

Part 1

A Meeting with the Great Designer

The day had finally arrived. Marcus and Waldo climbed into the rear of the shuttle and nervously awaited their meeting. The shuttle lifted off the ground and flew towards the center of the island where the capital city, Mantark, was located.

Marcus and Waldo had just turned 18 and were ready for their meeting with the Great Designer. They had eagerly awaited this meeting for the last few years. On the island of Zephen, every 18-year-old must undergo a challenge in order to be recognized as a respected member of the community. Each citizen must build their own house and it must be able to withstand the violent storms the island encounters every year.

The two brothers could hardly contain themselves as they flew over the city. Their shuttle descended toward the center and weaved in and around the buildings. Finally, it came to rest in front of a magnificent skyscraper. The brothers stepped out of the shuttle and marveled at the gigantic building that stood before them. Their eyes followed it up until it was swallowed by the clouds.

"This way!" ordered a man standing in the front of the door. As they approached the building, the walls folded away, revealing a door. The attendant lifted his hand and the door rose. Marcus and Waldo had never seen such beautiful craftsmanship in all their lives. "Let's go! The Great Designer is waiting!" barked the attendant. The brothers snapped out of their daze and quickly followed the attendant through the doors.

The attendant walked and talked quickly. "Today you will receive your blueprints for the houses you are to build. Pay close attention to the instructions you are given. If you do not follow them exactly, you will fail. The Great Designer has drawn blueprints specifically for you and no one else." The attendant led them to a door and waved them in. "The Great Designer will see you now."

Marcus and Waldo entered, scanning the large office. Lining the walls were shelves full of large, tightly wound rolls of paper. In the middle of the office sat a large desk where a tall man, aged with wrinkles, peered through thick glasses at a large pad of paper. His grey hair was carefully combed and his facial hair was neatly trimmed. In his right hand was a pencil; in his left, a ruler. His hands glided across the paper and drew line after line, taking small measurements, making marks, and drawing numbers. He slowed his work, took off his glasses, and looked towards the young men.

"Come in. Please be seated." He set down his tools and reached for a hot mug of coffee that sat next to his pad. He motioned to the chairs across from his desk. Marcus and Waldo sat down, keeping their focus on the man.

"I am the Great Designer. I draw the plans for every structure on this island. It is my job to make sure that every structure is built to withstand the violent storms that come each year. If you are able to follow my plans, then you will have a home strong enough to endure the mightiest of our island's storms. You both face a greater challenge this year as well, for it is the twentieth year." The brothers glanced at one another. "As you know, every twenty years the storms become far stronger than in the other years. The first storm that hits your houses may be one of the worst. Any structures that have compromises will fail."

He rose from his desk and pulled two large rolls of paper off one of the shelves. He brought them back to the desk and set them down with a thud. "This challenge will show the true character within you as this is no easy task. *Follow every step carefully; do not take any shortcuts.* If you build a home that can withstand the storms, you will become a true citizen of Zephen. You will have a safe place to lay your head and will not have to fear sudden disaster."

The Great Designer handed Marcus and Waldo their blueprints, shook their hands, then returned to his work. The brothers left his office, each one eager to undertake this long-awaited challenge.

Part 2

The Long-Awaited Challenge Begins

Marcus and Waldo shook hands and embraced. They each had to prove themselves worthy of respect by taking on this challenge alone. Since birth, they had been a team, taking on challenges together - twin spirits working side by side. But today was a new day. Today they had to prove they could stand on their own, apart from their parents and apart from each other. With one last farewell, they said their goodbyes and stepped into separate shuttles. The shuttles lifted high into the sky and sped in opposite directions.

As Marcus sat in the shuttle, he unrolled his blueprints and began flipping through the many pages. Every part of the building was detailed with measurements, materials needed, and building instructions. The amount of detail was overwhelming. Marcus looked up from the pages, took a deep breath, then turned back to the first page. His imagination got the better of him as he began thinking of the home he would call his own. This place would be stronger than any other home on the island. It would be strong enough to withstand any hurricane that came his way. It would keep him safe from all fierce weather attacks imaginable. Marcus determined his home would hold up against the great storms that were coming - no matter how much work it took.

Waldo was having a similar experience as he rode in the other shuttle. He dreamed of having his home stand high above the others. A house that would stand out among the others. His home would be a beautiful one, a true work of art. He wanted his home to be breathtaking.

Waldo peered out the window, searching the island for the perfect location. "Take me higher, please." The pilot lifted the shuttle higher into the air and Waldo scanned the island. Up on a small mountain he spotted a level peak. "Take me over there!" Waldo pointed. The pilot brought the shuttle to rest on the mountain top. Waldo stepped out and looked it over.

"This will be perfect. Everyone will be able to see my house up here, and I will be able to see all of the island." Waldo gazed at the beautiful ocean view before him, and then turned to see the city. He had found the best view on the island.

After a few minutes of taking in the scenery, Waldo pulled out the blueprints to see what the first building steps would be. "Your house must be built on a firm foundation. For maximum protection choose a location that will shield your structure from the strong winds that come in from the waters." As Waldo looked over the mountain top he had chosen, he realized his house would be fully exposed to the winds. "But I'm high on the mountain," he thought. "I'll be safe here. Nowhere else on the island will I find a more perfect view."

Meanwhile, Marcus was carefully reading through the first pages of his plans. He asked the pilot to take him up to survey the island. Marcus searched for many hours. Finally, he spotted a little field inland. It was a little dreary and overgrown. The shuttle landed and Marcus stepped out. His foot came to rest on the firm ground and he paced out the dimensions of the house. He then looked at the mountains that reached high into the sky surrounding the grassy area. "Well, there isn't much to look at here, but nothing is going to make it past those mountains. I will build here." Marcus returned to the shuttle and began reading the next step of building.

Part 3

Close Enough or Exact: Does It Matter?

Sweat rolled down Marcus' back as the sun beat down on him. He had been digging for six hours. The excavator had been provided by the Great Designer, but it was not as easy to use as he had hoped. The controls were very touchy and he kept moving the machine twice as far as he meant to. He had marked the outline of the foundation and was slowly working his way through it. The entire foundation had to be eight feet deep, but every time Marcus climbed out to measure the depth of the hole, he would find he had not dug deep enough. After climbing out for the tenth time and finding it was only seven feet deep, Marcus angrily yelled, "What's the point?! I can't operate this machine!" As he turned and kicked the mound of dirt that lay next to the hole, his foot tore up the dirt and caused a heap of it to fall back into the hole.

Marcus walked away and plopped down to the ground. After a few minutes of sulking and staring at his work, he remembered the words of the Great Designer. *"If you are able to follow the plans I give you, then you will have a home strong enough to withstand the mighty storms we face."* Marcus' attitude changed as he remembered that the quality of his work would be put to the test. If he failed to follow the plans exactly, then his house would fail to protect him when those storms arose. He took a deep breath and returned to the machine.

Marcus dug late into the night, carefully working on every corner of the foundation. Hours passed. The only light he had was that of the excavator, so his progress was slow and painful. Marcus shut down the machine and carefully measured the depth all the way around the foundation. He had finally finished. Worn out, but pleased with his work, he pitched his tent and fell into a deep sleep.

Waldo was having a very different experience as he dug his foundation. He was very much enjoying digging with the excavator and loved how fast it could rip up the earth. He gouged the soil and pulled up bucket after bucket of dirt. After working his way around the entire outline of the foundation, he climbed out to inspect his work. As he walked the outskirts of the foundation, he felt proud of what he had finished. "This deserves a celebration!" He called for a shuttle and headed towards the city to meet up with some friends.

During the ride, he opened his plans. As he re-read the instructions, he caught sight of a detail he had missed the first time. "The foundation must be eight feet deep. Measure all sides after digging to ensure it is at the proper depth." Waldo had only measured one side of the foundation and worked from there to dig the rest. "It all looked good when I left," he thought. "I'm sure it's close enough to eight feet all the way around." Waldo's friends were waiting in the city so he put the thought out of his mind, set down the plans, and watched out the window as the shuttle descended into the city.

Part 4 The Great Cover-Up

Trucks rolled in, churning with concrete. Marcus sat watching at his field and Waldo atop his mountain. One by one they backed up to pour the sludge into the freshly dug foundations until it reached the correct height.

At Waldo's building site, the trucks halted and a driver climbed out and approached him. "Sir, something's not right on the south side. All the concrete is flowing towards the north end. We can't get the south to fill to the line. Your foundation isn't level." Waldo knew that he had failed to check the depth on the south side, but he assumed he was close enough to the eight foot depth. "Can you work around it?" he asked the truck driver. "We can pour it," the driver said, "but you really should get the south side dug and leveled out. Otherwise you're not going to have a good foundation to build on."

"There's no way I'm digging that again! The concrete's already in there and it would be too much work to scoop it out and start again. Just pour it and I'll figure it out." Waldo walked off irritated.

At Marcus' site, the trucks were pouring the last of the concrete. The driver of the last truck climbed out to speak with Marcus. "Everything looks good here. Give it a week and you should be set to start building on it." Marcus grinned as he looked over the start of his home. All the extra effort he had put into following the instructions was showing its worth. He sat at the edge of the foundation and felt the satisfaction of his work wash over him.

As the week passed and the concrete cured, the brothers spent their time collecting the materials they would need for the next part of the building. They had also each received a notification that their foundations must pass a building inspection before any further construction could take place.

Marcus was eager to get the inspection over so he could start building. When the inspector arrived, he looked over the foundation in detail. "Everything looks good here. It's level and ready to build on." Marcus thanked the man and then headed off to prepare for the next step.

When Waldo received this news, he became anxious. His foundation was not up to the specs in the plans. He knew he was going to have to redo his work if the inspector noticed his errors. He had to find a way to cover up the obvious droop on the south corner where it had been dug too shallow.

He quickly got together some more concrete and mixed it up. He shoveled it into the drooping corner and carefully worked it up to the right height. After some careful artistic work, he made the imperfection disappear. He examined it from many angles to make sure it looked right. Satisfied with his work, he relaxed.

The next day the inspector flew to Waldo's building site. Waldo greeted him and tried hard to relax.

"Hello sir. You here to inspect the foundation?"

"Yes, I am. Before you do any construction on it, I've got to make sure it meets all the requirements."

Waldo swallowed nervously and motioned towards the foundation. "Well, let's get started. I've followed the plans just as I was told. You should find everything is in order."

As the inspector examined the foundation, Waldo was careful to distract him as he got near the south side.

"It's a beautiful view up here isn't it? You can see all of the city from here."

The inspector stopped to take in the view. "Yes, it sure is a scenic spot. However, the winds can be harsh up here. Better take extra care to make it sturdy. So far, everything appears to be in order. You can move ahead with your construction."

When the inspector finally left, Waldo breathed a sigh of relief. He was very happy he didn't have to tear up his work and restart.

Part 5 Decisions, Decisions...Strong or Beautiful

The lumber piled high along each of the building sites. All the materials the brothers had selected were delivered to their sites and were ready to install. Before they could begin framing up the walls for their houses, they needed to anchor bolts into the concrete so they could attach the wood by drilling holes down into the concrete walls. The blueprints stated that each hole was to be drilled six inches into the concrete. After the holes were drilled, they were to anchor a 2x8 foot board to the concrete. The walls of the house would be fastened to these boards. It was very important that every anchor be securely set into the concrete.

Waldo drilled hole after hole. Every anchor was securely fastened, except those along the south corner. He carefully avoided drilling any holes along the side where he had made the cover-up. After completing all the anchors, he began putting up the walls. By the end of the day, he had over half of the walls up.

Marcus was also moving quickly through his project. He was drilling his final hole when suddenly a crack rippled out from the drill bit. He halted to see how far the crack had spread and found it had reached all the way to the bottom. Marcus had no idea what he was going to do now.

After a few minutes of staring at it, he got his phone and called the concrete company who had poured it and explained what had happened. "I'm sorry to hear that," the man said. "You'll have to cut out one foot from the cracked area on each side and repour it, reinforce it, and connect it to the walls on each side."

Marcus listened carefully and thanked the man. He then angrily threw down his phone and searched for a saw. He followed the man's instructions exactly, but was worried over the time he lost. He was going to have to wait another few days before the new concrete would be strong enough to build on and the stormy season was quickly approaching. Would he finish in time?

While the concrete set, Marcus framed up the walls and set them on the ground. He secured the 2x8 boards to the good walls, and he also read through all the blueprints again so he could work quickly when it was time.

Finally, the new concrete was cured. He carefully drilled the new holes and set the bolts in. He worked late into the night and got all the walls up. When he finished, he fell exhausted to the ground and slept that night on the grass.

Waldo was nearing the end of his building project. All he had left was to put on the roof and siding of his house. He read through the blueprints and noted that they called for fiber cement siding and metal roofing that could stand up to high speed winds. Waldo had no idea what this meant, so he took a trip to the lumber yard.

The salesman began showing him the siding and roofing samples. "This is the strongest stuff we sell. This metal roofing will hold up to some tough winds, however, it's not much to look at. If you want a classier look, we have standard shingles that will hold up to moderate winds; plus they are quite a bit less expensive. We also have the standard vinyl siding that is rated for moderate to high winds. But be sure to go with what your blueprints call for."

Waldo started imagining what his home would look like. The idea of a shiny metal roof sounded pretty ugly to him.

"I'll take the shingles and the vinyl siding."

"Is that what your blueprints call for?"

"Yeah," muttered Waldo.

Waldo left the lumber yard and headed out for a nice dinner. Since he had just saved a little money, he could spoil himself and his friends with a good meal.

Soon after, Marcus strolled into the lumber yard. "What can I help you with today?" asked the salesman. "I need some fiber cement siding and metal roofing," Marcus said as he handed the man a paper with the measurements he would need.

"Weren't you just in here?"

"No. I haven't been here for a while," replied Marcus.

"Yeah, you asked for this stuff, but then went with the shingles and vinyl siding instead."

"That wasn't me. This is the stuff I need. My blueprints call for this."

The salesman had a confused look. "You got a twin or something?"

Marcus nodded. "Oh, that must have been my brother Waldo. Yeah. He's my twin brother."

The salesman laughed, "Thought I was going crazy for a minute."

"You say he got shingles and vinyl siding?" asked Marcus.

"Yep. It's cheaper than what you're getting. You want that, too?"

"No, that's not what the plans call for."

Marcus paid for the materials with the last of his money and quickly headed out. He immediately called Waldo.

"Waldo, what on earth are you doing? Why are you buying the wrong stuff for your house?"

"What are you talking about? I've got everything I need," replied Waldo.

"Waldo! I'm at the lumber yard and the salesman told me what you bought. That stuff will rip right off during one of these wicked storms! The blueprints were very clear on what to get."

Marcus was worried as he thought about the compromise Waldo had made.

"Marcus, I've got what I need. Leave me be. My house will be fine."

Waldo hung up on Marcus and shut off his phone. Marcus tried to call back, but no one answered.

Part 6 Put to the Test

The materials were delivered to the building sites. Each brother worked over the next few days to install their roofing and siding. Waldo worked quickly, and after hammering the last shingle in place, he took a deep breath. Scanning the south, he looked over the beautiful waters. He turned to the east and could see the whole city from his perch upon the cliff. He was filled with pride. He had the grandest spot on the island.

Marcus also worked hard to get the roof and siding installed. He carefully snipped and secured each piece of the metal roofing and the siding. He cut himself multiple times on the metal as he hauled pieces up onto the roof. Finally, after many days of work, he put the last section in place then carefully inspected all parts for any loose pieces.

Marcus stepped back to examine his work. It had taken painstaking effort to follow the blueprints to the detail, but he knew his house would protect him through the mightiest of storms.

And that test would soon arrive.

Marcus and Waldo each sat in their homes enjoying their work. Suddenly, their phones sounded out with a loud voice. "There is a storm 200 miles away! Seek shelter immediately! Stay away from doors and windows. If you do not have a safe home, leave immediately for the storm shelters in the city. The storm will be hitting in less than three hours!" Marcus and Waldo listened carefully to the message. When it ended, they each made preparations.

Marcus and Waldo each sat in their basements awaiting the storm. The wind howled and screamed throughout the island. It tore in from the south and was getting stronger by the minute. Large hail followed the winds and pelted the roof of the homes. As it poured down, it sounded like a thousand drummers beating their drums. Could this be *The Big One*?

Waldo crouched down and covered his ears. He was scared to death. The hail was frightening enough, but that was nothing compared to what he heard next - a terrible ripping sound. His eyes shot to a small window where he saw shingles flying away from his house. His whole body trembled with fear as he watched pieces of siding whipping past. Waldo went to the center of his basement where he sat shaking.

But the worst was still to come.

To his horror, he watched the south corner of his house begin to tear away from the concrete base. With no bolts holding the walls down in that corner, the wind demolished it. Waldo ran to the north wall and clung to a post as the whole south wall collapsed. His knuckles were white and his body ached as he waited for the storm to pass. He finally worked his way into a small closet under the stairs and shut himself in.

Marcus sat at a table with a hot cup of tea listening to the hail pound at his roof. He was nervous as he waited through the storm. He knew he had followed every detail of the plans and that his house should stand - but it was now being put to the test. High speed winds blew against the house, but the cliffs around his home protected it from the most powerful gusts. Try as it might, the storm could not break down his house. No winds tore off his roof or his walls.

Marcus sat anxiously through it all. He was not worried about *his* home; he was worried about Waldo. After a few hours, the winds lessened and by morning, the storm had passed. Marcus immediately called for an emergency transport to take him to Waldo's home. As Marcus waited for the shuttle, he stepped out to see what damage the storm had done. As he walked around his house, he saw only dents and scratches. Neither one piece of siding had been pulled, nor one sheet of metal roofing.

Marcus boarded the shuttle and as it approached Waldo's home, his stomach turned. All that remained standing was a small pile of wood with a staircase and closet under it. Surrounding the staircase was a

strewn-out mass of debris. In the middle of the devastation, Marcus spied a figure standing. Relief rushed over him when he saw that Waldo had survived.

The shuttle landed and Marcus ran over to hug his brother. "Waldo! Thank God you're alive! Come on - let's get you cleaned up." Waldo slowly turned and walked toward the shuttle, his face downcast. He didn't say a word.

The shuttle flew back over the city to Marcus' home.

"Wow, did the storm even hit you?" asked Waldo as he glanced over Marcus' property.

"Yeah, and it was scary," replied Marcus. " But now I fully understand why the Great Designer is the most important and respected person on our island."

Waldo nodded silently as Marcus invited him inside.