**Prologue**

*Do you want me to tell you how it all began?* The woman looked at the group of children sitting before her. *You must be too young to truly remember.* They stared back at her, excitedly thinking to one another about their good fortune, but not quite daring to respond. Finally, one boy about ten years of age worked up the courage.

*Yes, please tell!* He stared at her, examining her with his intense yellow eyes, and slowly the other children quieted down and did the same, waiting for her to mind-speak.

The “her” in question was a woman in her mid-thirties with long red hair and piercing green eyes. She wore a long white dress with little ornament except for a woven rope belt around her waist attached to a cotton bag tied with a string. She was moderately attractive, but otherwise unremarkable save for her unmistakable air of ‘otherness’. It was a difficult thing to describe or place – there was nothing obviously different about her. Perhaps it was the look in her eyes, or the way she held herself; whatever the case may have been, she was clearly of a different Earth. It was as though she had lived a thousand years, and seen into the heart of the universe itself. Perhaps she had.

The woman smiled at the children, and waited for the last of them to finish calming down before responding. *If you wish to hear the story of the fate-dawn, then that is the one that I will tell. It is a long story, however, and you must pay attention, for this is the story of how one world was destroyed, and a new one reborn amid the ashes. There are many versions of this story, and all of them carry varying measures of the truth, but this is the one that I trust the most, for it was written by someone who grew to be a dear friend – one of the fate-seeds themselves. These are the stories of the fate-seeds as collected by Manderin herself. The true rebirth occurred ten years ago, but to truly grasp the characters that created it, we must descend further into history, and delve into the lives of the fate-seeds.*

The children, listening attentively, were completely silent as, in that pristine meadow on that flawless summer day, the woman from another world began to tell its stories.

**Chapter One**

The world exploded. My universe, once a tiny little place made up of nothing more than an immense quartz crystal and a distant planet that had nothing to do with me, was destroyed. In an instant I felt fragments of crystal and bursts of energy fly in all directions before my awareness was swamped by an overwhelming feeling of *pain* that crossed every border. It was physical, emotional, mental – everything. And then it was gone. The world was gone. Everything was an endless sea of nothingness, punctuated by bright expanses of colour and light and feeling, crevasses in the vast expanse of the universe. Then, almost indiscernibly, a ripple passed through them. It left nothing in its wake but a subtle feeling of *wrongness* as though something was broken with the world that I could never repair or even understand, but was there nonetheless. And I was moving again, propelled by some immeasurable force toward one of the little multicoloured cracks, and then the world disappeared once more.

I was surrounded by *things*. I didn’t know what they were, exactly, but they were there. There were many *things*, and I wasn’t sure I was entirely comfortable with of them. For starters, there were too many colours, and too much light, and why oh why was there so much sound! The world was right in front of me, and I hated it. I instinctively shied away, searching for that which had always been there, that which was right. Where was the crystal? There was nothing around me except for this constant supply of *things* and I didn’t like it and I wanted to be home! And then I found it. The crystal was gone, perhaps forever, and yet I could still feel it. Puzzled, I reached for it, and when I found myself reaching inward I was puzzled even more. Was the crystal inside me?

I paused, startled into inaction, before gently probing again. I searched for the energy, seeking its familiarity, its powerful but somehow soft protection, and when I found it I was, once again, blown away. The crystal *was* inside me! But why? What had happened? I tried to remember the events that had led here, but my mind could only struggle to comprehend them. Everything had happened so quickly that I could make no sense of it. In my search to find an answer, my only option was to reach down inside myself for the crystal’s energies, and ask it what had happened. And so I did.

At once, I made contact. My mind was filled with the energy of the crystal, and I suddenly understood what had happened as the crystal transferred the knowledge to me. Before all of this, I had no sense of time. Everything just *was*. Now, however, I had a sense of history – my own history – and for the first time I learned my own story as the crystal showed me who I was and how I came to be here.