

# Forces

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M.J. Scott

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# THE DEVOLVERS

M.J. Scott

**It was just past noon** when Steve took a bite into his microwavable burrito. It would be the final time he would suffer the disappointment of a zapped lunch. The edges of the tortilla were, as usual, hard and nearly impossible to chew through. “Damn, I let it sit too long after heating,” he said. Ginger had hardly eaten any of her peanut butter and jelly sandwich; she just sat quietly and examined the tiny holes in the surface of the bread. “Do you find it strange that the technology of a microwave is fairly new but the process of making bread has been around since before the pyramids?” she asked.

“No, but I do find it strange that the pyramids are more than five thousand years old, and we were never able to definitively determine how they were built,” Steve replied.

“Seriously, Steve? Water was the key to construction. Much of the region was flooded during that period, and the Egyptians designed pulley systems to use the weight and distribution of water. Do I really need to explain this again?” she snapped in reply.

Tension had been mounting for weeks leading up to this day. They were the last two scientists. The last man and woman. The last of the first evolvers. The meals they were eating would be their last as modern humans. Soon they would take the last of the De-Codex pills, and life as they understood it would become no longer understood. Just as the rest of the human race had already descended back into the earliest version of bipedalism, so too would Steve and Ginger.

“I’m sorry. That was rude of me,” she said.

“It’s okay. Honestly, that is the most rational and logical answer. I’m just glad the last debate of mankind was settled by a woman,” said Steve. Ginger chuckled. “It doesn’t really count if there’s no record of it,” she said.

“I had a feeling you’d say that,” said Steve with a playful grin. He grabbed his burrito and charged back over to the microwave and threw it in. There was a loud thud, a definitive slam, and four beeps. Steve had set the timer for thirty minutes. Ginger sat confused, but intrigued. This was the most spontaneity she had witnessed since the devolution process began. Steve pointed over at her sandwich. “Are you done with that?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Good, follow me. I’ve got a surprise for you,” he said. They left the laboratory and headed for the cart garage. Ginger was almost disappointed that he didn’t perform an act of aggression on her sandwich, but her mind had wondered on to what the surprise may be. Fireworks, she thought. This was a celebration of sorts after all; the last surprise of modern man. But, it was mid-day, and fireworks are far less exciting in the daytime, she thought. Reality began to dampen her excitement because there were no other people to come flying out of nowhere with gifts or cheers. He probably learned to tap dance and sing, she

thought. Suddenly the excitement dissipated. The truth was, Steve could have trained a pink poodle to howl Streisand’s *The Way We Were* and it would have done little to offset the feeling of despair that Ginger was feeling.

They took a cart ride through an underground tunnel that Ginger had never been given clearance for in twenty years as a scientist for De-Codex Labs. It was apparent that Steve knew his way around. He pointed down to the other existing tunnels that branched from the main breezeway and gave reference to classified information.

“Down there is where we successfully zombified a sloth. It was part of a back-up plan if the devolution code couldn’t be figured out,” he said.

“Why a sloth?” she asked.

“Safety precaution,” he said.

At the end of the corridor was an iron door that opened vertically. Light spilled in through the bottom and heavy floral scents bellowed in with it. “It smells like an arboretum,” said Ginger. The door opened completely to a grand garden that was green and speckled with every color imaginable. Trees, plants, and flowers from every exotic corner of the planet seemed to be within sight. Insects of all kinds buzzed, swarmed, and fluttered in the midday sun. Ginger was in awe, but the garden wasn’t the surprise. Steve drove

through a short winding trail and explained that the garden was the key to success of De-Codex Labs, and that it had to remain in pristine condition. Only necessary personnel were allowed; until today. The trail came to a massive sandstone boulder with an inscription. It read, "THE WOMAN IS ALWAYS RIGHT." Ginger stood from the cart and laughed at the gesture.

"I chiseled it in this morning. I figure at some point humankind will re-evolve and this should be the message they find," he said.

"Steve, that is the sweetest thing. It really gives me hope for the future," she said.

"I just thought that if we are going to take these pills and revert back to the stone age then I could at least lighten the mood first," he said.

From his lab coat Steve pulled out a vial containing two red pills and handed one to Ginger. Her eyes welled up with tears. This was the last time they would see each other in this way. She had been trained to contain her emotions in this moment, but the moment was too real and overwhelming. Steve took the pill without hesitating. Waiting, he thought, was pointless.

"Ginger, you won't be alone. We'll be different, but we'll be here together," he said. The words gave Ginger some comfort as she closed her eyes and swallowed the pill. The two

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**The Dumbbell Nebula** • Bill Ponder

embraced and she began to cry on his shoulder, but the moment was cut short with disbelief.

First it was the sound of a cart horn and laughter echoing from the tunnel. Then there was the sound of dirt and gravel under turning tires closing in on their location. Two men with sparkling gold wavy hair and matching eyebrows, and wearing olive green jumpsuits, were driving towards Steve and Ginger in a De-Codex Labs cart. The driver held a sledgehammer in his free hand, and the passenger held a contraption that looked a lot like binoculars.

“There they are, Malcom,” said the passenger.

“We made it just in time, Marcus,” said the driver.

The cart came to a halt and the men stepped out and began to walk toward them. Steve and Ginger stood without speaking. The strangeness of the two men was almost too much to process. They wore neon blue boots that lit up with each step they took. Their eyes were solid black pearls—like there was nothing but void in their sockets. Their skin was milky white and flawless.

“Steve and Ginger, I presume?” asked Malcom.

“We are the Oron brothers from the year 80 Z 5,” said Marcus.

Steve and Ginger were paralyzed with confusion. The brothers looked at each other with concern over their dormancy. Malcom placed the head of his sledge hammer on the ground with the handle at his hip and then snapped his fingers at Steve and Ginger. “Do you understand?” he asked. Ginger snapped from her blankness and replied. “Yes, but ...” she started.

“Don’t concern yourself with the buts and whys. We have no time to explain everything. Just know that we are here from the fourth re-evolution age. You—the first evolvers that is, set in motion the events that would define and then redefine humanity over. We come from the ninth planet of Elitist, also known as Elitist 9. Devolution has proven to be effective in separating the elite from the undesirable. For that, we are grateful,” said Marcus.

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“Ninth planet? Are you telling me that eight other planets have been discovered as habitable?” asked Ginger.

“Yes, but the previous eight have been depleted of the resources for sustaining life. Including this one. Only the elite inhabit the ninth. Hence the name Elitist 9,” said Malcom.

Ginger felt her face muscles tense, and her forehead began throbbing. She felt like falling into Steve’s arms, but his arms were limp and he was standing in a slump. His forehead and brows had already begun to protrude and shade his cheeks from the sun. Ginger had begun to involuntarily slump in the same way as Steve. She tried to speak one last time, but all she could muster was a grunt. Marcus giggled fiendishly and mocked the apish expressions that now dawned on Steve and Ginger.

“Let’s hurry Malcom. I want to get a selfie with the last two idiots on earth while they still look half-human,” said Marcus.

“Fine, but make it quick. I want to shatter this boulder before the idiots start mating,” said Malcom.

“Remember now, we agreed on taking turns in breaking this monument into rubble,” said Marcus.

After posing next to modern Earth’s last scientists with expressions of disgust the Oron brothers hammered away in turn with the sledgehammer and broke away, letter by letter, Steve’s last gift to Ginger. It would be now as if it never existed.

“That was a long time coming, brother,” said Marcus.

“That will teach mother to dress us how she sees fit,” said Malcom.

“Indeed—this will change everything,” said Marcus.



**Drive End** • Debra St. John