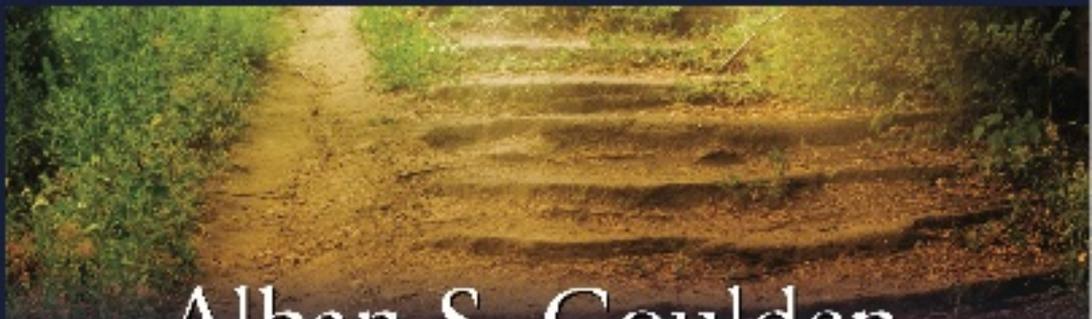


Book Two of The HOME Trilogy

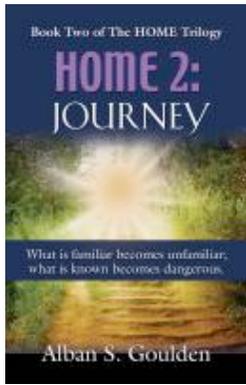
# HOME 2: JOURNEY



What is familiar becomes unfamiliar;  
what is known becomes dangerous.



Alban S. Goulden



*The first book of the HOME trilogy (HOME 1: Departure) traces Allera's emergence from an unchanging society to a gradual discovery of its previously-forbidden history. This second book of the trilogy (HOME 2: Journey) begins as the characters find themselves-now with little memory of their previous actions-on the brink of a changed yet still somehow vaguely familiar Whole World. A world in which they are once again thrown into a struggle for survival...*

## **HOME 2: Journey**

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# ***HOME 2: Journey***

**Alban S. Goulden**

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## CHAPTER 1: *Teran*

*A vast shape like a bloated whale descended from above, edging beyond the overhang of the roof. It whined in high-pitched anger.*

*Sharp explosions accompanied it. And panic. The inhabitants of the cave withdrew as far back into its depths as they could. Pieces of rock shattered around them; shards flew, some finding flesh.*

*The old man could not move quickly enough. He rose, tried to stagger backwards. But his body jerked—once, twice, three times—as if he were a puppet made to dance. He fell, his blood spattering the floor and walls.*

*One of the younger men threw himself over his body.*

*The cave mouth was darkened by shadows filling its entrance. A voice barked power and command: “Stay where you are!” The shadow that spoke turned to its companions. Sunlight from behind haloed them as the shadow waved an arm. “Secure them. Any injured, let ‘em bleed. We’ll medic on the way back. Move it!”*

*The shadows swarmed over them as the prisoners twitched in shock and pain.*

*The old man managed to gasp once, as the young man held his head. “The City...go....” His eyes faded; his breathing caught, stopped.*

*Gently lowering the man’s head, the young man felt rough hands abruptly slam into him from behind, hauling him to his feet.*

\*\*\*

Teran looked back at the mountains. Jagged peaks towered behind the bedraggled collection of people who picked their way towards the flatter lands beneath.

He wanted to explore those mountains. There was something about the mysterious valleys and summits that he needed to know: the way they receded into a haze that was more than distance...the *feel* of them fading into somewhere else. *But how can that be?* He

shook his head. Something wasn't right, but he couldn't resolve the idea more clearly.

A hawkre circled above him, crying mournfully to its mate. Gusts of wind carrying the heavy scent of jacmin swirled up from the valley floor to mix with cold air that drifted down from the upper mountains. At any other time it would have been exhilarating.

Below and far beyond was the vast stretch of Territory. At the edge of the foothills beneath them the Lost Lake began, creating a barrier to the hills to the west of it. On their left, the lake widened and became a vague mist to the south. To the right, it narrowed and a river entered at its far end. The river valley ran northwest, disappearing in the distance. Plains vanished into haze to the north.

But Teran did not feel exhilarated. He was tired; he knew the others were too.

No one had spoken much since they'd stood beneath the arch after he and Thia had opened it and they'd gazed once again upon Whole World. They were likely as confused and stunned as he was. At least they'd all been content to follow his lead and had agreed to descend the mountain. Somehow he knew the basics of the geography in which they found themselves. And he knew the identity and origin of each of his companions, although the details were extremely vague.

But the rest of his experience of what had happened in that room—and before it—had faded quickly. His mind simply turned away, and now he could not find the impetus to make himself try to remember.

Just before they'd begun the trek down the mountain, his mek companion had abruptly disappeared.

Before going, Thia had told him privately that she would meet him somewhere below. "*In a place called The City.*" He had a rough idea where that was, but just as he'd been about to ask her its exact location his attention had been distracted. When he'd looked back, she was gone.

Something told him he should be more disturbed by this than he was. The others, however, had paid no attention to her

inexplicable absence at all, as they seemed fully occupied in beginning the tricky descent.

After carefully picking their way through rocky scree, the group of tired stragglers had eventually come to a wide ledge just above the tree line.

Navigating amongst loose rock and scattered boulders had exhausted Zenn, the Territorial, an old man burdened by a long robe that he'd tried to wrap around himself. Teran could see he was near collapse. The others saw too: Marin and her handsome companion Capt. Amre; beside them the Durans Feran, and Abba; then Saren and Crag, Seth, and Kell. The latter all Allerans like himself. At least he remembered that much! He knew they'd been important people...before. He could even remember most of their titles. And that there was some great reason they were here together. But why they turned to look at him, seeking his lead, was a mystery. When he strained to remember, his head hurt. It was impossible to think further.

He motioned for them to halt, and as one, they threw down their packs and sat. Zenn stopped, glancing back in bewilderment. Kell immediately got up and helped him to a flat rock where he sank with a groan. Crag, meanwhile, had taken off Seth's pack as the young Appren dropped wordlessly to the ground.

Teran seated himself apart from the others.

After making certain that Zenn was comfortable, Kell approached Teran hesitantly. She seated herself beside him, watching as he threw small rocks beyond the ledge.

Finally she said, "You trying to wake up the wildlife?"

He turned to her. "How much do you remember?"

She sighed. "Not much. I was going to ask you the same question."

"The important thing is that you *feel* as if you have forgotten a lot, right?"

She nodded.

"Does it bother you? That you can't remember?"

She shrugged. “No. Actually it doesn’t. I mean I know who they are.” She gestured to the others. “I know all of them except the man with Marin.”

“Him? He’s Captain Amre. She went to Sundara with him on his ship. The...Kestrl, yes. And,” he smiled at her, “I know who you are.” He looked straight at her. “But you claim you know who I am?”

She looked bewildered. “Of course! Everyone knows you’re Teran auKor, the High Tek of Allera.”

“You’re sure.”

“Yes!”

“And you?”

“Me. Why I’m....”

Teran watched her screw up her face in that familiar way. *I find her attractive, but there’s something more: some deep connection between us.*

“I’m not sure,” she said, shrugging. “It will come back to me. It just doesn’t seem that important now.”

“Must be the same with the others,” he muttered. “But I can tell you that you are the Captain of Cadres of all Allera.”

Before Kell could demand that he explain, an explosion of sound rushed down the mountain. They looked up. Dark clouds had rolled in to obscure the upper peaks and valleys; this roiling mass was spreading over them and out towards the plain, obscuring the sun. Lightning flashed, and the thunder grew closer, more frequent. It seemed to shake the ground.

“We’d better get some shelter,” Teran yelled to the rest, pointing towards the trees below.

They scrambled, Amre helping Zenn this time.

Carefully, because of the dangerous footing, Feran, who had taken the lead, found them a path around the ledge and down beneath it, right to the edge of the trees.

They found a small cave under a ledge. Abba, Saren, and Crag gathered firewood that Teran lit with the flint from his pack just as the first raindrops began to fall. Lightning and thunder shook the air but soon faded away as the rain became a steady downpour.

After munching on ochram cakes from their packs and gulping down rainwater they caught in their cupped hands, they huddled together beside the fire. It spit at them, the pitch in the wood giving off black smoke. Fortunately, there was a draft from the back of the cave, and the thick smoke was pushed out into the rain.

Amre broke the silence, laughing. "I can't even remember clearly who I am let alone imagine where we go from here."

"You are right, stranger," Abba barked. "I am not sure where we are, why we are here, or who I am. Not much is clear in my head."

"I'm scared," Seth whispered.

"You're honest, Appren," Crag reassured him.

"What is difficult is that we seem to know a little about each other, but virtually nothing about ourselves," said Teran.

"I don't think that matters much, High Tek," Saren offered. "I have this strong sense that Whole World has changed. I remember bits and pieces, certain places such as Allera, Lost Lake—"

The rest nodded, some with more conviction than others.

"—but," she continued, "I know there was much more. Yet it doesn't feel to me that even if I could remember everything it would do much good. I don't think this is the same Whole World we used to live in."

"I feel it too," Kell said.

Once again, the others nodded.

Something had happened when Saren spoke. Teran saw that her 'confession' had created an unspoken affinity in the group: they looked more directly at each other and words came more freely.

"Wasn't there somebody else? Are we the only—?"

"—it's like a dream."

"My mind. It's changed—"

"Who did this?"

"What did they do? How?"

"Why?"

Crag's deep voice carried over the rest. He pointed at Teran, Kell, and Marin. "I know you. I feel I've known you a long time." He turned and looked at first Seth, then Saren. "But you and you

are much more familiar.” He shook his head. “We were...we are....”

“Part of something together,” Saren said.

“I can at least tell some of you who you are,” Teran said quietly. When he told Saren and Crag, the latter muttered, “Pak Viper. It is familiar, but....”

Abba scowled as Kell offered, “You are from Duras. You were leaders of Pak Wolfe.”

“Duras.” Feran shook his head in perplexity. “Where does your knowledge come from?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “There are just bits and pieces.” She shrugged. “Perhaps if we’re patient, more will come back to us later.”

Silence again. Rainwater poured off the overhang at the front of the cave.

Teran stood, walked to the entrance, and looked beyond it. Through a liquid curtain, he saw blue sky to the west. The storm would soon be over. *Then what? Someone has to lead this group with a specific purpose and goal.* He felt it should be him. He wasn’t sure what the rest would think of that although they had already tacitly acknowledged his authority. He knew his motive wasn’t ambition, yet he felt impelled to make decisions. *To go somewhere. Find out something. Something very important. It seems...right. Decide what, though? Go where?*

“Komp be damned!”

Teran swiveled. The others looked up, instant recognition of these words in their faces.

Feran stood, anger stamped on his face. He said it again, “Komp be damned to the Womb of Uncertainty!”

This strangely familiar phrase got them all to their feet except for Zenn, who was too tired to move.

“Komp!” Saren repeated. “That’s it! Something about Komp! What is it? Who is it?”

There was a flurry of discussion, but eventually the initial excitement died: no one could remember. They slumped once again to the rock floor.

The rain drifted away, back to the mountains. A mournful wind picked up, moving across the tops of the jacmin as late afternoon sunlight began to filter through the campfire smoke that was now pushing inside the cave.

Something outside caught Teran's eye, something in the air, lower down, above the forest as it sloped to the uneven land below. He stood slowly and walked towards the cave entrance. Feran, Abba, Kell, Amre, and Crag followed. Marin and Seth had fallen asleep. Zenn watched, but again didn't respond.

They studied the shape. It was an oblong bladder that floated, yet it also moved forward. Soon it would pass beyond their sight behind the intervening jacmin trees.

"What is it?" Crag pointed.

"Some kind of bird?"

"No. Too big."

"Look! There's a...carriage or platform attached beneath it!"

"Komp, I may not remember much, but I do know I've never seen anything like that before."

"Me neither."

It passed beyond their sight. Teran decided this was the opportunity he needed. "Look. We can't stay here. There's no food once we run out of what's in our packs."

"I agree," said Crag. "But we can't just wander around out there, not really knowing who we are and why we're here."

"We should go back up the mountain," Feran growled. "Really look around up there. We got into that room somehow. There has to be a clue. Find it and we can trace our tracks backwards."

Kell inclined her head towards the interior of the cave: "The old man, Zenn, could never make it. He's about finished."

Abba spat. "Too bad. I say we keep going. Get him to the nearest town—if there is such a thing—and leave him."

"There have to be people out there," Teran said. "That thing we saw in the air proves it. We just can't just leave him. We have to be careful."

"Why?" Feran pulled out his short sword and brandished it.

“Because,” Saren said, quietly but firmly, “we don’t know our bearings. We’re like somebody who’s been blindfold, then taken somewhere and finally allowed to see. We don’t *know* enough yet.”

“She’s right,” Crag added. “We can’t go down to the plain and start throwing our weight around. We have no idea what’s waiting for us.” He looked away at the thinning clouds. “I’m not sure why, but I think I was less cautious in my life...before.”

“Simple. It’s fear,” Feran said. “You’re afraid. Admit it.”

“I *am* a little afraid. Not of why we’re here. Like the rest of you, that somehow doesn’t bother me—although Komp knows maybe it should. But I’m prepared to accept that there’s a reason for whatever has happened. I still think we have to understand that, like Saren said, this isn’t the place we were in before. This—” he waved his arm over the lowland below them—“is someplace new.”

“Maybe that’s it,” said Kell.

“What?” Teran asked her.

“I don’t know. Just a thought.”

“If you know something, tell us. We’re not exactly overwhelmed with information.”

“Well...,” she said, hesitantly, “it’s more a feeling than an idea.”

Amre had been silent, listening and watching. Now he spoke: “You strike me as someone whose ideas and feelings we should pay attention to.” He flashed her a disarming smile. Then he shrugged. “As for me...I don’t feel I’m in the right place. That bit of water down there. What did you call it? Lost Lake? Now, that’s what I’d like to get to. We could find some kind of boat. Build one, even. Get out on the lake and see where it takes us.”

From behind them a voice said, “I like that idea.” It was Marin. She joined the group, yawned, and stood beside Amre. “Although I don’t know if I trust the person who said it.” Her eyes sparkled. She put her arm through his.

Amre laughed and shook his head.

Clearly disgusted, Abba said, “We should split up. Whoever wants to go with him,” she flicked her hand at Amre, “on that...water...can do so. Those who are ready to put up a fight if

need be should find out where that thing in the sky came from. It has to have a roost somewhere nearby. Might be a town or a city.”

Feran gestured with his sword. “I am with you.”

“Wait,” said Saren. “I want to hear her idea.” She pointed at Kell.

“I am starting to remember Allera,” Kell said.

“Me too,” Crag breathed.

“But it’s vague to me. I can’t remember specific things. Some of us came from there. Those in Pak Viper. I know I did. Although I find it hard to believe what you tell me, that I am...was the Captain of Cadres of all Allera. Anyway. I’m absolutely sure Allera’s somewhere out west, far beyond those hills on the other side of the lake.” She pointed towards the sunlit tree-covered slopes on the horizon. “I think our old world changed, for a reason I can’t imagine right now. But we’re here to find out something. Then to do something, something very important.”

Teran shivered. *My thoughts!*

“I don’t think this is a completely new world,” Kell continued, “but Crag and Saren are right. It’s not the old one either. We need to find out why. We need to go to Allera. Or at least I do.”

There was silence as they thought this over.

A voice croaked from within the cave, behind them. “Territory is the key. We should go to Territory. Below. To The City.”

They turned. “What city, old man?” Feran barked. “You have been dreaming.”

Zenn shook his head. Seth was awake now too. His eyes wide as he listened to the adults argue.

“No,” Zenn said, gathering his robe around him. “I am not dreaming. I am remembering. The City. It’s on the Lost Lake. Down there. Not far. Get me there, and I will uncover the truth. I am...known there.”

Abba sneered. “You don’t even know who *you* are.” She turned back to the group, slapped the sword at her side. “Somehow I now know that Feran and I must return to Duras. That is *our* key. We must reunite with Pak Wolfe and lead them to victory!”

Feran smiled at her. Moved to her side.

Teran looked away. The sun had come out. It was not hot, but it was warm. Flecks and wisps of mist drifted by; faint streams of cloud rose from the forest. A golden light seemed to envelope the lake and the hills beyond. It pulsed. For a moment he imagined that something was behind that light. Something alive...he closed his eyes. When he opened them, the golden light was still there. But it was only beautiful, ordinary.

Teran turned back to the group. "It sounds like we've agreed to disagree. We have different paths. I counsel sticking together, at least until we find out if Zenn's city exists. We have to descend to the land below anyway. We can be cautious—" he nodded at Crag, "but we can actively seek the truth." He looked at Kell, Abba, and Feran. "When we see what is on the shores of the Lost Lake, we can then either follow Zenn's lead, or we can decide to go our separate ways, whether to Duras or Allera. Or find some kind of watercraft and take the lake south." He looked at Amre.

The others nodded.

Saren asked, "Start now or in the morning?"

But the decision was not theirs to make.

A vast shape like a bloated whale descended from above, edging beyond the overhang of the roof. It whined in high-pitched anger.

Sharp explosions accompanied it. And panic.

## CHAPTER 2: *Teran*

In the shock following the attack, as Teran was roughly hauled upright, a memory flooded into his brain: the Hegemon Han. The room in the mountains.

And Thia.

The name triggered her face—and her voice!

*‘Don’t draw any attention to yourself. And don’t answer me out loud. Think what you want to say. Use only your thoughts.’*

*I don’t know what’s happening!* He watched as the others, in shock, some bleeding, were quickly tied, their mouths taped.

“Primitives,” a voice said contemptuously. It came from a muscled male standing back near one wall of the cave. He was wearing a tight battle uniform made of some shiny material. It gleamed even though he was standing in the shadows outside the bright sunlight that was now streaming into the cave.

“Look, Commander,” said one of the other uniformed men. “They only got swords.”

“Yeah,” growled another. “And pretty lousy ones at that.” He leaned down and pulled Abba’s free, examining it. She growled beneath the tape over her mouth, eyes glaring. He casually drew back his boot and kicked her in the head, which snapped back and she was still. Teran gasped. Feran twisted his body and thrashed his legs, trying to get free. This brought another casual kick, and then he too lay unmoving.

The blood surged in Teran.

*‘Don’t!’* hissed the voice in his mind. *‘Wait!’*

He held himself, checking both Abba and Feran. Yes, thank Komp, they were still breathing.

The man holding him from behind let go and walked towards his comrades, perhaps anticipating more resistance from the other prisoners.

Thia said. *‘Remember the Shrine in the White Waste. Remember your fight with Kav enGor in the valley of the Chera. Find what you found then, within you. I will help.’*

Somehow Teran remembered. And felt that same emotional and physical connection with her. Energy welled up inside. Power surged; a fierceness pushed him to act even as he was wary of it.

*‘Listen to me now. You must go to The City. Don’t hesitate. You know what to do.’*

And he knew that he did.

In an action that amazed him even as he watched himself do it, Teran reached out with what was inside and twisted the shape of the air. Without anyone noticing, he slipped sideways between the flows of light and, invisible to the others, brought himself outside, just beyond the entrance to the cave.

He looked around. A breeze drifted through the tops of the trees. Fresh air after the storm assailed his nostrils, and he took deep gulps, slowing his heart, calming his mind. A flock of sparrows flitting towards him were swept up on some air current above the cave entrance, abruptly gone. Hanging in the sky and back from the ledge above the cave was the huge bloated bladder Teran had seen earlier. A rope ladder descended from the cabin that hung beneath it; the ladder was anchored to the rocks on the ledge. The air ship wavered gently in the air, tugging against its anchor.

The world looked almost normal, yet the ‘feel’ of it was not. He could sense powerful, invisible currents of energy webbed throughout the vast space around him: sky, trees, mountains, land, lake. He knew that, if he wished it, he could reach them, ‘touch’ and mold them with whatever was inside him that made this work. He also knew that doing so would cause unknown changes. And he would wake a force that he was not yet ready to encounter.

So he retreated, holding just enough energy to remain between the light.

“Damn!” He heard someone say from within the cave. It sounded like the voice of the Commander. “Where in Komp’s name did the other one go?”

“Sir?”

“The other one. The one you were watching!”

“I—he was here just a second ago. Right where I left him.” A man in uniform emerged from the cave’s entrance and looked wildly around before dashing back inside.

“I swear, Commander. He was right there. He couldn’t have got outta here, sir!”

“Cadre Sig.” The Commander’s voice was ice. “Take Nar and sweep the area. On second thought, no. Leave Nar. You can do it on your own. We need as many cadres as possible to watch here. And no more mistakes. The City’s going to be interested in these specimens! Now move!”

Sig emerged from the cave and moved quickly away towards the trees. But as soon as he got near them, he looked back. Seeing no one watching him, he made a desultory attempt to track where Teran might have gone. At the edge of the first jacmin, he unshouldered the weapon he was carrying and waved it at nothing in particular, walking half-heartedly back and forth, facing the forest.

Soon the rest of the uniformed men carried their bound prisoners outside the cave and laid them on the ground. A cadre signaled to the airship while another climbed to the ledge above the roof of the cave and unhooked the ladder from the rocks. He then stepped onto the first rung and rode the bottom of the ladder as the airship moved slowly forward, the device that powered it emitting the high-pitched whine Teran had heard before.

When the airship was above the prisoners, a long rectangular basket was lowered to the ground. Saren and Seth were loaded into it, and the basket rose laboriously to the ship, where it disappeared inside the cabin. This process was then repeated for the next two prisoners, Kell and Crag, and then the others. Some had blood on them, but Teran could not be sure how seriously they were hurt.

He realized he had to do something unless he wanted to be left behind.

The cadre had obviously decided that his task was hopeless. He poked a bush here and there with his weapon. Teran knew he would have the element of surprise on his side, but Sig was well-

muscled, like the rest of the crew. *What am I supposed to do with him?*

Teran had momentarily forgotten about Thia until he heard, *'Look at his pattern. You must become it. You've got to get on that ship.'*

He looked. And looked again, in that sideways manner in which he moved through the spaces between things. He saw the energy converging in the cadre's shape, in the place the man took within the forces around him. And Teran understood. He had to occupy that pattern. Not displace it, but insinuate this power that he shared with Thia so that Sig's control of it would be blocked. In effect, he would become the image of the cadre to the outside world. But he would also have to keep his own body invisible.

*'It won't hurt him,'* Thia quickly answered his unspoken thought. *'He won't know it's happening. The next moment for him will be when you leave him.'*

Without thinking he did it. And gasped. Abruptly he was looking out of the eyes of someone else. At the same time Teran knew Sig had been frozen in awareness. *I can do whatever I want with him. I could kill him.*

*'Yes. You could. Is that what you want to do?'*

Teran did not bother to answer.

"Hey, Sig!" Someone yelled down from beneath the airship. "You coming? We're gone unless you get up here quick!"

"Be right there!" Teran yelled back, using Sig's voice. He seemed to be in two places at once; he could feel his own body as solidly as if he were still in it. Yet the same was true for Sig's. *No time to worry how weird this is.*

He climbed up and reached the basket just as it returned, threw in Sig's weapon—*'It is a gun,' Thia said. 'A weapon. No time to explain.'*—and the visible Sig and the invisible Teran jumped in. Soon they were being raised up and Teran began to sense what being in a craft that traveled through the air was like. It was not a pleasant sensation, and he could allow himself only a glimpse of the lake in the distance as they rose. Mostly, he kept his eyes on the bottom of the basket.

“What’s the matter, Siggie?” a young round-faced soldier laughed as he pulled the basket in beyond the opening in the floor of the airship. “You look a little airsick. Never seen you go green before.”

While he arranged both his ‘selves’ along the side of the wall where the other cadres were, Teran looked away and muttered, “Not feeling so good. Wish I’d caught that prisoner we lost.”

“You mean, *you* lost,” the Commander said from down the line. “Now cut the talk and keep an eye on these.” He pointed to the captives languishing on the floor.

At first, Teran could not look at them, afraid his comrades would recognize him. *But that makes no sense!* And of course they didn’t. He could see mostly superficial wounds, probably caused by chips of rock that had dislodged and ricocheted off the cave wall when the mysterious weapons had been fired. Except for Abba and Feran.

The airship began to make a noise that drowned out any possibility of conversation. Teran looked through the hole in the floor as it was being closed by two of the cadres. He could see trees beneath them moving backwards, and he felt the ship shudder as the forest moved faster and faster. Soon the door was closed and they were trapped inside a painfully whining, nearly dark enclosure.

*I’ll just have to wait. Be patient. Something will suggest itself. Thia?* Nothing. He waited a moment but still could not contact her, even sense her. She was gone again. He also tried Han and Kriya in the wild hope that they might help, but it was as if they had vanished from the world. *Great.*

A powerful fatigue dragged at him; he was so tired his legs almost buckled. It was all he could do to maintain control. *Using this power drains everything out of me. I’ll have to be careful, resort to it only when I have to.* Fortunately, at that moment the Commander hand-signaled to the cadres through the now gloomy interior, motioning for them to sit down, backs up against the sides of the ship. Teran tried not to sigh as he slid Sig and his invisible self down to the floor.

He was abruptly nudged hard in the ribs, and he turned to see the round-faced cadre grinning at him. He managed a weak smile and a shrug of his shoulders. *Got to watch that one when we get wherever we're going.* Teran leaned back, closed his eyes, and tried to think about what had happened.

He remembered the room in the mountains far above—*How long ago?*—but the memory was a haze. He'd received some kind of message from Han or Kriya—or both? It was confusing. Then he'd been in another room with the companions, some of whom he knew well but about whom he could not recall extensive information. Kell and Crag. But Saren and Marin also. They had a long history together, complex associations.... He squeezed his fists tight, trying to remember. Feran and Abba he recognized as somewhat antagonistic. Yet he had been together with them on some kind of mission. Then there was the old man he had cradled in his last moments after the attack. Zenn was it? *But what about Han and Kriya? Those two are the key to all this. I know it. They explained many things in that room. But I can remember almost none of it!*

The old man had said they needed to get to The City. Hopefully, that's where the ship was taking them. But he did not have a good feeling about that. Surely they would be imprisoned. Maybe tortured. *The Commander called us something strange. 'Primitives.'* It was a word unknown in Allera. *Ah. Allera! My home. Where I was...I....* As he felt he was about to grasp some clear fact about being High Tek, it vanished. He stifled an inward groan before his curious companion could notice.

Teran drifted off then, making sure, however, that at some edge of awareness he was still in control of Sig's body. He dreamt of a huge wall of ice, blinding lights, an unspeakable force pulling him somewhere, a vast ocean, a huge map of something his mind told him was Whole World, a woman but not a woman, her dark hair falling across his face and chest, her tongue hot and wet...all merging, fading into a blank wall of haze beyond mountains, beyond jungle, beyond an island in the center of which was a huge volcano....

An uncomfortable time later, he felt rather than heard the ship's whine begin to drop in vibration. His eyes opened. Around him, cadres were picking up their weapons and stumbling to their feet to stand at loose attention. Teran made himself and Sig do the same although his muscles were sore and he was still extremely tired. The nose of the airship tilted slightly downwards but then leveled off, and the ship settled. The whine ceased.

Everything began to happen at once. Two cadres pulled back the covering of the opening in the floor. It revealed that a temporary stairway had been attached to the airship so it would be possible to descend from it. Meanwhile, the Commander was shouting orders and the prisoners were pulled to their feet and hauled towards the opening, then down out of the airship. Other cadres were gathering supplies stashed at the back. Teran hastened to have Sig help unload the supply packs, almost stumbling on the stairs in his haste to get outside and see where his companions were being taken.

By the time he was on the ground, he saw the last of them, Feran and Abba, being shoved through a doorway into a building off to the side. Both were resisting and growling at their captors—seeming to have recovered from the kicks to the head—but they were finally herded within it. Teran/Sig started towards this doorway, only to have the Commander yell at him to follow the other cadres and haul the supply pack he was carrying to another entrance to the building. Sig stumbled, changed direction. The Commander frowned at Sig, clearly puzzled by his behavior.

*Komp! How am I supposed to get to where they are?* Then he had an idea. Once he was in the supply room and had dumped his pack, he motioned to one of the cadres farther back near the entrance that he needed to use the sanitary facility, pointing towards a door leading out of the supply room and likely further into the building. He had no idea what such a facility would look like in this place or even if there was one on the other side of the door, but he was lucky. His companion nodded, pointing to himself and then back to the Commander still outside. Hopefully, that meant he would tell him of Sig's temporary absence.

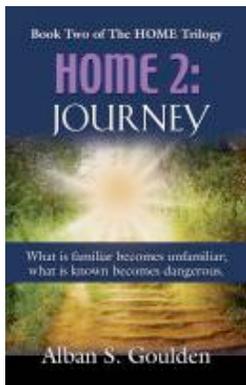
Teran didn't think further: he headed straight for the door and was soon on the other side, finding himself in a huge area that was filled with giant boxes, metal pieces of some kind, and other mysterious objects. Thankfully, however, this place seemed to be empty of others. Waiting a moment, he then partially opened the door he'd just come through and stepped back into the other room. He 'released' Sig—for a moment fearful that he would not be able to without Thia's help, but he had no problem—then quickly stepped back into the second room and closed the door. He took a deep breath, finding himself physically intact on the right side of the door. He could imagine what Sig must be thinking on the other side, abruptly transferred from the forest into the supply room in what would seem the blink of an eye. And what the Commander would have to say to him.

Sure enough he heard a yell from the supply room, then the sound of someone running towards the door leading to the outside of the building.

Teran wasted no time in moving to the far side of the huge area, putting boxes and metal pieces between himself and the entrance through which he'd come. He could see that a very wide door was open at this far end and cautiously moved to it. But just as he got there, he began to stumble. Dizziness washed over him, and he gasped for air. *I'm so tired. So tired. Have to sit.* Incredible weakness took him as he managed to stumble into an alcove between several boxes. *Need rest....*

He collapsed on the floor, his head reeling. *...just for a minute.* He closed his eyes, trying to steady his breathing, to make the world stop wavering around him.

Gradually, his body calmed and he sank into exhausted, dreamless sleep.



*The first book of the HOME trilogy (HOME 1: Departure) traces Allera's emergence from an unchanging society to a gradual discovery of its previously-forbidden history. This second book of the trilogy (HOME 2: Journey) begins as the characters find themselves-now with little memory of their previous actions-on the brink of a changed yet still somehow vaguely familiar Whole World. A world in which they are once again thrown into a struggle for survival...*

## **HOME 2: Journey**

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