

Eon Aton

By Niels Serup

"Sidus! Sidus!" Mirie yelled. Sidus had been asleep for almost a day, but he still wanted to sleep more. Mirie, on the other hand, had got up right after hearing what had happened to their city. After a lot of yelling and shouting on Mirie's part, Sidus finally woke up, and Mirie was now able to tell him the terrible truth: Their city was gone.

It had now been two days since the unbearable truth was revealed to Mirie and Sidus. They were the only people who on that fateful night were outside the city, and now they wanted to find out what exactly had happened. Sidus and Mirie had been living in the city of Aton for all their 16-year old life, and they had never been away for more than 3 days at a time and not more than 50 miles away. Aton had it all: Shops, activities, schools, just everything a normal middle-sized city would have. But now there was nothing. There were no marks after explosions, and there was not any debris either. It was like the city had been conjured away, but both Mirie and Sidus knew that was not the case. About a day ago they had seen a terrifying light in the sky that did not look like something natural. They thought it to be odd that they were the only two who had noticed it, and they still did not understand it. "It has to have something to do with the disappearance of the city. It has to," Sidus told Mirie, "why else would we've been the only ones who could see the light AND be the only ones to not disappear? It HAS to have something to do with each other." Mirie agreed, and together they decided to find the city. But to do that, they first had to find out whether their city was the only city that had disappeared, or if all cities in all of Orb, their country, were victims. "We'll have to get some proviant," Mirie exclaimed, "and some warm clothes. It's going to be cold outside in the night." Their first travel had begun.

Having decided to head north, Sidus now understood what Mirie meant with "cold". However, it was not cold, it was freezing. There were no living animals, nor any plants. Everything was frozen. The temperature did not vary at all. At night it was far below 0 degrees, and it was the same at daytime. Sidus and Mirie barely managed to breathe. They walked for a week, only seeing ice wherever they looked, before finally reaching a small city. Sidus and Mirie instantly fainted in front of an old house. The inhabitants heard them faint and dragged them inside. The life savers put the two wanderers in bed, trying to get some warmth into them. Mirie and Sidus were in a very bad condition.

Mirie finally awoke. "Where am I?" she said out loud, looking around. She couldn't spot Sidus. Suddenly a female voice appeared behind her. "How are you?" it said. Mirie looked at the person but was confused and did not answer instantly. Thoughts kept circling her mind. "Where is Sidus? Where is this? Who is this person?" At last she made a reply. "I'm fine," she said, but it was more of a standard response than anything.

"No, really, how are you?" the voice reanswered.

"Well.. Who are you? And.. And.. WHERE IS SIDUS?!?" Mirie yelled all of a sudden.

"I'm Asitera. My husband, Maes, is treating your friend in the next room. He -" the person told Mirie, with Mirie interrupting her in the end, shouting: "SIDUS? How is he? Is he alright? Does he have any wounds? Did he -"

"Calm down," Asitera said, "He's fine. It's just that he had a few wounds. Nothing serious, really. Both of you were really lucky. Where were you headed?" Mirie ignored the question and hurried into the next room. Sidus was lying in a bed, wrapped in a couple of bandages. Mirie didn't think he looked too bad and started to relax. "I'm not really a doctor, but he should be alright," Maes told her, "just a few scratches here and there. It's actually a bit weird you were completely unhurt." Mirie looked at herself and

did not see any wounds. She wondered about it for a moment but let it go. She walked back to the other room, thanked Asitera and went to sleep again.

Three days had passed. Sidus had now completely recovered from his wounds, and both him and Mirie began to refocus on their plan about finding cities. This small outskirt did not qualify as a city in Sidus and Mirie's eyes. They told Asitera and Maes about what had happened and what their plan was, and to their surprise both Asitera and Maes knew about the disappearance of cities. "We don't know about who is behind all of this," Maes started, "but we're aware that every city with more than 100 citizens is gone." Mirie was confused. "Why do you two know that?" she asked. Sidus was also a bit confused, but he had an idea: "The citizens of this small town probably used to live in the different cities, and they all ended up here. Is this correct, Maes?" Maes nodded, saying: "20 persons inhabit this village. They come from 15 different cities. They all say their city was suddenly gone, and that they were the only ones who didn't disappear. They all somehow ended up here. We were actually a bit surprised when we got here. It would've been natural if it was a ruin, but when we got here, it looked as if it had been restored recently. Everything was fixed. We thought about it-"

Asitera broke in, setting a stop to the random chitchat. "I suppose your situation is the same, right?" she asked Sidus and Mirie. They both nodded.

"Now the only thing left is to find out who or what did all this. Let's try to find some leads," Sidus suggested with a determined mind. Maes and Asitera began to gather the people of the village and told them about the plan. They all agreed on trying to find clues, and after distributing some proviant and something equivalent to walkie talkies, they began looking in different directions. No one knew what to look for, but they all knew that the future of the world very much depended on them. Destiny lay in their hands.

"Shit."

Sidus eyes had suddenly become focused on a giant creature about a mile away moving very fast towards him and Mirie. Mirie noticed it too, but when she did, it was only half a mile away. Soon after, it had fully caught up with the two. Mirie and Sidus felt like they had been stunned. A giant sandworm, about 100 feet wide and several 100 feet long, had appeared before them. Mirie thought it had an odd, eerie glow that would make it visible even in total darkness. Sidus noticed that the giant sandworm seemed to be launching an attack, and he quickly regained his senses. However, both him and Mirie were useless. The sandworm was larger than them, faster than them, and they did not have any weapons at all. Seconds later the giant sandworm swallowed them. They were doomed.

The walkie talkie beeped again and again. Finally Sidus heard it, and he got up, noticing that he was still somehow alive. Then he thought of Mirie. He called after her, but no one answered. "She must be near me," Sidus thought, and he began looking. However, it was completely dark. He could not even see his own feet. Despite of that, Sidus tried walking forward, hoping to find a torch or something similar. Not long time went before he tripped and fell, and apparently someone heard that, as a couple of lamps above Sidus were suddenly turned on. Then he found out. He was trapped inside a large cage, and Mirie was nowhere to be seen. He grabbed the walkie talkie and tried to communicate with the other groups. No signal. Apparently all it could do was beep. "Probably the batteries," Sidus thought, putting it in his pocket. Then he started to look around. He was amazed to see the size of the room his cage was in. His cage was the same. It was probably ten times the size of what it needed to be to keep him trapped. The cage he was in had large steel bars keeping him from escaping. The floor, walls and roof were all in a dark brown color, and there were many doors but no windows. Judging by the inventory, Sidus had the idea that he was in some kind of laboratory. However, he did not get more time to observe. A short, dark-haired man entered through one of the many doors. He walked slowly towards Sidus, taking heavy

but short steps. When the man was only a couple of inches in front of the cage, he looked at Sidus and started talking. Sidus was scared.

"You are the one." the short man told Sidus. Sidus was surprised and gathered enough courage to answer. "What do you mean?" Sidus replied.

"You are the one."

"But why? How? And where's Mirie?"

"Mirie is safe. The point is, several thousands years ago, you was chosen to become the leader of the group called Radical Believers. We consist of thousands of people trying to save the world from misery. And you will be our leader."

"But WHY? I'm just Sidus, an ordinary boy from the city of Aton! What could I help with at all? I don't get it!"

The short man sighed and turned around. Then he told Sidus in a quiet voice: "Your father."

Sidus' father had died when Sidus was only 3 years old. Sidus had very few memories of him and did not want to think too much about him. He did not, to this day, even know anything about his father's background. He had never asked his mother about it. And now this dwarf-like person mentioned him! Sidus suddenly felt like he desperately needed an answer. Before he could say anything, though, the short man started talking again: "I'm Ibaxo. Your father was our former leader, but unfortunately he passed away 13 years ago. If I remember correctly, his name was.. Liwe?" Sidus nodded. Ibaxo continued: "For 15 years he led our group to great victories over evil. But then he was defeated. And now -"

"Who defeated my father?" Sidus yelled all of a sudden, interrupting Ibaxo's explanation. He had almost completely forgotten about Mirie. He just wanted to know who defeated his father -- badly. Ibaxo did not seem surprised, and Sidus thought Ibaxo might have foreseen this. A few seconds of silence went by, and Ibaxo continued as if nothing had happened: "- and now you will be our new leader. This is no easy feat. You must control thousands of people in their effort to save the world. And of course... You must be able to use the CHRONO CHANGER." Sidus looked troubled. He knew that "chronos" meant "time" in Latin, and he soon realized that "time changer" might mean what he would call a time machine. "Is this thing we're talking about a time machine?" Sidus asked Ibaxo, trying to speak calmly. Ibaxo took a deep breath before quietly nodding. "It's difficult to use. But it's powerful and very useful in some situations. But beware! It might.. backfire." Ibaxo told Sidus.

Sidus felt he was prepared, though he did not completely understand the last part. But he knew he would someday. Sidus was given the Chrono Changer, and he was surprised to see that it was in fact a fairly small machine.

Sidus had been reunited with Mirie, and they had been freed on a location near the small town. They were now able to communicate via the walkie talkie. All teams were fine and heading back to the town. Sidus told them that he and Mirie were also heading back, keeping the secret about the Chrono Changer to himself. Back in the town, though, he decided to tell the citizens about his newly aquired time machine. He felt he had to tell them as a "thank you" for helping him. Also, he did not know how to use it, and he hoped one of the citizens could help him.

"So that's how it is, right?" one of the citizens said. It was a dark-haired, tall male, probably about 90 years old. Sidus had just told him and the others about the Chrono Changer, and how he forgot to ask Ibaxo how to use it. They were sitting around a small fire, and the old man was the only one who seemed to know something.

"I thought it was just a legend," the old man continued, "but apparently it's not. This must be fate. You see, years ago my grandmother told me about 'a machinery that will alter human history'. I thought it sounded funny, but one day I met this young man - he might've been your greatgrandfather or something - who told me about it in details. I still didn't really believe it, and I quickly forgot about it. But it seems it's true. If I remember correctly, one of the things he told me was how to use this little piece of

machinery. Now, what did he say? Oh, yes, you just think of the date you want to travel to and put a bit of your blood and the blood of a person close to you into this container to confirm that you are in fact you and that you will not use the machine for evil purposes. Anyone who touches the Chrono Changer when it's starting will travel in time together with the owner."

Sidus and Mirie were thrilled and tried it without thought. Sidus thought of two weeks ago and put a little drop of his blood into a container in the machine. Mirie subsequently put a drop of her blood into the container, making the Chrono Changer emit a multi-colored beam. Mirie was surprised and let go of the machine. Sidus still had it in his hands when a great, blue light appeared. He was gone.

Sidus was standing in the middle of the desert. He was surrounded by a circle of small houses. It looked like the houses had been left a long time ago. Sidus immediately recognized the place as the small town that he had been in just a couple of seconds ago, though this time it looked more like ruins than anything else. "Is this.. two weeks ago?" Sidus thought. He walked into Asitera and Maes' house, but no one was there. And on the contrary to when Sidus last visited their house, this time it was full of dust and webs. It was then that he understood how true the Chrono Changer was. Sidus had no intentions of staying in the time frame two weeks ago, and so he desperately tried to get back to the future. All of his attempts were futile. He did not have the blood of a person close to him. He sat down, looked into the sky and thought of his possibilities. He soon realized that there was no way he would be able to return in two week's time. It was then he remembered what Maes had told them about how the village did not look like ruins when they had arrived. "Maybe.." Sidus thought, "maybe, I was the one who restored the buildings!" He did not completely understand the situation, but nonetheless, he slowly began restoring the houses. A week passed, and he noticed a couple of people in the distance. He quickly hid behind one of the houses. After a short amount of time, he heard two familiar voices.

"We should stay here, Maes"

"Yep, Asitera. But I wonder why it looks this well. It doesn't seem like anyone would want to live out here. Odd."

Sidus knew he had to hide until the Sidus from the future had gone to the past. He simply did not want to cause a paradox.

During the two weeks of hiding, occasionally Sidus was able to get proviant. When the inhabitants of the village had wandered off to find clues, Sidus was finally able to sleep in a bed. He spent most of his time thinking about the meaning of life. Was time travelling really that great? What if humans were simply destined to be exterminated? Sidus was not sure of what to do anymore, and he fell asleep.

The great, blue light appeared once again. The oldest Sidus looked intently at himself disappearing into the past. "Did another Sidus also look at me when I disappeared?" Sidus thought, "Did he think the same thoughts that I'm thinking in this very moment?" Sidus did not want to worry about it anymore, and he showed himself to Maes, Asitera and the rest. One of the first responses was about the Chrono Changer only being a teleporter. Soon everyone was talking about the Chrono Changer and its attributes. Sidus had to yell "STOP!" to make them quit talking. Sidus then told them everything -- his time travel, what he had done in the past two weeks, simply everything. The villagers were stunned. Some of them looked like they were not able to comprehend the situation, Sidus observed. One kept talking about not understanding a thing, while another kept coming with theories that were supposed to point out the current Sidus as a traitor. After some time, Asitera broke in.

"Take it easy," she said calmly, looking at the old man who had told Sidus how the Chrono Changer works, "Sidus is right -- he is, isn't he?"

The old man nodded. The villagers slowly walked away, still thinking about what they had witnessed. The old man turned to look at Sidus, telling him quietly: "We need to

talk."

Sidus, Mirie and the old man were sitting around a table inside what seemed to be the old man's house. Mirie had insisted on joining the two, and the old man had agreed in the end. The old man had just walked into the kitchen, and Sidus took a look at the house from the inside. It was a fairly large house, though it did not seem that the old man was the only one living here. From where he was sitting he could see several beds, none of which looked unused.

The old man had just reentered. He sat down by the table.

"How are you?" the old man asked Sidus and Mirie.

"Not to well," Mirie said.

"Could've been better," Sidus remarked.

The old man seemed to understand and started talking.

"I'm Jonathan. What I told you about the Chrono Changer was indeed true, but there is more to it. The Chrono Changer has a long history."

Sidus and Mirie yawned. "How long?" Mirie asked. Jonathan seemed to completely ignore this as he started to talk.

"A long time ago, a very advanced race inhabited the mountains of Hujy. They were called Sphyxes, had wings and were able to teleport to different places in a nanosecond. They were able to do this because of their infinite energy resource -- the Zidtron. They lived in harmony and peace, only eating animals that had died of natural causes and plants. They were happy. But they were also powerful. And with power comes the lust to rule."

Sidus and Mirie started to get interested.

"You see," Jonathan continued, "about 4000 years ago, the Sphyxes invented the Chrono Changer. They wanted to be able to travel in time and not just be able to teleport. Most Sphyxes believed this to be a great invention, and within a short period of time it was decided that the Chrono Changer should be used to change the course of history -- in favour of the Sphyxes, naturally. Fortunately for the rest of the world, there was one Sphyx who did not want to use the Chrono Changer for such things. He hid it within a sealed barrier that only humans, animals and plants - in fact, anything that wasn't a Sphyx - could enter. The Chrono Changer was later picked up by an adventurer. The Sphyx who put up the barrier was eventually killed by his own race. Before getting killed, he managed to put up another barrier, this time restraining all access to the Zidtron. Because they did not have access to the Zidtron, they gradually grew weaker, and in the end they died. Or so I thought."

"What do you mean by that?" Mirie and Sidus almost synchronously asked.

"The disappearing cities might have something to do with them. I've thought up a theory, which would explain it. You see, the barrier that stopped the Sphyxes getting into contact with the Zidtron relies not on species recognition, but on energy level recognition. In short, that means that only a creature with an energy level below a certain point can enter the barrier. A Sphyx has a very high energy level, which is why they can't enter. However, the Sphyxes have been drained for energy during these thousands years, so there's a risk they might be able to enter the barrier by now. If that's the case, they might want to take revenge on the human race for stealing the Chrono Changer."

Sidus looked at Jonathan, then at Mirie. He had made up his mind. "We must go back to our town and travel back to the day it disappeared. Maybe we can catch a glimpse of some Sphyxes," he said determined. Mirie seemed to agree, but Jonathan did not.

"What if it is the

Sphyxes? What will you do in that case? And what if it isn't the Sphyxes?" he told the two, "You have to make a fairly bulletproof plan to be able to get the cities back all over the world. And I'll gladly help you."

Mirie and Sidus nodded.

A few days had passed. Sidus and Mirie had been helping with various tasks in the

small village, while in the meantime Jonathan had tried coming up with a plan on how to get the cities back with the help of the Chrono Changer. Sidus had just finished eating dinner with the rest of the village, when he heard Jonathan call for him and Mirie. The three gathered in Jonathan's house -- which Sidus now had learnt was also inhabited by some of the other villagers -- and sat down by the table. Jonathan started talking.

"It has been a difficult task to make a plan. But I've succeeded. We know that cities have been disappearing, and we know that the Chrono Changer has once again become active. We think that the Sphyxes might have regained their powers. The point here is, even if the Sphyxes has got their powers back, why would they want to make cities disappear? If they are indeed back, they would surely want to kill the inhabitants of the cities. And somebody would have to protect the inhabitants of those cities. You, that is."

Sidus looked at Mirie, and Mirie looked back at him. A few seconds went by, when they almost simultaneously exclaimed:

"THE CHRONO CHANGER!"

Jonathan nodded, continuing explaining his plan: "Yes, that's right. At some point you'll travel back in time and somehow make the cities disappear. That way, the Sphyxes will not be able to kill any humans. The problem is, it's actually pretty difficult to make cities disappear. And this is where my plan comes into action."

"Just tell us already!" Sidus shouted impatiently. Jonathan did not seem to notice and continued as if nothing had happened: "Back in the days when I was merely a student in the art of planning, my master told me a secret - the secret of the Mass Uniter. It's a device that can merge a lot of things into one thing. I don't know the details, but you should be able to use it to make the cities time-transferable. You see, the Chrono Changer is only able to travel in time with one object at a time. However, if more than one object touches it, the Chrono Changer will detect it as only one object. If you used the Chrono Changer at a city, only part of it would travel in time, and that's why you need to get the Mass Uniter. As far as I remember, it's located in a city north of here named Neythity. You must go there and ask for a person called Finn Frenzy. I don't know how he got that name, but everybody calls him that. You know, he was actually my old master."

"But if he's your master, he must be relatively older than you. You are old, so your master must either be very old or just dead, right?" Mirie asked.

Jonathan nodded. "My master is indeed very dead. But with the help of the Chrono Changer he'll once again be alive. Your task is to go about twenty years back in time and visit my now-dead but then-alive master Frenzy. After that you must go forward in time to the date the cities started disappearing, use the Mass Uniter to merge you with the cities and take the cities to the future. I'm sorry if my plan isn't very detailed, but I simply don't know that much."

"We'll do it!" Sidus said in a determined voice. "Let's go!" Mirie yelled.

Mirie and Sidus stood in the middle of the village with the inhabitants gathered around them. Jonathan had given them a compass and provisions to hold out for a week.

Sidus put a drop of his blood into the Chrono Changer, held Mirie's hand and thought of a date 20 years ago. Like the last time, a great, blue light appeared. A second or so passed, and Sidus was gone together with Mirie.

Sidus couldn't see a thing. Neither could Mirie. It seemed as if they had landed in the middle of a sandstorm. Sidus tried looking in all directions to see where the storm was coming from, and he noticed that the sandstorm was coming from everywhere. Then he and Mirie started being pulled downwards by a mysterious force. They tried fighting the force, but with no luck. They were, once again, doomed.

It was dark. Sidus had just awoken. In the distance he could hear footsteps, though he was unable to determine if it came from one or more persons. Suddenly the light was turned on, and before Sidus stood none other than Ibaxo. Sidus suddenly remembered

his promise about being the leader of the group called Radical Believers and felt bad about completely having forgotten it. He then had a slight dejavu, sitting in the same cage as the last time he was captured by Ibaxo, looking at the same room as the last time he was captured. Ibaxo started talking, but Sidus barely noticed what he said. He had just noticed that Ibaxo was not alone in the room. In the back of the room two people - a man and a woman - was walking. Sidus was unable to completely grasp how they looked, but they seemed very familiar to him.

This time Mirie had not been removed from the cage. As she woke up, Sidus regained focus and started listening to what Ibaxo had to say. Ibaxo, however, had stopped talking. Instead he held up two identical Chrono Changers. Sidus and Mirie could not find Sidus' Chrono Changer and quickly realised what had gone wrong. Ibaxo's facial expression changed from being angry to being confused, and as soon as the two people walking in the back of the room had exited the room, he started talking again. "You posses a Chrono Changer identical to the one my leader has. You are a stranger, and yet you resemble my leader very much. Who are you?" Ibaxo looked closely at Sidus. Sidus did not fully understand what Ibaxo meant, but as he thought of the two people that he has seen a moment ago, he suddenly got it and could not help but yell. "FATHER!" Sidus had just remembered that Liwe, his father, had been the leader of Radical Believers until his death 13 years ago -- no, in 7 years time. "You.. You're from the future?" Ibaxo asked. He did not look very well. Mirie and Sidus looked at each other, then at Ibaxo, and nodded. Ibaxo tried to act calm and asked about Sidus and Mirie's reason for going back in time. They explained to him about the towns disappearing, obtaining the Chrono Changer, the Sphyxes and the Mass Uinter. After a short amount of time of thinking, Ibaxo agreed to let the two go free. "I see no other way out of this mess," he said. Sidus and Mirie then left, once again looking for the city of Neythity.

It had been several days before Sidus and Mirie had left for Neythity. They had met a bunch of wild animals and were low on provisions. They were walking, low on hope, when they finally saw a city in the distance. They hurried towards the city, and within minutes they stood in front of a great gate. It was open, and they walked straight into it. The next step was for them to find Finn Frenzy. They asked the first person they saw, but it seemed the person did not know. After having asked a lot of people with no result, Sidus and Mirie decided to get something to eat. They found a place called "The Qwizzor's Diner" and entered. They got a table and ordered something to eat. While waiting for their food to come, they took a look at the diner. It was full of drunk men talking nonsense in an odd language. It was not the type of people you would want to ask something, and Sidus and Mirie quickly decided to just sit still. That, however, did not seem to be an option. Within a few seconds, the men had already noticed Mirie, the only female in the room who was not a waitress, and Sidus, who probably seemed a bit odd compared to the rest of the customers. The two adventurers were a bit scared, though they did not take long to realise that there was nothing to fear. It did not take long for the men to start asking.

"Heyy ya oddity," one in a large, red handkerchief said, "what ya doin' here?" Sidus thought he both sounded and looked like a pirate, but he did not comment it. Another man, this one wearing a oversized blue shirt and a cap that seemed to cover his eyes, then looked closely at Sidus and Mirie. "You lookin' for something.. or someone?" he asked, "We'll help you for free."

Sidus and Mirie did not have any second thought about strange men saying they would help, and instantly said that they were looking for Finn Frenzy. The men's faces stiffened, and within moments they had gone back to their tables and started talking about something else. Sidus and Mirie's food arrived, and they could not see any other solution than simply start eating it. When they had finished they left, but as they went through the exit, a voice called them. The voice seemed strangely familiar, and they followed it. It was dark outside, and they were not able to clearly see the owner of the voice. They made it to a small house and went inside. A light was turned on, and the

voice revealed itself. It was Jonathan.

"How are you?" Jonathan asked. Mirie and Sidus thought that somehow revealing they knew him in the future was be a bad idea, and they did not.

"We're fine," they answered, not thinking too much.

"I heard you were talking about Finn Frenzy," Jonathan continued, "Do you have any business with him?"

"Well.. Eh.." Sidus had no idea to what he should say.

"We have to deliver a personal message to him!" Mirie then said. Jonathan seemed to accept that purpose, and he asked Sidus and Mirie to sit down.

"I will lead you to master Frenzy the first thing in the morning. But for now, you must sleep," he said. Mirie and Sidus nodded and went to sleep.

Sidus and Mirie had been woken by Jonathan as the sun was starting to rise. They hurried out of town and made it to a small hut located in the middle of nowhere. "This is here," Jonathan said. He turned around and left. Sidus and Mirie slowly walked towards the hut. They thought of what

to say when they met what they thought of as a "frenzy fellow", but they were unable to come up with something very clever. As they came closer to the hut, the main door seemed to be opening. An old man appeared from inside the hut and seemed to be waiting for the two adventurers. When Sidus and Mirie had reached the hut, he welcomed them. "I am Finn Frenzy. Welcome." he said in an almost solemn tone. Sidus and Mirie followed him into his hut and sat down by a table. Finn told them to wait a couple of minutes and then went into a room. While waiting, Mirie and Sidus thought about what they had seen. They had originally believed that Finn Frenzy was an insanely powerful and wise man, but when they looked at Finn, it seemed to them that he was simply an old, powerless man. Finn then reentered with a small, black object.

"This.." Finn started, "..is the Mass Uniter. This is what you're looking for, right?"

"It is!" Mirie shouted, "but how did you know that?"

Finn then turned away from Mirie and Sidus, leaving them to their own thoughts. "The world is in your hands. Don't waste the Mass Uniter on unnecessary things." Then he left. And then Sidus and Mirie left too.

Sidus and Mirie had decided to get something to eat before travelling forward in time. They weren't sure as to how the Mass Uniter was supposed to work, and they decided that they would try to merge themselves with a couple of random objects lying unconnected on the ground before travelling in time. But for now they were in need of food. And sleep. Outside it had already turned dark. They found somewhere to spend the night, and the next morning they were ready to leave. They then found three small rocks, placed them so they didn't touch them, and looked at the Mass Uniter. They noticed a button and clicked it. The moment they touched it, a great, green light erupted from it, and then a voice appeared out of nowhere. "Do not use me for simple rocks," it said, "do not waste the Mass Uniter!" And then it disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. Mirie and Sidus were surprised but decided they had to believe the strange voice. They then used the Chrono Changer to travel forward in time to the date when the cities started disappearing. They had earlier come to a conclusion that the disappearance must have started a three weeks or so before the city that Sidus and Mirie used to live in disappeared. After all, they had been the last to arrive at the small village.

With the date in mind, they held onto the Chrono Changer. Sidus and Mirie placed some of their blood in the small container on the Chrono Changer, and the usual blue light once again appeared, bringing the two to the future.

"Look!" Mirie had noticed a city in the distance. Mirie had always been good at geography, and she immediately recognised it. "Let's start with that one," she then said. With limited proviant the two wandered in the desert for hours, finally making

it to the city. They agreed to enter and examine the city before sending it to the future. On their way into the city, they noticed Maes and Asitera leaving the town. "Then we'll be going!", Maes said, leaving the entire population of the city to what would seem to be total destruction but was in fact nothing more than a tiny time travel. Mirie and Sidus decided to wait for about an hour or so before they made the city disappear. That way Maes and Asitera would not be able to see who did it but they would still notice it. Mirie and Sidus looked at each other. They were sure this was the best solution.

After having waited for about an hour, Sidus and Mirie positioned themselves about 100 metres away from the city. Sidus took the Mass Uniter out and clicked the button they had clicked earlier. The same voice as last time appeared.

"I see you've found quite a task for me!" the voice said, "But don't worry, I'll handle it." All of a sudden, the city was surrounded by a barrier covered in the colors of the rainbow. Sidus hurriedly took his Chrono Changer out and put a drop of his blood and a drop of Mirie's blood into the container. He and Mirie then thought of the date ten years from now. They believed that to be enough. The usual blue light appeared, sending both the city, Sidus and Mirie into the future.

The first city transfer had succeeded. Ten years into the future, Sidus, Mirie and the city stood as if nothing had happened. Both the surroundings and the weather was unchanged, leaving behind an impression that no time travel had ever taken place. "I guess we must do this with all the cities in this area. I'm glad we have a month to do it in!" Mirie said.

Sidus then looked away, starting to mumble. "Well, eh.. The truth is, we only have one day to do it. I miscalculated the date," he said quietly. He expected Mirie to become mad, but as he looked at her, it seemed as if she had suddenly got an idea. "Why not simply travel a day back in time whenever we're in need of that?" she said. Sidus immediately understood. When travelling back in time now, they would not travel back to a couple of seconds after they had gone to the future. Rather, they would travel back 10 years plus a couple of days. This way all the cities could disappear at the same time.

"The only problem with this plan," Sidus started, "is that our city was the last one to disappear. If we must make all cities disappear within a day, our city is going to disappear sooner than it really did. And then we're going to start our wandering earlier! That'll screw up the entire time-space continuum!"

Mirie looked thoughtful for a moment. Then she looked up at the sky. "We must poison ourselves," she said. Sidus looked stunned, but Mirie continued: "Nothing serious - it's just to make sure we'll sleep for another week. That way, we'll arrive at the time that we originally arrived at. I don't like the idea, but I don't see any other solution. Argh." Sidus nodded. It was indeed very necessary, though it was not something he looked forward to. There was however one thing that he was not able to find an answer to, and he said out loud: "How do we get sleeping pills that'll make us sleep for a week but not kill us? I mean, sleeping for a week means not drinking anything for a week and not eating anything for a week. That can easily result in what we know as death. And that's not very nice!"

Mirie spaced out for a while, looking into the endless desert. "I know.." she started, looking like she didn't feel very well, "a way."

Sidus looked at her, as she continued.

"A long time ago, a secret was passed down to me by my grandmother. She told me that -" Mirie hesitated, clearly doubting that she should tell Sidus the secret.

Nevertheless, after taking a deep breath, she started talking again: "- that a spell that can put people into a type of hibernation exists. I've never thought it to be true, but I suppose it's our only solution. My grandmother told me of a woman that used to live south of our city. Apparently she could do magic."

"MAGIC?!?" Sidus yelled. Sidus had never liked the occult. He simply did not believe in witches or the likes. He told that to Mirie, but she did not react. Instead, she kept

talking.

"She used to live just outside our city. If we travel, say, 20 years back in time, I'm sure we'll be able to find her. We'll make sure none of the people we know sees us." Sidus still clearly did not like it, but he nodded. He was able to do it. "Let's take care of the other cities before we handle our own, though. It'll be easier that way," Sidus said. Then they traveled 10 years and one day back in time and went to the next city engraved on Mirie's inner map.

They kept doing the cycle of travelling back and forth in time for a month or so. Though it did not take more than one day, timetravelling all the time was quite exhausting. Sidus and Mirie needed a break before they were to poison themselves. However, that was impossible, and they kept on wandering.

At last they were able to see their city in the distance. The sight of it brought back memories. Sidus and Mirie kept walking in spite of the nostalgia starting to kick in, and within an hour they were standing not far away from what used to be the city they lived in. It was however still not dark, and they were fully aware that they themselves were inside the city right now. They had to wait.

It was now dark. Sidus and Mirie had been calculating for some time now, and they had reached the conclusion that putting themselves to sleep tonight would keep the time cycle the way it was supposed to be. The poisoning was done in a matter of seconds. Sidus and Mirie -- the ones not poisoned -- then traveled back to the future, to right after the time in which they had first traveled back in time. They walked through desert and icy areas for a week, consuming all proviant. They barely made it. Back in the village, the inhabitants greeted the two time travelers. Sidus and Mirie were however very tired and went to sleep.

Sidus and Mirie had slept for a couple of days before they woke up. They then used a lot of time telling Jonathan, Asitera, Maes and the others about what had happened, before going to sleep once again. The next day Jonathan woke Sidus and Mirie. They sat down by a table, and what seemed would turn into a long talk was starting.

"So, how are you? Are you alright?" Jonathan started. Mirie and Sidus nodded, although they did not feel entirely well.

Jonathan then continued: "To us it seems that it was only a week since you left. But I'm sure you've spent much time travelling in time, right? Let me see the Chrono Changer."

Sidus handed over the Changer in disbelief.

"Hmhm.. Let's see - oh..!" Jonathan's facial expression suddenly stiffened.

"What's wrong?" Sidus asked.

Jonathan apparently tried to calm down. He was still shocked, but he kept on talking:

"This is.. serious. While you were away I found a couple of old books describing how the Chrono Changer works. I was surprised to find out that there is a well-preserved secret regarding the Changer. Apparently, one who travels in time is subject to forces unknown to man. Those forces are dangerous and can mean that one obtains mysterious powers. However, those powers have only been obtained if the Chrono Changer has a mark. That's what the book said. And the Changer -- it has the mark."

"A... mark?" Mirie was troubled.

"A mark, yes," Jonathan continued, "a mark that tells us that the distortion of time has increased to a level above the accepted. In other words, you have overused the Chrono Changer."

Jonathan then turned the Changer, making the mark visible to Sidus and Mirie. Sidus took a good look at it. It was the mark of a unicorn. And it seemed as if it was bleeding. "What does this mean?" Sidus asked, looking at the mark. Jonathan turned his back to Sidus and took a couple of steps.

"It's a curse."

Sidus and Mirie then fell, followed by the mumble of Jonathan: "It's the curse."