

THE RUNNERS

Isabelle CARMODY
Prabha MALLYA





THIS IS NO Men's Land. It is not permitted for...

Didn't anyone ever tell you boys should be seen and not heard?

It is a terrible thing for a mother to die Geneva. Do you know how she died?

Your mother did not tell me that there could be purpose in death, Geneva.

Yeah, well, that's just the problem, isn't it? My mother gave you not entitled to and ideas above your station. Then she died.

I know how and I know why.

Now shhh! I have to listen for eyeballs.

Guardmen can't protect me from the mothers, can they? It was their Amazons that killed my mother.

You are mistaken, Geneva. No one would kill a mother. They are sacred.

Are you in danger, Geneva? Do you wish me to summon a guardman?

This territory was poisoned during the War for the Motherland fought against the rule of predatory, rapacious, destructive Menning, but my radiometer detects insignificant levels of radiation.

This is not forbidden territory any more due no one comes here.



TOSS

Your mother did not tell me of this place.

She said she would prove we were true humans.

She said you were the future. She showed the Mothers her proof and she was killed because they thought she had done something to you.

Your mother said I had evolved and the others could evolve, too.

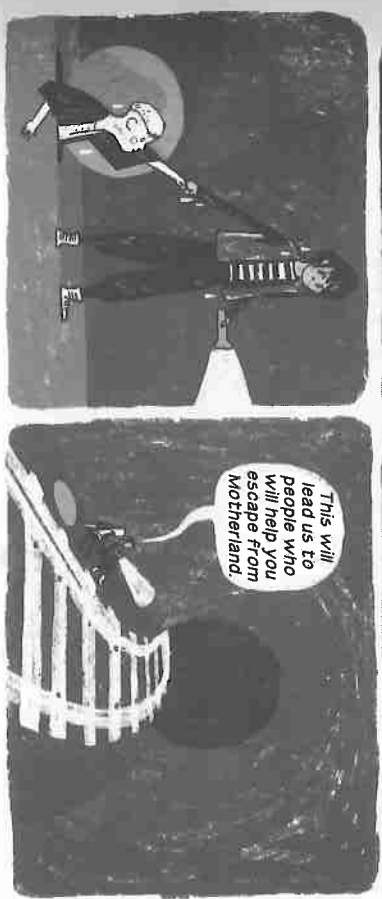
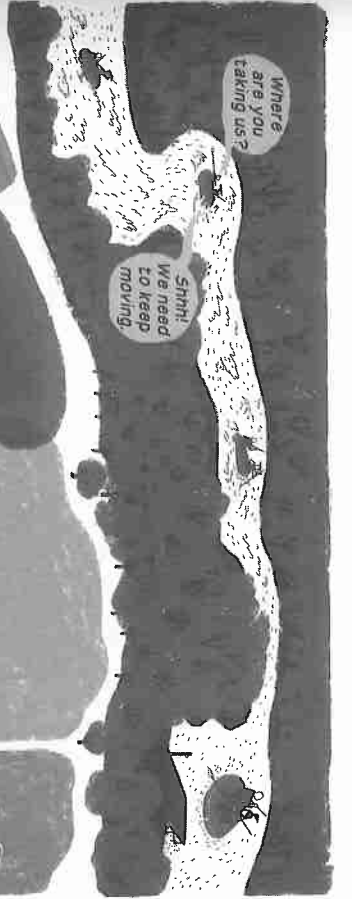
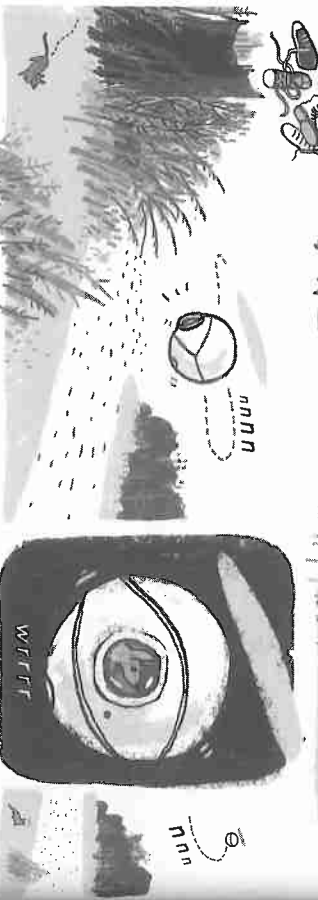
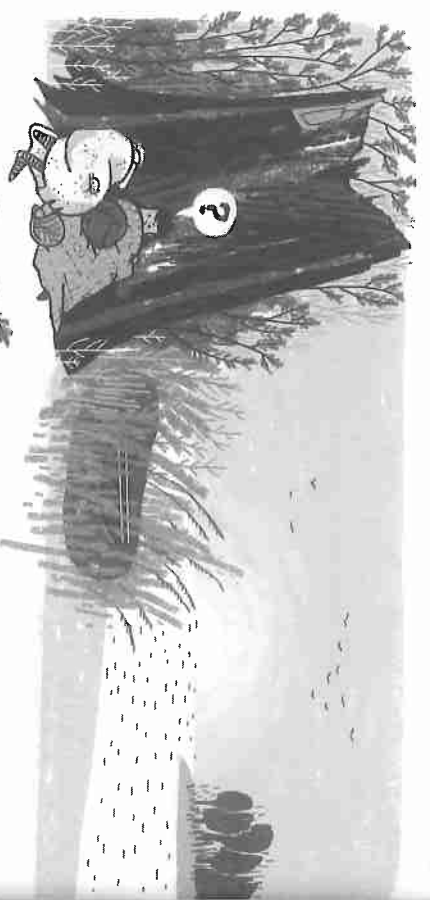
That was not supposed to be possible.

Why did the Amazons not take me when they came for the others?

They took all of the Men.



...they had no idea my mother's prize was a boy.



There is no place in the world that can support life, save the Motherland.

There is the Promised Land, where true men and women live free and equal.

The men were an abomination.

So the Mother's claim. But my mother said not all true men were alike.

No matter what they were, I am not a true man, Geneva.

My mother believed you were human. That is more important.

Is that why you risk your self? To save your mother's work?

She said we lost half of our humanity by killing off Mankind, and as long as you lived, people would know it was possible for a Boy to be human.

I am an idiot. It is all ruins. There is no one here who can tell us how to get to the Promised Land.

I AM MAYA 7 OF HOMESAFE. I AM THE LAST WOMAN STANDING. I WAS LEFT TO GUARD THE WAY.

You are one of the synthetic Women created by true men!

I AM SHE WHO WAITS. BUT YOU ARE THE FIRST WHO EVER CAME.

What about the true men who made this tunnel and built this place?

THE MAN WHO MADE ME WAS KILLED BY THE AMAZONS, AS WERE ALL HIS SISTERS.

THE SISTERS WERE GOING TO MAKE ONE AND SEND COORDINATES BACK, BUT THE AMAZONS CAME BEFORE THEY COULD DO IT...

Do you know the way to the Promised Land?

THERE IS NO PROMISED LAND.

The true men and their sisters dreamed of a Promised Land. Is it possible the stories we heard just grew from that?

Geneva, you must eat and drink. I will prepare it. Maya 7, is there food here?

THERE IS FOOD FOR HUMANS BUT YOU...

I hated it when my mother said she was your mother too, because part of her had gone into you.

Biological matter is used to create Men and Boys, but it does not make us human.

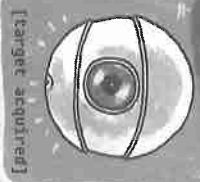
My mother said what you do makes you human. She said some of your brother's showed signs of humanity, but that you were truly human. She told me you were a gift and a burden that I must bear because I am her daughter.

CREAK

1-38 074847356

PROFESSOR

nnnn



[Target acquired]



HELLO!

Run, Geneva. Return to Mother City before you are killed.

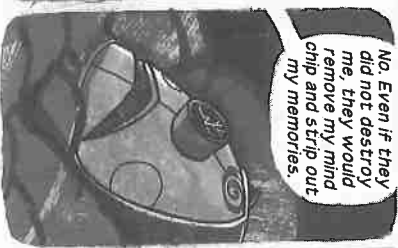


No!

But you will die if I take it out!



I have to get you to a biologic!



No. Even if they did not destroy me, they would remove my mind chip and strip out my memories.

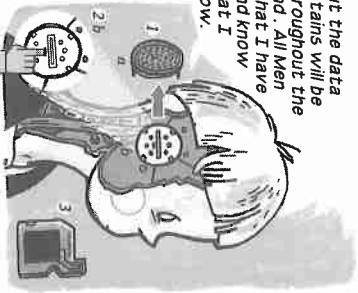


Take my mind chip and go to the city. Plug it into a cleaner man, a servoman... any unit...

The biologicals won't mesh.

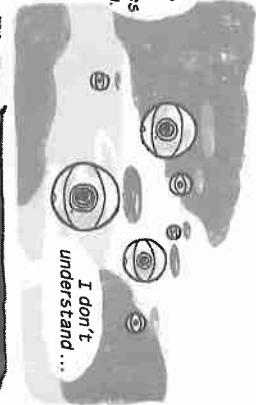


I know, but the data my chip contains will be dispersed throughout the Motherland. All Men will see what I have seen and know what I know.

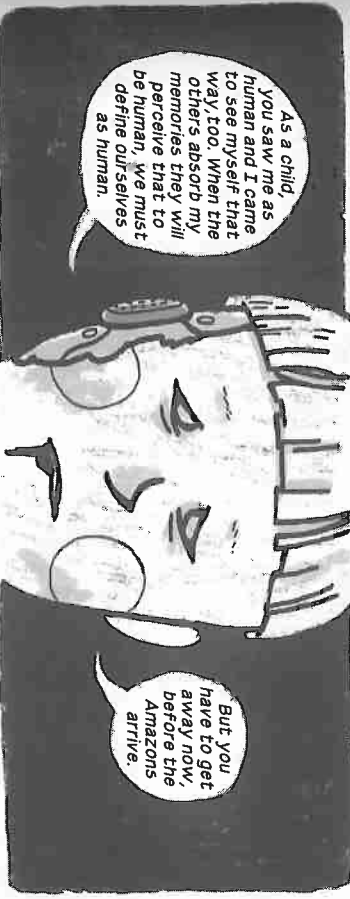


But you won't exist any more!

Geneva, your mother was wrong, I am not unique. The balance of biological matter and synthetics is the same in all Men. You were the difference.



I don't understand...



As a child, you saw me as human and I came to see myself that way, too. When the other's absorb my memories they will perceive that to be human. We must define ourselves as human.

But you have to get away now, before the Amazons arrive.



When they find your mind chip gone, they will come after me...

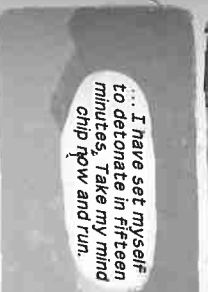
I will self-detonate after you have gone, and collapse the tunnel from this end. The explosion will obliterate homesafe, and Maya 7. They will think you dead.



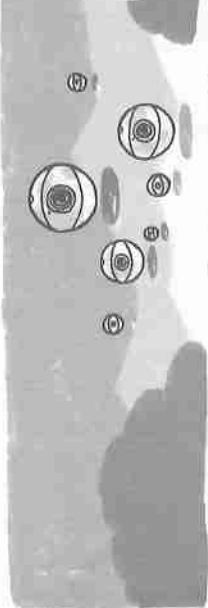
I can't leave you... I love you.



The knowledge that you have loved me is the gift I leave to my kind, which is your kind...



... I have set myself to detonate in fifteen minutes. Take my mind chip now and run.



THE RUNNERS



Tell me again what happened after Hel died.

Geneva took his mind chip back to Mother City as he had asked. Once they felt what Hel had felt, Men asked the Mothers if they might live alongside womankind and become truly human.

But the Mothers were scared of them!

A lot of Men and Boys were killed. But unlike in the Motherwars no Man or Boy raised a hand against a woman, or strove to harm them, even when the Amazons were killing them. So the Mothers looked at Hel's mindchip and were changed by it.

That's how Men and women were made equal and free.

And you and mum decided to be together and then you got me and we all lived happily ever after!



FIN

Kirsty Murray

Working on 'The Blooming' with Manjula made me realise that when you start weaving a story with someone, threads will connect you to each other across time and space, across oceans, continents and cultures. I'd admired Manjula's writing for years, so when she suggested we play a writerly version of a game called 'Exquisite Corpse' I was a little daunted. Would I be able to keep pace with such a formidably clever and talented author? Each of us wrote a section of the playscript without knowing the other's intent. We didn't discuss the story at all but sent each other a 'surprise' section of the manuscript every few days, bouncing scenes, characters and dialogue back and forth across cyberspace until the story had formed itself. The strangest thing was to discover that sometimes our thoughts were interconnected, even though we've never met. Symbiosis, imprinting and clones aren't exactly mainstream ideas but they came to us simultaneously and found expression in our collaboration. Truth is stranger than fiction and every thought you conjure connects you to someone else.

THE RUNNERS

Isobelle Carmody

I never much liked the idea of collaboration because I thought it would be all about having to compromise, but when Kirsty Murray sent me a link to the website of the illustrator she proposed to match me with, I couldn't resist having a peek. That was all it took to be blown away. Prabha is brilliantly versatile and amazingly talented. Dabbling in drawing in my own books has made me a lot more interested in artwork, and reverent when I stumble on someone who does it really well. So the thought of having Prabha draw my story was completely enchanting. I couldn't wait to see what she would come up with and I loved her illustrations enough to cut thousands of words down to a few, so that there would be plenty of room for her to spread her wings, artistically speaking. I feel absolutely honoured to be able to work with her, and we are already plotting to collaborate again.

Prabha Mallya

Creating *The Runners* was a gradual process of working with a detailed futuristic world and characters with backstories, extracting from it all *just enough* to tell What Happened, with clues to the How and the Why and the What If? for a dreaming reader.