

CHAPTER ONE

Jared Brain fell.

Until that point, the damage to the master plan was merely aggravating. Repairable. Jared and Methuselah certainly hadn't *planned* to send any of the Century Club heroes back through the one remaining time gate. The plan was that Jared—aka the Walking Mind—would claim the minds of the psychosaurs before the Conqueror Ape could goof things up.

When Khan's useless son fell through the portal, it was frustrating, but still salvageable. Jared could have dealt with the other weak-minded Centurions. The flying squirrel presented no danger to him. Benjamin Hu possessed an interesting ability to slip his mental hold, but he couldn't control the psychosaurs. And that aggressive woman, the one who liked to solve problems with her fists—Amelia Stone—she was no concern either.

But damage to his jar? That was a problem.

And so he fell.

He hurtled through the time stream, surrounded by the dizzying whirls of possible futures and distant pasts. Telepathically conductive fluid oozed out through the holes that Sally Slick, turned to her Shadow side, had left in his protective shell. It beaded on the outside of the glass. Hovered in the timestream alongside him, pulled by the same force that hurtled him toward his destination.

Without that elixir, his psychic reach would be weakened to the point of death. He would be stuck in the wilds of prehistory, inert tissue on the ground. Immobile. Helpless.

UNACCEPTABLE!

The Walking Mind focused all his power on retaining the precious liquid, blocking the holes. The leaking slowed. Then he concentrated on a perfect, precious globule floating near one of the gashes in the glass.

Grasped it.

Pulled it closer—

With a small *plop* it squeezed back into his enclosure.

He felt the urge to sigh with relief though he'd been lungless for years. Some habits die hard.

But soon fatigue set in, an unaccustomed tiredness that made his control waver.

One stubborn drop kept slipping from him as if pouring through invisible fingers—

Then time was up.

Jared Brain rocketed out of the portal with an audible *pop*. A moment of exhilaration as he exalted in all the *green*, so vibrant and overwhelming it assailed all the senses at once. Even he, who had none, could feel it. Smell it. Taste it. The green of growing things. The green of nature unsullied by man.

The green of prehistory.

He was about to experience it firsthand. By falling on it.

The corner of his jar smacked the very green ground with a vibrating *thwang*. His brain—the last fragile bit of his once-human meat—slammed against the glass wall. Sloshed back.

In that moment he registered the shocked face of Jet Black, crouched at the edge of a stark rock cliff—

Then he rolled over the ledge.

Again, he fell. The indignity of it!

His jar spun in what would have been a sickening spiral if he had the inner ear to sense it. But he had none. No legs and arms to flail. No mouth to scream his inarticulate rage. His shriek was silent. No one with the power of speech stood close enough to hear his telepathic cry, deadened by the leak:

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

No one, that is, except for Jet, that cursed flying squirrel. Slick's puppy. The kid, the perpetually optimistic *boy*, peered down at him from the cliff's ledge as the jar toppled onto a small outcropping of rock.

The jar rolled, wobbled, came to a stop. Tottered on the edge of the unending chasm. The slightest movement would send it over.

Jared tried to calm the precious teleconductive fluid remaining in the jar, but his abilities were feeble, ineffective. The soft flesh of his unanchored brain slid toward the fulcrum despite his every effort—

“Need a hand?” Jet asked, reaching out as if to catch the tottering jar despite the fact that it was obviously beyond his reach. Worst of all, he meant it. So earnest. So eager. So *heroic*.

Without his jetpack, the fool couldn't possibly offer any significant aid. But still he tried, his tendons standing in stark relief against his neck as he strained with all his might to rescue his enemy. A selfless gesture, particularly since Jared had just done his best to kill the boy and all his silly little hero friends. If he had eyes, he'd have glared at the kid.

Instead he hit Jet with a psychic wave of loathing that wiped the smile from the hero's face. Made it into a scowl. But then it cleared, and the kid gave a cheery wave.

“If that's how you feel, enjoy your trip,” Jet said, smiling pleasantly.

Jared's brain slid—

The jar overbalanced—

And Jared Brain fell.

Although he'd rejected Jet's offer of help, Jared now felt a flicker of doubt. He tried to levitate. Failed. He couldn't even halt his spin, let alone float himself to safety. The rock face blurred as he picked up speed. A fall from this height would mean the end of him. The situation was dire indeed.

A harsh screech from the cliff heralded his descent. The Pterosaur nesting there launched at him.

Jared couldn't control the creature yet—the plan was to come back in time to learn that very thing—but he tried to snare it with his mind anyway.

It didn't work.

The creature shook off his mental grasp with a toss of its scaled head. It pushed off from the wall, stretching its long reptilian body to reach him. Its needle-toothed maw opened, its jaws snapped closed on the Walking Mind—

It gulped him down.

Jared Brain plopped into the belly of the beast, protected from its digestive juices by the glass surrounding him.

On the bright side, he thought, at least he wasn't falling.

CHAPTER TWO

Jet spared a moment—not a long one—to mourn as Jared Brain’s jar was snatched out of the air by a hungry Pterosaur. The beast’s sinewy, leather-skinned neck worked over its glass-encased meal. The end of the Walking Mind. Gulped down like so much meat.

It was a pity. Sure, the bodiless brain had stabbed the Centurions in the back, sent them hurtling through time, and engineered a psychosaur invasion, but he could have repented. Could have changed. Maybe.

Then again, maybe mourning was a waste of time. Especially with a hungry dinosaur in the air and no boosters on Jet’s back to help him escape.

He pushed away from the ledge and took shelter under a glossy leaf the size of his bunk back home. The piercing, harsh shrieks of the Pterosaur grew closer. Had he moved fast enough? Had it spotted him?

He made himself as small as possible. Quite tiny indeed. Held his breath—
The calls grew closer.

Too close.

Jet tensed against the anticipated impact, the dagger-sharp teeth that would pierce his skin within moments. His hand closed on a stick. A flimsy, ineffective weapon, but at least he’d go down fighting—

But the attack didn’t come.

He heard the swoop of wings, the rustle of the monstrous leaves in the wake of the creature's passing. It screeched again, a shrill call of frustration and unabated hunger. Circled above, searching.

But it didn't spot him, hidden as he was.

The creature's hungry calls faded as it took its search wider, seeking the quarry it had glimpsed. Then even those were gone, and only the sounds of the jungle remained. The rustle of wind-jostled foliage. The stealthy movement of small predators in search of unwary prey. Distant calls of unnamed animalia.

Jet cautiously peeked his head out from under his verdant hiding spot. It wasn't bitten off, which was a plus. He emerged from beneath the plant, stretching cramped and aching limbs. All that time travel really took a lot out of a chap. Especially the landing part.

It was enough to make a fellow miss his jetpack, that's for sure.

But that was a dangerous line of thought, leading back to the many things he'd lost when he rocketed through all those portals and ended up in the bowels of prehistory. His jetpack. His home. His family.

Sally.

He grimaced and shook off the wave of longing that came with that name. There'd be plenty of time to dwell. To mourn.

Right now, he needed to figure out where in tarnation he was. He needed to find the others and rig some kind of shelter before they got gobbled up like so much dinosaur chow. Together, they could survive. Even without Sally's inventions. Without her wrench. And that little self-satisfied smirk she wore when she finally managed to troubleshoot her latest invention.

He smacked himself on the forehead. Hopefully it would knock some sense into him. He could almost hear Mack scoffing, "Look at you, kid. Mooning about like some lily-livered sap over some broad when there's work to be done. Only a matter of time before you get yourself gnawed on by a saurian or enslaved by one of those dang blasted talking apes. It's what happens when you send a kid to do a man's job, eh? If you don't get your head on straight, the job's not gonna get done. Focus. You need to stop those overgrown lizards, kid. Buck up and get to work."

As much as he hated to admit it, Imaginary Mack was right.

Of course there was still hope. Before they all went through the time portal, the Walking Mind said he was going back in time to learn how to control the psychosaurs himself and wrest control of the invasion from Gorilla Khan. So the invasion hadn't happened yet. Doctor Methuselah would soon be opening yet another portal to what Jet still considered present day, the portal that would disgorge armies of psychosaurs on the world. His world.

Home.

There was a way back to it, if only Jet could get there in time.

All he had to do was find the rest of the Centurions, stop Doctor Methuselah and Gorilla Khan, evade an entire army full of ravenous dinosaurs with psychic abilities, sneak through the portal, and close it behind them before the invaders could do the actual invading.

Easy peasy.

First things first. Where was he? He looked around—Jared's cliff of doom stood to his left, possibly occupied by more Pterosaurs desperate for a mid-day nosh. No sense going that direction.

That left the stretch of jungle to his right. He'd never seen anything like it before—the sheer size of it, like a backyard garden gone feral. It was pretty enough, but the kind of deceptive beauty that lures a man in before it strikes. Lush orange blooms dangled from the trees on fleshy, fungus-spotted vines, scenting the air with citrus-sweet perfume. But thorns the size of his forearm dotted the vines. It would be dangerous to pick those heady blooms. The kind of danger a man would court, say, if he kissed Sally Slick without her permission...

Stop that!

He'd have berated himself further if the sky hadn't cracked open like a nut in the meaty hands of a warrior ape. The hair on his arms stood on end. The air crackled with power, disgorging a distant figure onto the land beyond the cliff. Trees shattered from the impact as what had to be another Centurion crashed into the verdant jungle.

Microaptors took to the sky in alarm at the sudden arrival. Their raucous calls filled the air, drawing the attention of the still-ravenous Pterosaur. It came soaring out of the depths where Jared Brain had fallen. Swooped and dove in effortless airborne arcs that made Jet grit his teeth with envy.

Snatched up the bird-sized microraptors in its jaws and gulped them down, cawing with persistent gluttony.

At least Jared would have some company in the belly of the beast. Small consolation given that the Pterosaur blocked Jet from reaching another Centurion. One of his comrades in arms—

Frustrating.

He backed away slowly, careful not to catch the creature's attention, and made his way back into the greenery. Hid himself from view. It was time to take action, but *what* action? Crossing that chasm would have been easy with his jetwing, but without it? Never. Especially not with that overgrown lizard in the way. That meant going around, and it would be a dangerous trek for sure.

He glanced down at the stick still gripped in his hand, snorted, and flung it aside. He'd need a better weapon than this if he was going to make it. And he had to. One of his fellow heroes might need him. Everything else might fail, but Jet Black would never desert a fellow Centurion in need. It just wasn't done.



Jet pushed his way through the underbrush. It hung over his head and probably should have been called overbrush, but no matter. He held a spear at the ready—a long, needle-sharp thorn lashed to a sturdy length of wood. Another strapped to his back.

He almost wished that something small would attack him, something he could spear and roast over a crackling fire. He was ravenous. Of course, the meal wouldn't be complete without a drink and some fresh baked bread, but he'd take anything. He was so hungry he'd have gulped down Sally's cooking with relish, and his oldest friend couldn't cook worth a darn. She always got too busy tinkering with the appliances and ended up burning everything.

Nothing to be done about it now. He squared his shoulders, ignored the gnawing rumble of his stomach, and set out to find his companions. They had a future to save, and not much time to do it in.

The trek was uneventful...until it wasn't.

Relatively uneventful, anyway. He edged past plants wider around than he was. Slogged through wet muck up to his knees. Swatted away mosquitoes the size of saucers. They left smears of blood on his palms and face, giving him a feral warrior look. At least that's what he imagined. Hoped for. He didn't wade in with his fists if he could help it, always relied on speed and wits. Without the jetpack? All he had was wits. If he came face to face with danger, his best bet was to avoid a fight. Intimidate. Frighten them off.

The chasm was longer and wider than he'd thought, and by the time he reached the southernmost tip, his stomach was protesting audibly. It kept going *sproing* and *grong* and generally making its discomfort known. He pulled a particularly juicy looking leaf off a low-hanging plant and shoved it into his mouth. Took two chews. Spit it out. It tasted like the bottom of Professor Khan's feet. Or what he imagined they'd taste like, anyway.

He was trying to scrape the taste off his tongue when he stumbled into the nest. He pushed aside a monstrous palm frond, and suddenly there it was before him, big as a boulder. It was roundish. Whiteish. Ovoid.

An egg.

His first instinct was to grab a frying pan, rub some sticks together to make a fire, and scramble that puppy up. His stomach signaled its approval of this plan with an emphatic *boing!* An egg this size would make a feast fit for a king...and all his soldiers...and maybe the rest of the kingdom to boot. He put his hand against the egg, pushed with all his might.

It wobbled. Barely.

Tempting as breakfast was, he couldn't afford to waste the time. Besides, he had no fire. No pan. And where there were eggs, there was likely a mother to tend them—

The air above him split with an angry shriek. The mother Pterosaur hovered over him as if summoned by his fearful musings, and she looked none too pleased to find him messing with her shell-sheltered embryo. Her mottled, leathery wings blotted out the sky. Claws tensed and grasped, ready for his flesh. Her yellow, curved teeth were as long as his arm.

She descended upon him—

He raised the spear, even though it seemed futile.