

# **The Mists of BS3**

**By**

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## Chapter 1 - A Building in the Mist

It was a fine day on BS3. The sun was weakly shining through the mist and the sky could be perceived as a faint blue. The unusually bright light brought out the pastel shades of the beautiful garden which could be made out all around with some careful scrutiny. A well manicured lawn speckled with dew drops bordered a meticulously kept gravel path. It was carefully raked absolutely level and there was not an impudent weed in sight. Away from the path and deeper into the garden the grass grew deeper and more lush and evidently held considerable moisture. Back further, but following the path was a range of increasingly tall shrubs each bearing delicate clusters of small beautiful flowers. On the closer bushes some detail of the individual flowers could be made out but as the gaze of the eye moved further off, the image was as if it were an impressionist water colour with blurs of predominant greens merging with pale reds, pinks, blues and mauves. All of this vegetation was covered by a myriad of small droplets of moisture as though the whole garden had been covered with a sparkling fairy dust.

Given how extraordinarily fine a day it was on BS3 it was actually possible to discern grey shapes in the mist up to thirty to forty feet way and, as the mist swirled slowly in the soft wind, the shapes slowly transformed and kept the visitor to the garden guessing as the nature of the objects which lent their transient forms to the ever changing imagery of the garden. As the warm wind momentarily gathered in strength, a bird hovered somewhere over head, a light grey blur being occasionally observable above, before its form slowly merged into the drifting foggy cloud. The continuing presence of the bird was confirmed by the its repeated calls which punctuated the otherwise quiet and peaceful surroundings.

It was certainly a beautiful scene on an especially fine day for BS3 with the star, around which the planet orbited, shining unusually brightly. The rays of light emanating from the star caused a comforting, warm sensation on the skin. Hereabouts the foggy cloud

was so high that even when leaping into the air with the arm stretched fully out, the hand would not have touched the cloud and would not have been even partially obscured. It was amazing. Given the quality of the light and the relative remoteness of the cloud, the fog formed a welkin of pearlescent pale blue which surrounded the scene as though the place were a miniature in a glass dome or within a small bottle of tinted glass. The impression was of a place detached, separated and cosseted from any surroundings that the logical rather than physical senses insisted existed beyond the purview of the visual and auditory capacities presently available to anyone who currently stood in that spot.

Standing in the middle of this scene was an old fashioned house which unusually for BS3 stood apart and significantly separated from any other building or signs of habitation. The house was reasonably substantial, if not too large for its surroundings. It was built of a red brick and had a dark grey slate roof. Only just discernible, a series of ornate chimneys stretched out tall and straight from several points on the rooftop. On the frontage visible from this angle, regular windows were surrounded on each side by blue shutters. Imitating the manicured gardens, the house had clearly been well maintained and there were no signs of disrepair. With its grand front entrance placed in the middle of the ground floor, the house provided an image of symmetrical stately beauty and orderly perfection. Overall, the house stood well in its grounds and had an appropriate appearance for the garden. Even on an unusually fine day like today, the mist diminished the strength of the colours of the house and the sharpness of its angular lines so that the building blended naturally with the garden in which it was placed as though it too were part of the same water colour as the surrounding vegetation.

Moving on, as though seeing the scene shot from a camera on rails, which smoothly recorded the scene, the insides of the house revealed themselves to provide an equally impressive experience. From entering the front entrance one came upon a grand reception

hall panelled in a richly stained and highly polished wood from the marreb tree, a hardwood tree now very rare upon BS3 after years of over exploitation. A broad stairway spiralled up out of sight, covered in a thick, lush red carpet apparently woven from a natural fibre. In the high space above the staircase, hung an impressive, glittering chandelier.

Turning to the right on the ground floor, the hall elongated towards another room which, upon entry, obviously doubled as a formal reception room and study. Once again, the large room was richly carpeted in a deep, crimson pile and, smaller, but still glitteringly beautiful chandeliers hung sparkling from the high ceiling. There was a fireplace with a fire surround of white stone rippled and flecked with pink. The other walls were panelled with book cases packed with leather bound volumes replete with gold writing and ornamentation upon their spines. Everywhere was spotlessly clean and the polished surfaces shone completely free of dust.

As one entered this room and as one's eyes moved to from point to point, they eventually followed the formally arranged pathway towards the large, richly carved desk which was placed diagonally across from the main door into the room, over in the far corner. It was then that one's casual visual exploration of the house came to a sudden, jarring halt.

For sprawled across the desk with his head angled downwards towards the floor and across towards the distant entrance was a man, or rather the corpse of a man. The man's face was paper white and there was a large maroon slash cut deeply and roughly into his neck. It did not take an expert to see that this man had died from exsanguination, for a hasty second look at the carpet lead to an appreciation that a large dark red shadow stained a wide area beneath the head of the man as if it were some bloody halo.

Suddenly, the quiet and the stillness of the house was punctuated by a deafening scream, which was, after a very audible drawing of breath, followed by another longer cry. The sound of some further sobbing was then following by the knocking over of a small round antique table and some someone running helter-skelter from the room calling out for another person apparently called “CRean”.

## Chapter 2 - Landing upon BS3

The engines roared thunderously as they sought to resist gravity and cushion the space vessel's fall to planet. The vessel sprang abruptly up and down as its feet had obviously made contact with the landing pad. Silence prevailed and after a moment, the irregular rocking motion of the vessel ceased and there was a complete stillness both of the structure and of all within. It was as if all the occupants of the small passenger cabin of the planetary hopper were recovering from the intense momentary noise and stress of landing while, at the same time, they expectantly awaited instructions from the cabin crew. After a prolonged period, a voice finally came over the loudspeaker announcing that the passengers could remove their safety harnesses and collect together their hand luggage and that disembarkation would follow in just a few moments.

Functionary sat quietly in his seat feeling a little sleepy, having dozed for most of the journey since he had transferred from the commercial inter stellar-system ship which had brought him to the edge of the solar system to which this planet belonged. He tried to gain his first impression of the planet through the porthole adjacent to his seat, but his eyes were adjusted to the brightly lit interior of the spacecraft and could make out little of relatively mirky exterior.

Functionary sat back and waited somewhat impatiently. He reflected on his unexpected visit to this backwater of a planet. Several months before he had left his former posting on the stricken space station, 2\_Kontrol, on the first stage of an elaborate journey which was to see him travel to the Service Headquarters at the centre of the System prior to being eventually redeployed elsewhere in the System after a period of extended leave and debriefing. He had hoped for a posting somewhere near the centre of the System, perhaps in charge of a significant security section and possibly with a small accompanying promotion. He had thought this the most likely outcome to what had ultimately been a

satisfactory close to his previous posting. He had taken the first relatively short stage of his journey from 2\_Kontrol in a small planetary hopper to the nearest operational space station and there he had found that he was obliged to wait several weeks for the next star cruiser heading for the centre. But, before the star cruiser could visit, he received an order to head out to the small planet of BS3 and investigate the murder of the Service ambassador to the independent BS planetary system. While, the background of Functionary lay in general administration, his two most recent postings had been in security and policing and it appeared that the Central Service now saw him as someone who could become an investigator. Functionary, doubted that he was the right man for the job, but when the Service sent you somewhere, as one of its officers, you did not argue, you just went. That was the nature of the Service and life within it. So, a detective, Functionary would be.

He had obviously been chosen because he was the closest available officer with both appropriate rank and, as starkly stated on his official record, suitable experience. From the station where he had been awaiting a flight towards the centre, BS3 was not that far in terms of space travel, if in the opposite direction to the centre of the System where Functionary wished keenly to head. But BS3 was not a particularly important planet and it was placed in a part of space which was of little significance to anyone except the relatively few sentient beings who resided on one of its few planets or moons. Few ordinary beings throughout the System would have heard of the solar system within which BS3 relentlessly pursued its almost circular orbit, and it was probably this obscurity which explained why the BS system had retained its independence in spite of the usual predatory colonialism of the System of Planets from which Functionary hailed.

Thus, Functionary had approached BS3 in a crab-like manner, jumping from planet to planet, catching ships following major routes to other places, until he managed to obtain

a ride on the planetary hopper on which he now sat. What with the elaborate journey he had had to follow and the enforced stopovers on various planets and space stations, he had taken several weeks to reach his destination. Now having reached his destination he was to investigate a murder or rather check on the work of the local police. He had heard nothing on his way to the planet but, with any luck, the case would be solved and Functionary would soon be on his way again, having dispatched an account to the Central Service on the satisfactory resolution of the issue by the local security forces. But if the case had not been resolved, thought Functionary, the case would be over three weeks old and the trail of the murderer would be long cold.

A voice boomed over the tannoy explaining that passengers could now disembark and cautioning people not leave any luggage behind. Functionary eased himself out of his seat, picked-up his hand luggage, walked along the aisle and out down the ramp onto the landing stage. Stepping out onto the landing platform, the muggy warmth of the inside of the vessel was exchanged for the comparative chill of a brisk breeze. It was late afternoon and the planet's star was starting to move low in the sky. Awakening in the cooler ambient temperature, Functionary started to take an interest in his new surroundings. He slowly appreciated that the landing platform was a flat oval. At one end of the oval a bright rectangle was cut from the surface and the other passengers was stepping down into the brightness and presumably into some area of arrival lounges, customs and immigrations. However, Functionary did not wish to follow them just yet as his first examination of his surroundings had piqued his interest.

As far as Functionary could tell, the landing platform was positioned high-up, possibly on the top of a tall building, although it was impossible to be completely certain that this was the case. He paced slowly away from the small insect-like ship that had brought him to BS3 and, fighting his vertigo, he gingerly stepped closer to the edge of the

platform. Functionary was confronted with a scene of mysterious beauty. Cautiously peering over the edge of the platform and through a horizontal safety netting that surrounded the entire landing surface, all he could make out was cloud drifting slowly passed. It was as though one stood on a structure surrounded by a sea moving towards high tide, if in this instance, the sea was of a gaseous nature. Looking up and out across the repeated waves of this sea and toward the setting star, the misty cloud was iridescently coloured in different hues of pinks, pastel reds, light browns and peaches. The waves of billowing cloud slowly receded into an indistinct horizon where the upper atmosphere and misty cloud-base blended into one. At various distances, Functionary could make out several large buildings sticking out of this foggy sea. These buildings pierced the cloud and stood straight, narrow and sharply defined in contrast to the airbrushed atmospheric ocean from which they projected. From the perspective of Functionary, the planet's star was positioned almost immediately behind one of these buildings and all that he could really make out was the narrow outlines and jagged silhouettes of these unnatural structures. Given the absence of contrast in their images and the ever-presence of the visually impenetrable cloud through which they emerged, he could not easily judge their height or mass. The footings of the buildings may have begun just below the surface of the cloud, on the other hand the buildings may have been miles high and of huge volume. Without having much evidence to support his conclusion, he suspected that the buildings were very tall indeed and beneath cloud there exist massive footings. Turning, Functionary strode towards the other side of the landing platform, ducking underneath the belly of the planetary hopper. On this other edge of the platform he was greeted with more buildings piercing the sea of cloud. Here, with the sun behind his shoulder, the visible sides of the buildings were illuminated in a reddish-golden glow. Their outer surfaces shone, with their windows and architecture clearly delineated, which demonstrated impressively their huge mass. But, looking downwards the sea of cloud remained as impenetrable and as

unrevealing as ever. Functionary pondered on what lay below. Were there more buildings down there? Was there a heaving metropolis perhaps? Was there the noise, motion, hustle and bustle, business and trade, love and hate, life and death of innumerable sentient beings? Or, was there a proper liquid sea? So far, the planet was frustratingly unwilling to disclosed anything about itself apart from the skyscrapers which floated improbably above a foggy blanket revealing nothing about their footings.

Functionary had become completely engrossed in staring into the thick, endlessly reshaping, fog of cloud just a yard or so below his feet when there came a sweet feminine voice: “Hona Functionary, may I welcome you to our planet and bid you come with me so that I can take you to your quarters and then introduce you to the High Official.”

Functionary straightened and turned round to behold one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, despite her lime green skin and purple hair.