A small break was announced. Tables with food and drink were brought in and everybody stood up. Furo took a chocolate truffle and looked at the rest of the program with Tori. " 'The sponsors of Global Trust, the Eden Initiative, S.A.A.T. and E.T.O. tell what they see in the project.' I guess that means an hour listening to the propaganda of Thorne and Roderiguez," said Tori. "I'm really in the mood for that."

" 'And lastly some explanation on the Eden Former by Josh Steen.' I already heard that a hundred times." followed Furo. "Shall we go?" asked Tori. "If something important happens we'll hear about it."

“Okay. I’ll have to tell Josh that I’m not sailing to Helios with him though.”

“Okay. See you outside!”

“Bye.”

Furo told Josh about his plan, walked outside and flew with Tori to her apartment in her private aircraft. There they had a nice evening while they watched the first three Bond films. Later, in his bed on Helios, Furo thought to himself that there was absolutely no chance that everything would go wrong, like F.A.T.H.E.R. believed. Everything would be all right and he would go into an amazing period of his life.

4. EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT

Eindhoven, the Netherlands; Thursday 24th of May 2012

Lieke could be happy. Yes, she always got the highest grades, she had a nice sister and she had loads of friends.

Luke scored higher than normal grades, but they were always lower than hers. He had a busy, irritating brother. Okay, he was just as popular as Lieve. He was also better at sports and he didn't even know if her sister was that nice. At least she never complained about her. Luke also knew he knew more about computers than her.

He just didn't like that she was the best in theoretical subjects. Plus drawing.

It wasn't that strange that he came home in a bad mood.

"Is something wrong?" Marie, his mother, gave him a concerned look.

"No nothing. Except then that Lieve got her 'fiftieth top grade' today."

"Just give her some space, okay!"

"I'm giving her space! I just don't like it that she uses it so much."

"Luke, be reasonable. You're jealous for nothing."

Luke looked at her dumbfounded.

"Jealous? What made you think of that?"

"You should hear yourself. Sit down."

"I have to learn for an English test and make a biology essay for tomorrow."

"This is more important."

Luke thudded down on the sofa. Marie sat down next to him.

"Luke, listen. I'm sure you can beat her in basketball and if you'd want it a pacman would appear on her computer that begins eating up her screen and crashes her computer. Am I right?"

"Yes, that's right, but it's an unpleasant example."

When Luke was eight he had a big argument with a classmate.

His brother had then unleashed the pacman-virus on their computer. When Marie wanted to sue them, it turned out they had moved. To where nobody knew, but Luke didn't really care. After that his interest in computers was born.

"How should I say it then?" asked Marie. "She probably has a lot of negative sides, just like everyone else."

"Lieke doesn't have negative sides. She can only do things a little less good."

"Think realistically. Of course she has a lesser side and if she doesn't share them with everyone, they are probably worse than yours. Disadvantages can also be outside school."

"I know, but how should I know those? Nico, for instance, is good at sports, but also very busy. Ben is fantastic with languages, but quickly mixes things up. By the way," Luke said laughing, "In Tuesday's grammatetest he had made the same mistake about twelve times. Luckily for him Cuno only counted everything as half an error."

Marie sniggered too. "If you think for a moment you could easily come up with something wrong with Lieke. Something you've seen or heard..."

Luke thought very carefully for a moment. Finally his face fell.

"Nope, nothing."

Marie sighed.

"Name a big negative point of... Sem."

"When he was five he had een accident with a lawnmower and his leg had to be amputated. Now he has a prosthesis for it and he only wears long trousers."

"Indeed."

"What does that have to do with all this?"

"Does everyone in the class know it?"

"No, of course not but..."

"Well, then you probably don't know everything of the others in the class."

"But that's not the point!" Luke was starting to lose his patience. "People only look at the visible, because they can't see the invisible!"

"Come on, don't talk nonsense."

"I'm not talking nonsense! A lot of people draw conclusions nearly immediately, before they really know you! She is fantastic, because she seems so from the outside. If you see what I mean." Luke took a long breath. Marie sighed.

"And you...?"

"Try to know someone first of course."

"What do you think of Lieke?"

"What do you mean?" Luke didn't understand what the question had to do with the conversation.

"Describe what you think of her."

"Well, she's pretty nice and..."

"Would you like to give a presentation with her?"

"I think we could work together fine, yes."

"But would you want to do a presentation with her anyway?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Because of the reasons I just told you. She is smart and nice, I think we could probably work together, she can explain things very good..."

"Why do you think you could work together so well?"

"At camp we were always a team. She's after me on the list:

Van Reijssel - De Ren."

That interested Marie.

"So you know her pretty well?"

"Pretty much, yes."

"What colour eyes does she have?"

"What?"

"What colour eyes does she have?"

"Ehm... green."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"What colour eyes does Ben have?"

"No idea."

Suddenly Marie began to snigger.

"What? Is it funny that I know what colour eyes she has? I just know that completely coincidental."

"Coincidental? 'She's nice.' 'I think we could work together pretty well.' 'No, I even know for sure.' Nico and Ben talked in the class about her fiftieth top grade. Probably Lieke heard them and talked to them. That's when you became jealous on those boys."

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re in love. Admit. IN LOVE.”