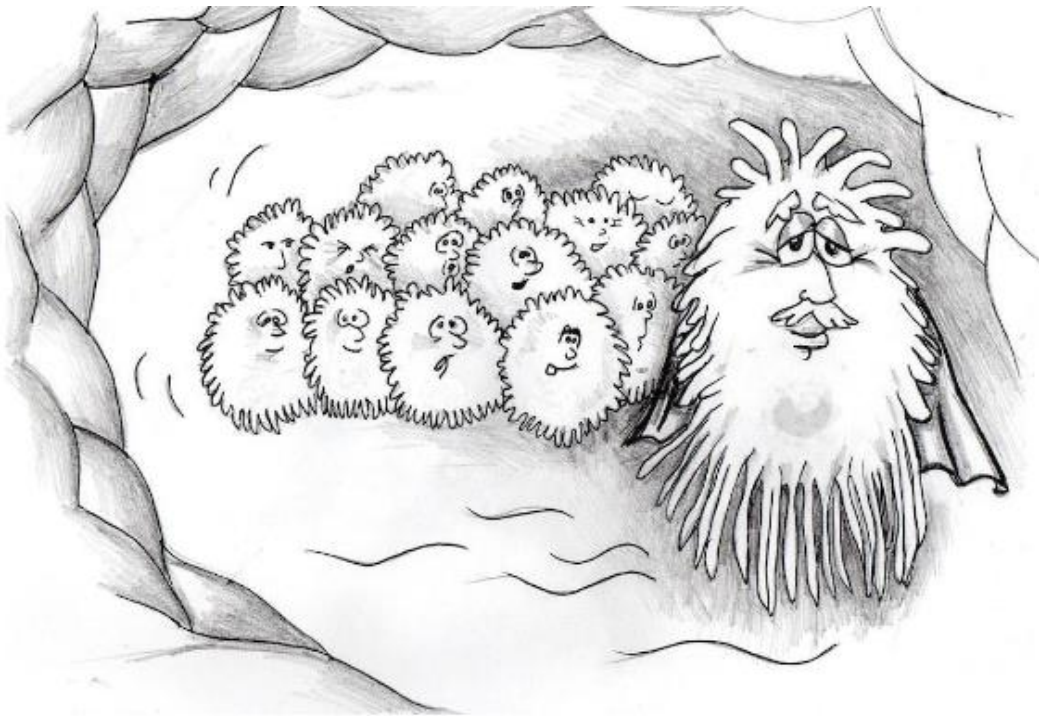


CHAPTER 1



In the Bone Marrow, a bell rings and some of the older, white blood cells swim away, off on their mission to protect the body. Some white blood cells are left behind. They are young white blood cells, which have just been made in the Bone Marrow. They must complete their training, before they are allowed to go on missions. They bunch together under a soft, pink, padded tissue wall, waiting for their teacher.



He glides in silently, his cloak barely making a rustle in the hushed, subdued room. All eyes are on the Master. He is legendary throughout the blood system. A slightly scary but revered teacher who knew when you were ready for active duty. Master Baso was the cell to please, to respect and most importantly to listen to.

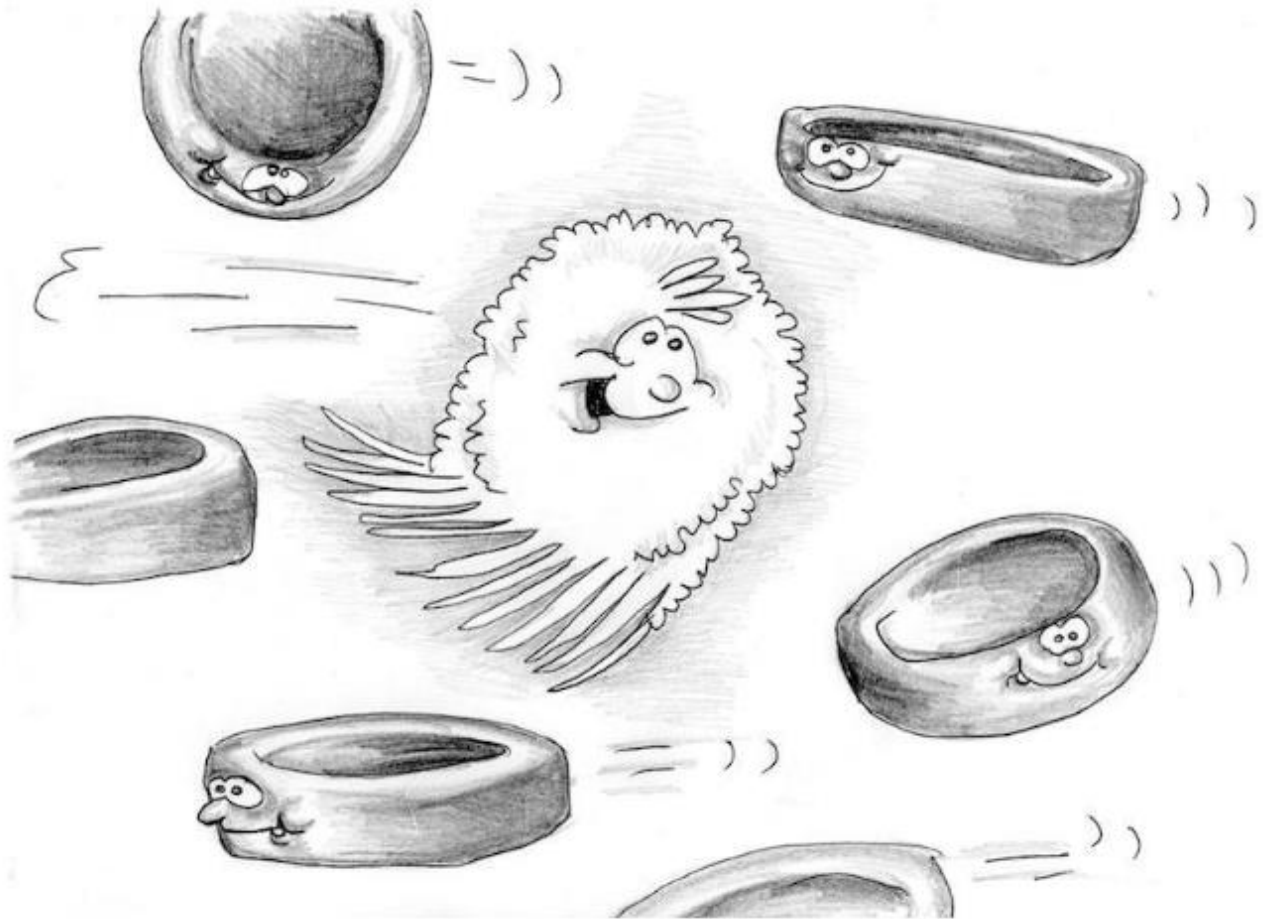
“Good morning cells!” cried out Master Baso, his eyes scanning the room.

“Good morning Master Baso,” replied all the new, young cells. Well almost all of

them. One was missing.

“Where is Bands?” shouted Master Baso.” He’s late... again!

Bands was swimming with some red blood cells way down in the body, when he heard the Bone Marrow School bell.



“Late again?” laughed one of the red blood cells.

“As always,” said Bands smiling. “I’d better go. See you later!”

Bands moved away from the group of cells. He crossed over a junction of tunnels running left and right and up and down and made his way to the Bone Marrow school. As he looked through an archway ahead, he could see his teacher talking to the new group of cells that had been made that morning. Bands floated slowly towards the back of the classroom, hoping to slip in unnoticed, his round, pale body camouflaged amongst all the other cells. It didn’t work.

“Good morning Bands,” Master Baso boomed over the rows of young blood cells. “So glad you could join us.”

All the new cells, tightly packed together into the pocket of marrow tissue, turned to face the back. Bands' face flushed bright red. "I was just explaining about the red blood cells," continued Master Baso, "and as you obviously feel you know all of this, by not arriving on time, maybe you would like to tell us instead?"

Bands sighed. He'd been at school for ages but still he wasn't allowed to advance to the next stage of training. He had to stay in the classroom because Master Baso thought he wasn't ready. Bands was convinced it was because he didn't like him.

"They are the workers. They carry oxygen from the lungs around the body and take

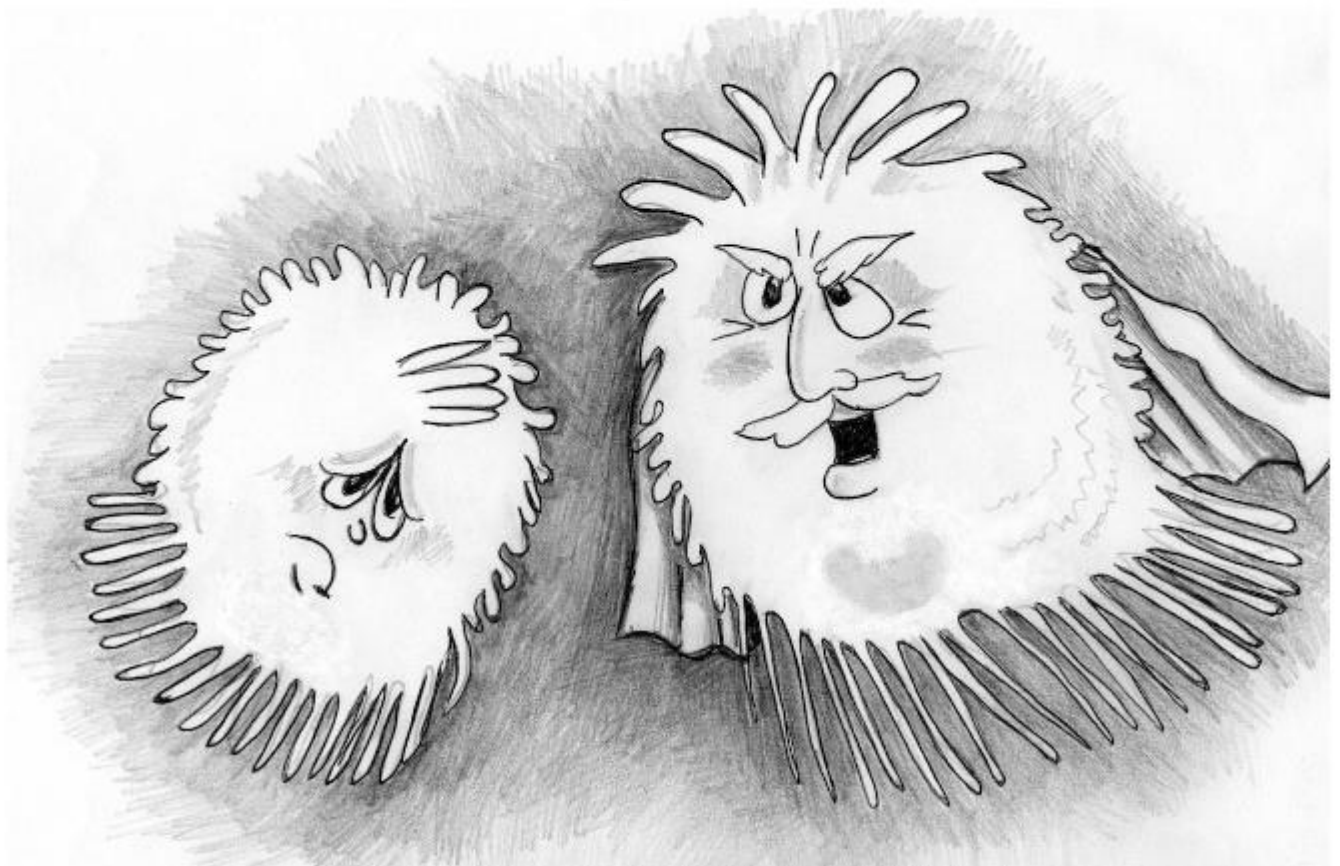
the carbon dioxide away," said Bands in a monotonous voice.

"Is that all?" said Master Baso.

"Is that all what Sir?"

"Is that all they do or is that all you know?" continued Master Baso.

"I answered didn't I?" said Bands rudely.



All the young blood cells stared at Bands with their mouths open.

“Come, come Bands,” said Master Baso. “That’s not the way to enthuse our new brothers and sisters. These new cells are at the start of their life. They are eager to learn how they will take part in our fight against infections.”

“But that’s the problem,” said Bands interrupting. “All we ever do is learn. We don’t actually get involved in the fighting.”

Master Baso shook his head. “Bands, you are too impatient. There is much you need to know before you become a truly great white blood cell.”

Master Baso turned away from Bands and glided over the top of the new cells. “Our red blood cell cousins are many in number. There are at least 600 red blood cells for every one of us. They help to keep the human body moving, by the delivery of oxygen to all the muscles and organs.” He paused and moved in closer to the eager new cells. “But we white blood cells, or as I like to call us, ...the WBCs,” he chuckled, as if he’d made the best joke in the world, “are the army and the ambulance crew. We fight bacteria and remove invaders. We clear away old and damaged cells by eating them and release chemicals into our human’s body to help speed up the healing process.”

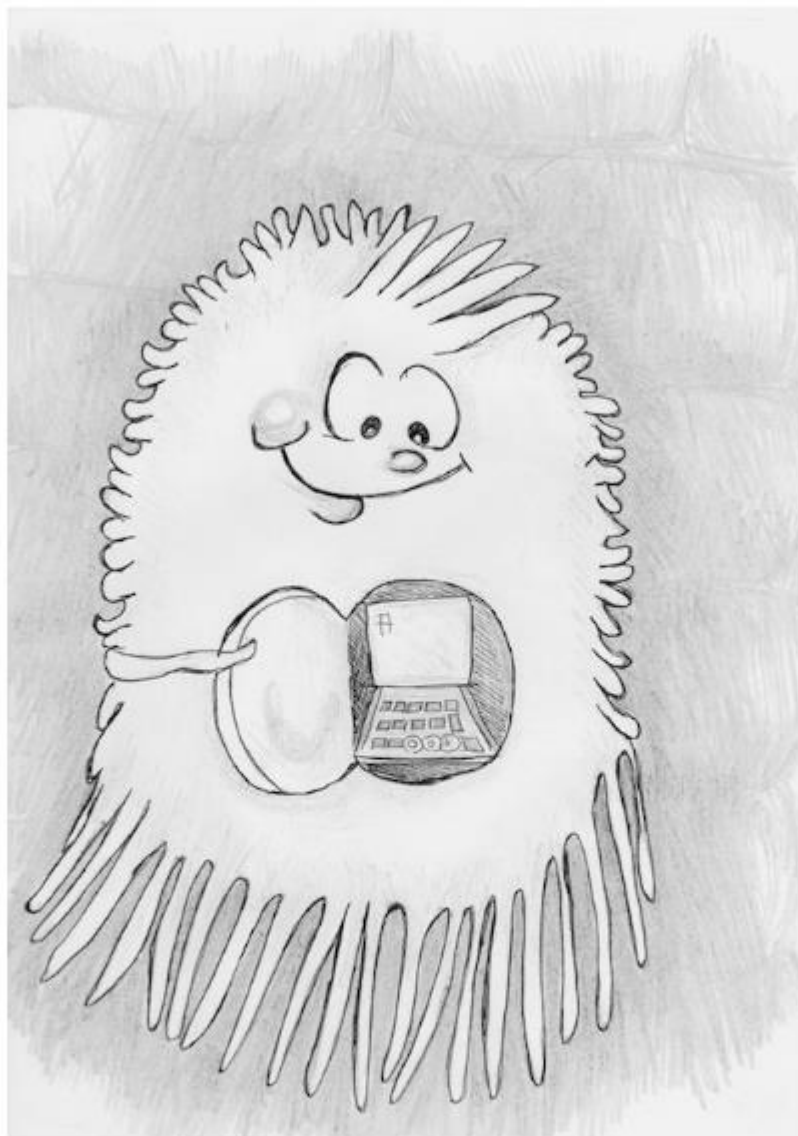
The new cells were all watching Master Baso intently, listening to every word he said. Except for Bands. He wasn’t listening. He was too busy bouncing up and down into the soft, spongy tissue beneath him.



"There are many dangers here," continued Master Baso. "A blow to the human body can cause blood vessels to burst. It is our job to eat those blood cells before they seep into the surrounding tissue." Master Baso scanned the crowd of wide-eyed white cells. "Can you think of any other dangers you might face?"

"Can we get stuck?" asked one eager cell.

"That's right!" shouted out Master Baso enthusiastically, pleased that some of his new students were listening. "We white blood cells have a nucleus in our body." All the cells peered down at their middles to have a better look.



"This nucleus has a computer system which contains lots of information, like a human's brain. And like a human's brain, we must look after it above all else. As

it makes our body less flexible, it is sometimes difficult for us to move through narrow areas like the capillaries. These are the tiny tunnels at the end of veins and arteries.” Master Baso looked at them sternly. “If you get stuck, your life will be over.”

Band’s bouncing had become more exuberant and he almost toppled over into the cell sitting next to him. The cell giggled and then straightened up when she saw Master Baso looking straight at them.

“Did you say something?” asked Master Baso, sailing right up to Bands.

“No sir. Not a word,” Bands smiled.

“Hmm,” said Master Baso, eyeing him suspiciously, before turning round to face the other cells. “Now, I would like to do a practice drill outside the Bone Marrow.”

“Another boring drill,” said Bands, pulling a face and pretending to yawn. The cell next to him giggled again. Fortunately for Bands, Master Baso didn’t hear or at least pretended not to.