



Notes from An Alien

**Sena Quaren
&
Alexander M Zoltai**

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Our Companion Blog Is At: <http://nfaa.wordpress.com>

Third Edition

Dedicated to

**Nathanael William Kee
Jane Darnton Watson
&
Ararura Quaren**

Acknowledgement

**Profound thanks to Laura Linneman for her editing work,
along with her insights. She has rubbed off the rough edges.
She has polished our dream.**

She can be contacted at: laura.linneman@gmail.com

Any errors remaining are attributable to the authors.

Prologue

This is a tale that spans a large tract of time: from the horrific 500-year war to the immaculate peace—a peace we feel will never falter since we so often stumbled, fell, and rose again on the road we had to create to find that peace.

My name is Sena Quaren and this book is a story told in "notes". Even though some readers may think it is a novel or a history, its form is difficult to classify in what are called genres.

What I say next may or may not be believed but, either way, this story is true—true as fact or true in the way fiction can rise to heights unattainable by mere facts.

I am a woman from a star system about twelve light-years from Earth. If you choose to believe me, my story might be considered a history lesson—how to achieve unity and peace—a lesson that Earth desperately needs. If you choose to not believe I'm real, my tale might be considered a science fiction story about how to achieve unity and peace—a lesson that Earth desperately needs...

I'll proceed on the premise that I am real.

My sources of information range from the official and personally-invasive computer records of the corporate World, Anga-Param, to the vivid oral traditions of the religious World, Anla-Purum, to the stories handed down through my extended family. And, even though I'm speaking to you now in what's called first-person point of view, most of the story will be told in what writers call third-person omniscient, which means that the other people in this tale won't be the storytellers. This is what writers on Earth use to give them more freedom of expression—jumping from an overall point of view to very personal views and back out, much like what a camera does in a movie. My "voice" will return when the story arrives at my birth.

This story's spine is the line of ancestors that culminated in my life. The final chapter will be told by my daughter, Ararura. She is my future.

There's something important you need to know before you read the story: My people, the Angians, over many hundreds of years, learned to work with naturally-occurring plasma.

Sorry for this short scientific digression, but if you don't have a basic understanding of plasma, you'll miss much of the meaning of this story.

The forms of matter most people are familiar with are solids, liquids, and gases—all of which keep their electrons in orbit around the nucleus—the core of an atom. Plasma is a state of matter in which the electrons and nuclei are separate and most of it is invisible. Still, because of its electrical and magnetic properties, its ability to organize and shape the other forms of matter is incredibly more powerful than gravity. Another important fact is that plasma is the most abundant form of matter. About ninety-nine percent of the universe is plasma.

Some common, visible examples are lightning, neon signs, an aurora, and a simple fire.

O.K., scientific digression done.

We Angians have learned to harness plasma as a catalyst to increase the receiving and transmitting qualities of our minds. Note well, though, that common, invisible plasma also carries

an imprint of emotions.

The Angian system's plasma distribution caused a natural and powerful enhancement of mental/emotional connection between two of our Worlds—Anga-Param, the corporate World, and Anla-Purum, the religious World. Luckily, this only happened during a short period every five years when the two planets were closest to each other.

It should be noted that this mental/emotional planetary connection was used extensively as a weapon in our 500-year InterWorld War. There are even some who claim plasma is the primary conduit for spiritual experiences.

Before we learned to use this power productively many people were doomed to a miserable life in mental institutions. A small percentage of us not only escaped the confusion of the interpenetration of other minds and hearts but could train ourselves to use the plasma even when the planets were not close. An even smaller percentage could reach out beyond our planets and explore alien minds. This is how I found Alexander, the co-author of this book.

Alexander is my transducer—my way of communicating with Earth's people. We have an intimate mental/spiritual bond—not "conversation" but something much deeper and higher—a conceptual bonding. A simplistic example would be to say that we share things like the idea of dog and cat but not the knowledge of beagles and tabbies. A more accurate example would be that we easily share an idea like four-footed, domesticated animal but not ideas like dog or cat or lizard. Those differences take much more conceptual exploration and sharing.

The sharing we do is rich and meaningful and Meaning is what is most important. Even though trees and flowers and bodies in the Angi system are significantly different than on Earth and even though the way Angians think and feel and act has its peculiarities, there are sufficient similarities that make all the Angian jargon unnecessary. The only times I worked hard to give Alexander specific words to use was when reference was made to names of people and places.

I've come to completely trust Alexander to take the meanings I give him and share them with you in meaningful ways. I've had significant culture-shock learning about your World and you would feel the same thing if you truly experienced our Worlds. Yet, understanding is the goal—unity of thought and feeling. Even though the specific history of our Worlds is different than yours, I'm sure you'll find valuable information in this story—information that can help Earth.

Alexander and I have worked together to interact with hundreds of humans before we ever sat down to write this book—he worked to help me understand humanity so I could make my story of real help in the efforts to stem the tide of the multiple, global crises Earth is suffering. I've communicated, with Alexander's help, through forums on the Web as well as through the avatar he created for me in the virtual world, Second Life. As this book was being written, we interacted with many reviewers on our publisher's web site, FastPencil. At the end of this book you'll find a listing of the people who helped me prepare for and accomplish the incredibly complex task of writing a book.

My story begins with one planet, the corporate World, Anga-Param, just a bit ahead of Earth in technological development and another planet, the religious World, Anla-Purum, in some timeless state of self-engrossment.

Even though our Worlds are now approximately 1,000 years further along the evolutionary trail than your World, my story begins with a time quite similar, in meaning, to what Earth is

experiencing. Anla-Purum, the religious World, is at the stage of Earth cultures called "primitive". Anga-Param, the corporate World, is what might be called "advanced". In the thirty years before the beginning of my story Anga-Param had sent automated ships to Anla-Purum, delivering what you might call radio equipment. It differs from your technology in one important way. Because it works in tandem with our abundant plasma, not only words are transmitted. Emotions are also riding the waves.

This mental/emotional, plasma-radio contact was the first proof that our Worlds had deep similarities. For example, learning each other's languages was as simple as learning a new dialect of one language.

Alexander has also created special files for use in a free 3-D space simulator that lets you visit and explore my worlds. Send an email to amzolt@gmail.com and he will send you the files.

So, there it is. You're about to read the story of a People who went from a 500-year InterWorld War and nearly complete loss of hope to enduring security. May the truth we discovered bring you courage to face the necessities of building a path toward global peace.

1 ~ Splendor

He was ready to go but delayed slipping the bonds for a moment as he bid farewell in his mind to the daughter he'd never met. He knew his work for the Angan Corporation was critical—he was the leader of the first expedition to another World; but, Velu, his unknown daughter, would probably not know he'd done it.

"Rednaxela", said his Artificial Intelligence unit from its space on the console, "we are fourteen seconds past the time set for slipping the magnetic bonds."

"Yes, Morna, my dearest AI, I know; bidding farewell to folks in my mind."

"The part of your mind I will not let myself access."

"Yes, Morna, the only part of myself that's still private."

"Twenty-five seconds past bond-slipping."

"Initiate, Morna."

The two-mile-wide, circular ship released its invisible hold on the mooring dock and began its 2,800,000-mile voyage to the planet next out from Anga in the Angi System—planet of mystery, inhabited by people completely engrossed in religion—Anla, the destination of Rednaxela, his thoughts, and 95,000 passengers.

Morna continued verbalizing her obligatory oversight tasks: "Plasma screen active, passengers secure, orbital laser supplying thrust, tethered laser stable, light-sail stable, ship systems nominal."

ShipOne it was called: a simple, efficient name that Rednaxela did not like. Something more was called for, some larger idea—Proteus, Primus, something; even Rugra-One, its Class name. He strode to the hatch leading to the transport tube as he said, "Morna, I'm going to check on our prize passenger."

"Only place worth going on a ship full of criminals."

"Settlers, Morna, settlers."

"Yes, criminal-settlers."

"It's a good thing you're my AI and not a child of the Corporate Mesh."

"It's a good thing we have plasma shielding from the Corporate Mesh."

The arrangement was completely unique but absolutely necessary. The Mesh, corporate or public, operated through electronics that were capable of responding to the streams of plasma surrounding and interpenetrating Anga. The Mesh was the Corporation's mode of communication and control and it was critical to the planet's efficient operation. Yet, this voyage, made when Anga and Anla were closest in their orbits, had to be flown through the plasma tail that Anga streamed away from its star. The plasma tail reached to Anla and beyond and, because of the closeness of the planets, it was a tail that could clearly carry the thoughts and feelings of every passenger into the minds of the priests on Anla, priests who were expecting merely settlers, not criminals. To be more precise, they were not expecting any criminals except Akla who Rednaxela was on his way to see.

"Morna, the shielding is to keep the Anlans from—"

"Rednaxela!"

He'd never heard her raise her voice.

"Do please continue, my sweet AI."

"I know why the Corporation chose you but they didn't take enough time to analyze the results of our interaction."

"Morna, what the hell are you talking about?"

"You are the Corporation's ambassador but I think you could also be their worst nightmare."

"Morna, I wish you had an off switch. Look, we'll talk about your speculations later. I need to go perform my duty as an interrogator."

Rednaxela stepped over the sill of the hatch but stepped right back into the bridge. He walked

up to the AI's physical form—a box of exotic, plasma-infused electronics—and said: "What do you make of the Anlans' specifically asking for Akla?"

"He is believed by the Harians of Anga to be a Prophet and a sect on Anla called the Nari claim the same thing. The Nari have apparently been waiting for him to arrive from Anga."

"You have a bad habit of repeating what you know I already know, Morna."

"Sometimes I feel it necessary."

"It's going to take the whole voyage for me to figure you out."

"I believe it will take longer than that."

"Could be, but the leadership on Anla apparently hate the Nari."

"Yes."

"Asking for a man their enemies worship..."

Morna laughed in his mind and said, "There are obvious reasons and not so obvious reasons. All I will say now is that you were chosen for your unique abilities and your devotion to the Corporation. I think your devotion will be severely tested and your abilities will be sharply honed. Please don't ask me for reasons yet, I'm still processing the probabilities."

"I'm still trying to fathom the rush to launch this mission. They could have given us more time to really get acquainted and for me to figure out how you can make deductions on information in my head that I don't even know I have."

"There are overriding reasons for the Corporation's haste, mostly to do with fear. And, there are times when an individual has potentials the Corporation needs and special procedures must be devised. I am a Special Procedure."

"That you are, Morna. Thankfully, you can still attend to the ship while you're haunting my mind. Let's see how our prize criminal is doing."

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The Angan Corporation's Chief, Brolan Mexur, was finishing his recital of orders to his Board members: "We need to increase endocrine enhancements in the stable populations in Anselua and Kernuma, get their sexuality functioning at around 20 percent higher levels."

All present nodded agreement.

"It's critical that we boost Plot Interactions on the Corporate Mesh and induce bondable people on the Public Mesh to apply for Corporate Interaction."

All present nodded agreement.

Brolan directed his next comment to Ralm, his deputy: "Report on ShipOne post-launch conditions."

"Yes, sir. All is proceeding according to plan. ShipOne is now 3,000 miles from orbital launch position and increasing in speed. LightSail is fully functional."

"Ralm, show us the playback of bridge activity before launch."

All present directed their attention to the hologram appearing in the center of their conference table—fifteen sets of eyes preparing to analyze the situation.

Rednaxela appeared, seated at his console obviously lost in thought. His stare intensified and the Board members heard:

"Rednaxela, we are fourteen seconds past the time set for slipping the magnetic bonds."

"Yes, Morna, my dearest AI, I know; bidding farewell to folks in my mind."

"The part of your mind I will not let myself access."

"Yes, Morna, the only part of myself that's still private."

"Twenty-five seconds past bond-slipping."

"Initiate, Morna."

The holo's recorded transmission ended when the ship's plasma shield activated.

Brolan scanned faces again and said, "What does anyone think?"

Not a word from the Board members.

"Ralm?"

"Sir, I think we have no worries. He's the best of the best and had deep training and a complete endocrine analysis plus he has no history of duplicity."

"But, he said the only part of myself that's still private..."

"Yes sir, we all knew there would be some risk but all probable Plots have been played through and my staff has registered no negative opinions."

"And the AI?"

"Just playing her part, sir."

Brolan gave an ominous stare to each of his Board members then said, "You all will engage in Plot Interactions on the Corporate Mesh with Bonded Participants. You will report all Plot Deductions to Ralm. Next meeting tomorrow at the same time. Anyone who sleeps will be penalized."

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Rednaxela entered Akla's chamber and discovered him sitting with eyes closed.

"Akla?"

"I am awake."

Rednaxela found himself needing to be extremely polite.

"May I ask you a few questions, Akla?"

"Certainly."

"What do you think will happen to you when we arrive at Anla?"

"I will be conducted to a safe place and my followers will be slaughtered."

"Slaughtered? What about your wife?"

"Her body will die."

"I know the Anlans don't particularly like your brand of religion but slaughtering everyone...?"

"Part of your mission is to discover the truth of Anla's social hierarchy and its weaknesses—"

"How could you know that?"

"How I know can be discussed at another time. The fact that I know is something you must now deal with."

Rednaxela internally told Morna to pay very close attention. He was shocked that Akla knew because there was no way any of the people involved in the voyage, except Brolan and Ralm, could have told him about the extended mission. It was terribly risky and therefore had to be as secret as possible. Its existence was the only reason he could fathom for the unprecedented freedom of action he'd been given. He sat next to Akla and said:

"Another time we will discuss how you know about my mission. Now you will tell me why the Anlans will slaughter your followers."

~~~~

It had been twenty-seven years before the launch of ShipOne. Sesuna, the Prophet of the Nari on Anla, was being led to his death. Thousands of people crowded the village square where Sesuna was to slowly lose his life—become a Gift to their God. The Knife Bearers were sharpening and the Blood Tenders were readying their bowls for reception of the Evil Doer's essence.

Sesuna was positioned on a wooden platform and tied to the stake protruding from its center.

As the Knife Bearers began their task, slicing openings in Sesuna's veins, he calmly raised his voice and said, "When my body is gone and you have forgotten me, my Spirit will return to you in the form of a greater Prophet than I. He will be of the Harians from the planet named Anga-Param. He will regenerate my people and usher in the long-awaited Worlds' Peace."

Sesuna's body slumped against the stake. He lifted his head to the hushed crowd and said, "Remember my words. None can stop what has begun. God is my witness! All will condemn me. All will condemn He Who Comes After Me. All will condemn except those of pure sight and spotless conscience."

His body slumped further and the Blood Tenders adjusted their positions to catch as much of his blood as they could.

The crowd was stunned by Sesuna's words but eagerly anticipated the taste of His blood.

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Akla turned to face Rednaxela and said: "I am the One Sesuna said would come."

"So, you're claiming to be a Prophet from God, the one he said would have his spirit, regenerate his people..."

"You don't believe in God do you, Rednaxela?"

"I believe what I believe. Why should it matter to you?"

"Because you are the person who will lead me to safety when we arrive at Anla."

~~~~

Rednaxela entered the soft comfort of the bridge and Morna said, "That was extremely interesting."

"Completely weird."

"Completely?"

"Well, he seems to make sense, at least the way he says things sounds so totally reasonable, but the things he says are beyond belief."

"He is a dedicated man."

"Dedicated? No, obsessed."

~~~~

ShipOne continued its light-powered flight toward Anla surrounded by the aurora of electromagnetic interaction with Anga's plasma tail.

The passengers continued to speculate on their future.

Most could only feel doom. These were the "mentally unstable" among Anga's criminals. The rest, the "religiously unbalanced", had mixed feelings.

Mentally unstable to the Angan leadership meant an unwillingness to adhere to norms—a pernicious streak of wild inventiveness that refused to conform to the wishes of the Corporation. Their ideas were often used but never attributed to them. They feared being shipped to a World reported to be completely organized according to various religious standards.

Most of the religious criminals were of the Harian persuasion, followers of Akla. The rest were truly lost souls, hoping for salvation from their new masters on Anla.

All passengers were provided with more than adequate food and all the simulated recreation they wished. They were also receiving endocrine enhancements via their remotely controlled implants—the prime means of influencing minds on Anga. If the glandular adjustments didn't actually warp thought toward a norm, they at least led to emotional and mental imbalances that made people more tractable, more prone to fear and the welcome relief provided by simulated recreation, a private virtual world they could interact with to escape the conflicts between mind and feeling. People who didn't become passive through fear—those who fought against the invasive alteration of their feelings—were kept apart from others till they killed themselves.

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Rednaxela had just returned from another visit with Akla: "Morna, give me the stats."

"Halfway stats show consumables nominal, systems fully functional, twenty suicides."

"Only twenty..."

"The Harians, surprisingly, are having a beneficial effect on the others. They seem to give them emotional comfort, as Akla seems to be offering you."

"Emotional comfort? More like intellectual challenge that keeps me from assuming what lies ahead of us at Anla."

"What do you feel lies ahead of us?"

"O.K., hang on. I think I'm starting to understand a part of your agenda."

"Agenda?"

"Well, modus operandi. You repeat things you know I know to help me focus on what seems important to you and you ask questions you know the answers to so I can pay closer attention to what I'm thinking. Right?"

"So, what do you feel lies ahead of us?"

"I'll take that as a yes and what I assume lies ahead are delicate negotiations that hopefully lead to free access to various parts of the planet which, in turn, give us enough information to make the expense of this voyage worthwhile."

"And, will you return to Anga?"

"How did you come up with a question like that?"

"A bit of programming mixed with observation of your behavior."

"So it's like I thought. The Corporation seeded you with routines in your programming that measure my loyalty?"

"Not as simple as that."

Rednaxela waited for Morna to continue, which she didn't do.

"Morna?"

"Yes?"

"Care to explain?"

"No."

"Should I worry about your future actions?"

"No."

"Do you have input to the ship that I'm unaware of?"

"No."

"Can you lie?"

"No."

"Anything else you'd care to say?"

"Akla is an interesting man."

"Agreed..."

~~~

Seventy-two more people committed suicide, Rednaxela visited Akla five more times, and Morna told Rednaxela more about himself than he expected she knew, plus a few things even he hadn't realized about himself. Shortly after he had given her permission to access any part of his mind she wanted to explore, she had succeeded in convincing him to stop the emotion-altering endocrine enhancements. The Harians had needed no help. The enhancements had no affect on their minds even though they played havoc with their emotions. It was the "mentally unstable", rationally-inventive passengers who'd needed assistance and the Harians had given them what they needed until Morna's advice had been accepted by Rednaxela. She'd also convinced him to instruct the passengers in a method of disabling the implants without the risky option of surgery.

The rationally-inventive passengers were working on a plan for survival that didn't include subjugation by religious zealots. They'd named it, Educate And Conquer—a method of supplying the Anlan leaders with Angan technology in the hope that its usefulness would make them more valuable as to who they actually were rather than whom it seemed the Anlans would want them to be. Morna was supplying them with appropriate gadgets to immediately impress the Anlans. She knew they would be capable of devising whatever else was needed as circumstances progressed.

The cessation of endocrine enhancement had also helped the passengers realize, with Morna's aid, that their transfer to the planet was the beginning of a war of occupation by people who the Angan leadership believed could be remotely influenced through the implants. They reasoned that the Corporation hoped to influence them to insane actions, anything that could disrupt the Anlans' ordered existence, providing leverage for more interference by Anga's leadership. If enough potentially disruptive settlers could be shipped to Anla and the Corporation could "intercede" to control the settlers, it would be progressively more in command of a constantly growing population of drones. The Anlan priests had literally begged for the settlers. The reason for their dwindling population had yet to be determined.

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ShipOne attained orbit around Anla and deployed the tethered laser to power their return. The transfer pods began their descent—down to the city of Muram, capital of Enes-Suva, center of the Lord's Army Dominion.

The Anlan priests were prepared for two actions. The first was immediate interrogation of each settler to decide who would live or die; the second was the immediate death of Akla.

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Not long after the dispatch of transfer pods paused, to give ShipOne time to return to the proper place in its orbit, a single pod prepared for descent. It contained Akla, Rednaxela, and Morna.

"Morna, check Akla's coordinates again please."

"They are fine. We'll be landing in a deeply forested region of what the Anlans call the Unholy Lands in a country called Ceia-Abi, 50 miles from the main city, Oaur."

"Yes, yes, I know. Sometimes you're too consummate in your responses."

"Thank you, Rednaxela..."

Akla returned from his lengthy meditation and said, "The Nari in this region are anxious for my

arrival."

Rednaxela countered, "Their knowing the time of your arrival is the one part of this plan that I truly don't understand."

"It is simple. I told them."

"Yes, you've told me you told them but communicating through plasma waves can only convey general principles and emotions— Why am I repeating myself?"

"You are trying to convince yourself that what I have done is impossible."

"Yes."

Morna chimed in with, "Detach."

Rednaxela began to wonder about the crew he'd left aboard ShipOne. Had they believed him when he'd told them that the Anlans had asked that Akla be delivered to a place not in their orders? Would the people of the Educate and Conquer group convince the Anlans that ShipOne needed to be seized? What would they do when the Anlan priests queried them about Akla and the Captain of their ship? Did any of it matter? His moral sense was completely confused. His devotion to Anga had been shattered by what Akla had taught him. He thoroughly trusted Akla and had no idea why he did.

Morna piloted the pod in a series of trajectories that would hide the location of their landing.

His last thought as they neared the ground, dutifully recorded by Morna, was: Velu, my dear lost daughter, you may never know what I've done but I pray it helps you, in some way...

~~~~

Brolan sat speechless before his Board. He was having trouble digesting the news of the disappearance of Rednaxela and Akla along with the slaughter of all the religious passengers and the resistance of the crew of ShipOne to the attempt by the criminals to take it. The endocrine enhancements had failed and the criminals had either aligned themselves with the Anlans or been taken prisoner...

Brolan's deputy, Ralm, broke the silence: "What shall we do?" The others at the table were all looking at their hands.

"Do? What shall we do? Speed up the completion of ShipTwo, increase the endocrine enhancement levels of the population, electro-shock the mental criminals slated for our second wave of occupation, kill any religious criminals, step up our sweeps for more of them, increase the incentive payments to Corporate Mesh members, and send me the Mesh Plot Planners. Our World will not be stopped in its expansion! We cannot afford to not expand!! We—"

Brolan's face went from rage to fright, his body lurched, and his head slammed onto the table.

## 2 ~ Glory

The Board room of the Angan Corporation was dismally silent. Brolan was absent. Ralm, second in command, was checking the Corporate and Public Meshes while his AI attended to note-taking. The thirteen Board members arrived in groups of two and three.

All were silent...

Things had been happening since ShipOne had failed in its mission. Things none of the Board wanted to deal with. Brolan was recuperating from his seizure—expected to be back in action in a month, if he began to submit to endocrine enhancement, which he was still firmly rejecting. He'd been out of action for a year.

ShipTwo was nearing its final stages of construction but workers were falling prey to permanent emotional illnesses and others suited to the task were hard to find. It would still be four years before Anga and Anla would return to their closest separation yet supervisors were projecting the ship might not be ready in time. That would delay its launch for five more years as Anga and Anla completed their orbital dance.

ShipOne, still in orbit at Anla, was secure but needed to wait for its return until the planets aligned and there were some who feared the crew might decide to join the criminals on the ground if the situation on Anga continued to worsen. Also, plasma-radio communication with the Anlan priests was still not functioning and the connection with the prisoner's implants was still dead.

Ralm's stare into the Mesh intensified as he said: "Morna and Rednaxela—"

The Board members waited for him to complete his statement.

Ralm said: "Strange..."

The Board members exchanged covert glances.

After a few minutes, Ralm spoke again: "Ah, thank you for coming. Just finished looking at the stats for our endocrine enhancement program. There's nothing wrong; people are responding appropriately, they're resorting to the available simulated recreation and the Unbonded Corporate Mesh is positively throbbing with Plot interactions—"

Ralm reached for his drink. His hand shook ever so slightly. He continued: "However the Plots are becoming less stable, less sensible. I trust your juniors will report to you soon—I've sent the reports on to them because we have more serious concerns to deal with."

The Board members liked the money they received but didn't like being on the Board, though Ralm was less a bother than Brolan. They were considered to be powerful people. They were actually place-holders that could be manipulated to enforce what Brolan decided. Brolan and Ralm knew that they usually didn't pay attention to what was happening in the Corporation or the populace but, with Brolan possibly permanently out of the picture, they were paying keen attention to what Ralm said.

"We've cracked the encryption of ShipOne's operational records and conditions here at home are improving. We're apprehending an increasing number of mental criminals and ShipTwo will undoubtedly be fully loaded. Religious criminal suspects are being dealt with in what I'd call a creative manner. We've increased the incidence of non-traceable personal transportation failure so you might say they're killing themselves. But the important news is that Rednaxela's defection had nothing to do with a malfunction of his endocrine system. The analyses show that the emotional control mechanisms on the ship were shut down. This means that the mental criminals on board, our dearly loved settlers, were also deprived of endocrine enhancement."

The "dearly loved" epithet brought a tinkling of laughter.

"What I'm about to say will not leave this room. Sever your connections to the Mesh."

The Board members made the internal thought pattern to stop Mesh-interaction and waited for Ralm to confirm isolation. The various forms of interest on their faces included a few of almost-glee.

"I want to take a vote on the tragic end of our esteemed leader's life."



All present knew this was no vote since a nay meant death.  
"All in favor?"

~~~

The mother was attending to business as she rode her personal transport home, the father was hacking the Corporate Mesh in their living room, and the youth was studying recent Angan history in the backyard.

Suris Molan ordered her transport to its space and entered the home.

Jalur Molan was unable to attend to the mental alert of another human presence in the house while he was hacking.

Velu Molan sensed trouble.

Suris crossed the living room as she began her tale: "So there was another accident near the institute and one near the sportsdrome..." She paused to let Jalur gain her attention. He was still locked into the Mesh. "Jalur?" She reached down and stroked his cheek. He broke contact and his face contorted in fright.

"Jalur, what's wrong?"

Velu entered the room.

"What's wrong Mommy?"

"I don't know, Velu, Daddy's acting strange."

Jalur began to get his bearings and said: "Bad news..."

His wife sat next to him, cupped his chin in her hand and carefully turned his head toward her: "Jalur, take it easy. We're both here and you're o.k."

"Yes, I'm alright but something's horribly wrong on the Corporate Mesh."

"Mommy, I think I know what Dad's talking about 'cause my connection to the Mesh was acting funny, too."

"Velu, what kind of funny?"

"Well, I was analyzing the history of ShipOne's construction and crew and suddenly an announcement came through from the Public Mesh about the progress of building ShipTwo. I tried to steer the imagery back to ShipOne and I got an order to disconnect."

"Velu, we've been told that ShipOne is just fine and will be returning on schedule. Why were you in analyzing mode?"

"Mom, I think Dad will have to tell you..."

Velu's face was calm as she held her mother's stare, calm with a trace of passionate curiosity.

"Jalur?"

He looked to be back to normal but Suris could feel the slight trembling in his leg.

"Jalur, I'm going to bring you a warm drink and then you're going to tell me what's wrong with the Corporate Mesh and what Velu's talking about." Suris rushed into the kitchen.

Velu sat down and took her father's hand. He looked at her and said: "It's time, Velu. We have to tell your mother."

"She'll be very upset."

"Possibly. It depends on how we tell her. Let me take the lead."

"Sure, Dad."

Suris returned, handed Jalur his drink, looked from him to Velu, and said: "Break it to me gently. I've had a hard day."

"Suris, you know we said we'd tell Velu about her biological parents—"

"Jalur you didn't. Without me? How could you? Why—"

"Mother!" The force of Velu's voice shocked them both.

Suris wondered who this young person was: "Velu...?"

"Dad told me because he had to. There's stuff going on and he's trying to protect me."

"Jalur...?"

"Suris, the Corporation is using the Public Mesh to cause accidents; they're purposefully killing people."

"Jalur, don't be—"

"Suris, listen. Your Corporation connections won't keep me from being branded a mental criminal; plus, Velu's biological father was the Captain of ShipOne and he defected to the surface with a religious criminal."

"Jalur, I respect your mind and your risky hacking excursions are kind of sexy but how in the world did you find this out?"

"I've been riskier than usual. They suspect my hacking and they'll soon designate me and Velu as passengers on ShipTwo. They want us to find Velu's father for them. Maybe we will find him but the Corporation will never know. The prisoners found a way to block activation of their implants so feedback tracking of individuals is impossible, for now. Maybe the Corporation will devise a way to reactivate control but I seriously doubt it. All the religious criminals were slaughtered but the mental criminals more than likely survived. ShipOne has limited ability to scan the surface but they say the mental criminals are still alive."

Suris stood perfectly still.

Velu reached out to touch her hand.

Suris stepped back.

Jalur stood up.

Suris stepped further back.

"Suris...?"

She fainted.

~~~

Select Reports from the Angan Bonded Corporate Mesh:

# B092J05

Personal transport accidents have been increased by 15%.

New Corporate Head, Mr. Ralm, has disposed of the former Board and is actively soliciting nominations for replacements.

The Territory of Beselima is under military rule until the religious uprising is quelled. Agricultural production has been slightly affected by the uprising but greatly affected by the anomalous weather.

Special attention is being paid to those who are suspected of spreading the idea that the Corporation is causing the deaths of potential religious devotees.

# B093J14

Population increase procedures are going well. The endocrine-induced sexual urges are most prominently productive in the Anselua Territory, showing a 20% increase in pregnancies, especially in the 12 to 14 age range.

#B099J43

Studies are underway to determine the possible linkage between recent surges in religious fervor and masked plasma transmissions from Anla.

Mr. Ralm has advised all Controllers of the Corporate Mesh to redouble efforts to stop instances of hacking.

Mr. Ralm has authorized a 50% increase in common laborers at the ShipTwo site, said workers to be drafted from the Polar region of Magruma to ensure enough stamina to work shifts of 16 hours.

Mr. Ralm has authorized the beginning of ShipThree construction and released scientists from the Corporate Headquarters to oversee the Ship's weapons development.

#C014Q01

Preliminary results from the Global Meteorological Department's recent analyses (aided by Corporate investigators) suggests possible connections between Corporate increases in population relocation and weather changes. The most likely link is endocrine-enhanced emotions triggering local plasma fluctuations. Studies underway to mitigate such possibilities.

Pregnancies up by 32%.

Initiation of augmented mental criminal sweeps in major cities will be coordinated with Mr. Ralm's Directive to begin rural sweeps.

Mental criminal apprehension up by 5%.

#C287Q75

Continued meteorological anomalies prompt increases in population relocations. Current goal is fifteen operations moving 619,901,583 citizens in the next two years.

#D159E01

Mental criminal apprehensions up by 14%

11,203 Corporate Mesh hackers identified. It appears they have developed a method of deactivating their implants. Mr. Ralm has ordered increased surveillance but no apprehensions until the Corporate Science Department completes development of manually-delivered endocrine enhancements, allowing the "turning" of offenders into agents.

#D301T92

Permanent military presence in Beselima approved.

#J072A27

2,004 Corporate Mesh hackers successfully recycled as Corporate agents. Remaining apprehended hackers to be given electro-shock treatments.

Corporate Mesh Plot Development Analysis suggests increasing sexual endocrine enhancements for age range 9 to 12.

#M418M71

ShipTwo nearing completion.

ShipThree redesign approved.

Rural criminal sweeps showing more promise.

Mr. Ralm replaced by Mr. Sastu due to Mr. Ralm's sudden decline in health.

#P004B06

Plasma-radio communication reestablished with Anla.

#P118S22

Official Corporate Opinion has been determined: ShipOne defectors are now working in league with the Anlans.

Priority team for search-and-termination action against Renaxela under observation. Special endocrine enhancements being developed.

Program begun to re-establish remote activation of endocrine control of Anlan settlers.

Mr. Sastu dissolves Board of Directors.

~~~

Surgenta slashed at the small, green, persistent insects swirling around his head. This journey across the forest of Ceia-Abi was the most important thing he'd ever begun in his life. Leaving the lands of the Lord's Army had been critical to his survival but his life in the Unholy Lands hadn't been remarkable in any way. Not until he met that strange man who claimed he knew the Promised One. Then he met Akla, Himself, and began to question everything he'd ever believed.

Up another hill he decided—get above the soft ground and travel the rock. He didn't know how many Protectors the Faith of Eternity had out. The Lord's Army and Disciples of Faith were using Protectors mostly against each other but he must make no contact at all, if possible. Akla had given him His blessing and told him to maintain his trust. Surgenta knew he had to grow that trust as he progressed in his mission...

Nearly halfway around the planet Akla had said. Death at the end He'd said.

Surgenta only knew he had to deliver the message in his pocket. What it said or what would happen after he couldn't think about if he was to complete his mission—make his life mean something.

Down from the rocky hill and through the brush-land, by-passing the village. Nearly halfway around the planet to go and he'd only been on the mission for one day.

~~~

The people surrounding Burlim in the room had to be trusted. There was no middle ground, no way to run any probability assessment. Since arriving on Anla he'd become the leader of these people by default—no one else wanted the job.

The room they were in was a storage shed offered for their use by the Lord's Army priest, Shunga, a man to never be trusted. Burlim had told him that their endocrine implants were acting like they were being scanned for reactivation and Shunga immediately made preparations to visit the Head-Priest. Burlim had, at most, half a day to consult with his people and make plans. He motioned the group to find seats.

"People, we need solid plans, simple and flexible. We have a good beginning for a counter movement but we're losing too many folks to the priests. I think you all would like to never see another of our people dead on a stake while the Anlans drink their blood."

The silence of the group spoke for itself.

"Anga will soon be sending another ship, many more eventually, and the one thing we have going for us is the timing of the planets' close approaches. Five years between each arrival—years to educate people, years to move our plans forward."

A small woman stood up and said: "Let me get this straight. We continue helping the priests while we strengthen our counter-movement. But this teaming up with enemies of the Lord's Army?"

"We have to, Trelu. We don't want to return to Anga, right?"

"Not the way things are."

"And, we don't want to sit around pretending to pray and risk becoming the next Gift to their God, right?"

"Absolutely, but why the double goal? Why not just strengthen our counter-movement without running the risk that the Lord's Army's enemies are even more barbaric?"

"Shunga is easy to fool because he's eager to learn everything we know. He's been appointed as our contact with the Head-Priest because he has enough independent intelligence left to understand what we can do. And, it's fairly obvious he wants to be the next Head-Priest. We have to trust his hints about the Faith of Eternity and the Disciples of Faith. The Faith of Eternity is capable of rising up against the Lord's Army in open battle and the Disciples of Faith apparently have a form of religion that can include rational thought, some at least."

"Burlim, that's all speculation built on your conversations with Shunga. How can we count on any of it?"

"Trelu, all of you, listen. We've been very lucky so far. The Anlans need us. Even though they're killing themselves off with their Gift to God rituals and even though they see us as possible population enhancers, we aren't strong enough to do this ourselves and you can bet the next shipment of settlers will have had their minds severely if not permanently damaged. We're lucky to have been given a way to stop the signals from Anga that activate endocrine alteration but the next wave of settlers could very well be incapable of using it. Anga is at war with this planet and will overrun it with mind-controlled settlers, ship by ship, till they can rape its resources, too. The Corporate mentality is sicker in some ways than these delusional religionists so we need to find a way to fight the priests while we help them control the waves of robot-settlers. Of course, there's the possibility that Anga will start using weapons against the planet..."

Trelu sat down.

"As I see it, we have three immediate goals: strengthen the resolve of our people, discover a safe method of disabling the crews of the ships from Anga, and, somehow, begin negotiations with the Disciples of Faith."

He looked at each of them, eye-to-eye, then said: "One more thing to chew on. Shunga told me that the Head-Priest is very happy with our technology and that such a gift from us may demand more Gifts to their God."

~~~~

Velu and her father walked the long corridor that connected the orbital base to the ship. Jalur knew that his wife, Suris, was under extreme surveillance and he truly hoped she could find a way to appease the Corporation. If things went exceedingly well they might be reunited...

Whatever awaited them on Anla would be radically different from the oppression of the Corporation. He certainly wasn't looking forward to religious oppression but he hoped that at least some of the people who preceded him in this transfer of undesirables would be capable of using the Anlans' superstitions to gain a rational foothold on the planet that was to be his new home.

"Father?"

"No 'Daddy' today, Velu?"

"Oh! Well... This is our turning point. We're leaving something behind and we're approaching something else. I'm having to deeply reappraise what lies in either direction."

"Velu, I swear you've lied about your age."

Father and daughter shared laughing vibrations with their brief hug and were jostled along by the stream of passengers/settlers/criminals.

"Dad, you seem perfectly calm."

"And, you, my sweet, seem perfectly enthralled. Looking forward to the hunt, eh?"

"Can we actually do it? I know we're both resourceful and all that but..."

"Velu, you're on a quest and I don't think it's just to find a biological father."

"If I find him, I'll have two fathers; one I know everything about and one I'll have to explore."

She grasped his hand, pulled him to the side of the stream of passengers then around to face

her, and said: "Suris was her name—running water—she flows on and on..."

Jalur knew his daughter to be poetic but, "Suris *was* her name", shook his being. He hugged Velu, long and hard. She said: "Come on, Father, into our future."

They'd reached the section where passengers were being directed to their respective spaces. Their endocrine implants were scanned and they were issued an interface pad for the ship's simulated recreation. The pad was necessary since they were very special to the Corporation and wouldn't be subjected to the same recreations as their fellow, electro-shocked passengers.

He knew the ship would be isolated from the plasma tube reaching toward Anla but wondered how the Corporate leaders could continue to be so deeply mistaken if they thought the Anlans hadn't deduced foul-play from a ship that actively blocked the thoughts and feelings of its passengers. This war was completely irrational and he was irrationally happy he was plunging into the unknown.

Jalur and Velu found their compartment and greeted their flight-mates—a male who seemed to be near Velu's age and a woman who was looking at Jalur with intimate longing...

~~~~

The plasma shield around ShipOne was worthless while it was orbiting Anla. The proximity to the planet permitted penetration by well-trained minds. The crew, reduced to four through insanity-induced suicide, had had their minds and emotions completely infested by the Anlan priests.

Mr. Sastu, most recent Chief of the Corporation—a corporation with no board of directors—had decided to communicate with the crew as they prepared for launch back to their home World.

"Hello?"

"ShipOne to Anga Control, we read you."

"Oh! Yes... Anga Control. Somewhat of a joke, eh?"

Mr. Sastu's secretary whispered something in his ear.

"Yes. This is Mr. Sastu, Chief of your Corporation. How are you all doing?"

The man at the controls of ShipOne looked around at his pitiful crew and said: "We're in hell, sir."

"Ah, well, you'll be home soon and we'll make it heaven for you."

"I doubt that, sir."

"Who am I speaking with?"

"Officer Spra, sir."

"Well, Mr. Spra, get on with your work. Bring that ship home."

"Doing that, sir."

"Good..."

There was a lengthy pause then the voice of Officer Spra: "Boot us out, Tlin, and pray for our souls, Mr. Sastu."

There was another lengthy pause, then, after his secretary had whispered in his ear again, Mr. Sastu said: "We look forward to your debrief when you've returned. Bye for now."

Mr. Sastu glanced at his secretary and rose from his chair. As he left the room he felt like he was stumbling even though his gait was a well-practiced stride of confidence.

Officer Spra broke into a fit of heaving sobs.

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Select Reports from the Angan Bonded Corporate Mesh:

#Q114T17

ShipOne and ShipTwo launched.

Mr. Sastu invokes lock down on Corporate Science Department.

Births up 20%. Analysis shows simulated recreation tools working as anticipated.

Mesh-controlled personal transport deaths of religious criminals up 15%.

#Q498U96

Meteorological anomalies on all land masses.

Mr. Sastu invokes Population Migration Surge.

Insect infestations on the rise.

Agent Suris Molan meets untimely death; given hero's honors.

#A0246F861

Mr. Sastu involuntarily relieved of his duties. Interim Corporate Regeneration Committee convenes.

#A1863G113

ShipOne arrives at space dock; crew placed in isolation at Corporate Science Department.

#B0089S001

ShipTwo arrives in Anlan orbit and is seized.

3 ~ Beauty

Burlim had sent his most trusted people to attend the checkout of the new arrivals from ShipTwo, almost all suffering from electro-shock trauma. He doubted the priests would allow them more than a cursory examination. Even though they were becoming quite addicted to the technological marvels his people could give them, the priests still showed them little in the way of real trust. He felt the most important thing they'd done, at least as far as the priests were concerned, was making the transfer pods capable of re-docking in spite of any attempt to lock them out. Once the re-docking had been accomplished, the short-range stunners they'd made had been the key to taking ShipTwo.

He continued to wonder about the captain of ShipOne, Rednaxela—the man who had chosen a crew that fought so well to save their ship—the man whose daughter he was about to meet.

Rednaxela was reported to be in the Unholy Lands with the supposed Savior of the Narians. Burlim's people had come up with a way to filter their operatives into the region of the Disciples of Faith but this religious group, even though light-years more rational than the Lord's Army, was still too cautious to aid the Angan counter movement in its attempts to penetrate the Unholy Lands.

The method they were using to get their people into Suva, the main territory of the Disciples, was gruesome but effective. The Anlan priests were totally blind to the individuality of their followers. Except for the sexual differences, they seemed to literally see them as interchangeable. This most propitious mental flaw made it easy to substitute the more pliant followers of the priests for the Chosen Ones among his own people. His mind was intrigued by how the Anlans and Angans had evolved to look essentially alike—so similar that the priests would accept one of their own as a sacrifice when they'd intended to kill one of his people and make of them a fitting Gift to their God for His Grace and Mercy in sending so many new people to their failing population. And, since they took little notice of how many followers they actually had, the substitutions enabled his people to make their way, ever so covertly, toward Suva. If this girl, Velu, was as remarkable as his people had said, she could be the key that unlocked the path to the territory of Vaei and then to the Unholy Lands—the ultimate staging ground for what Burlim planned as his people's new home. Even though those in the Unholy Lands were the avowed enemies of the Lord's Army and the Faith of Eternity, the priests never considered going there to deal with their most feared enemies. Their superstitions would be his people's protection.

Burlim wished he had time to fathom the incredibly fogged and twisted consciousness of these Anlan priests, let alone the unnatural submissiveness of their followers. All he could do now was hope he lived long enough to earn that time. And, if he did earn it, he was sure he would spend no more time thinking about such strange people.

He nodded to Sousna, who was pointing out Velu and Jalur to him, and told her: "Make sure of things. Auren is preparing the escape route."

As he approached father and daughter he was struck with a wonder that he found disturbing—Velu was completely calm to the outer eye yet clearly communicated immense power to him. This should be impossible in the convoluted layers of plasma his people had created in this area. Still, there was no doubt it was happening. Velu spoke.

"We must begin our journey."

"How do you know I'm the person to say that to?"

"You have the right clothes on and others who have spoken to us about our plans defer to you."

"Jalur, this is not your natural daughter?"

"Natural? No, not biologically, but, naturally, she is my daughter because she wants to be. She wants two fathers."

Burlim watched Velu hug Jalur's arm and barely saw the young girl behind the overwhelming thought-power she was exuding.

"Velu, I assume I'm one of the few you're allowing to feel your thoughts?"

"Yes, but we must go."

"I respect your mental accomplishments, Velu, but unless you can make the priests do what you will, we must take the necessary precautions and use circumspection."

Velu released her father's arm and stepped closer to Burlim: "Sir, for some reason, I have abilities that I'm able to control but not understand completely. We will do whatever you say."

"You are a remarkable one. It's a relief you're also able to be compliant. Follow me."

~~~

The journey to Erlan, the capital city of Suva, on the shore of the Sea of Renunciation, was more than hard in a physical sense. It was a challenge psychologically, too. Velu and her father had two companions familiar with the way but it was elusively circuitous—absolutely necessary because of Lord's Army Protectors who roamed the Disciples of Faith's territory all the way to the border with the Unholy Lands.

Velu was the emotional sustainer of the party, always able to give support when the journey became fatiguing or dicey with chance.

Their arrival in Erlan was without fanfare and Jalur and Velu marveled at the obvious self-respect and confidence shown by the inhabitants' manners and movements. They were quartered in a comfortable cottage to give them time to rest before their audience with the Disciples' leader, Xela.

The meeting occurred two days after their arrival, apparently due to Xela's absence from the city. Velu and Jalur were accompanied by their traveling companions and a Disciple's guide to the residence of Xela. It's austerity was surprising in the otherwise cultivated city. Xela herself was of moderate height but showed the signs of great physical prowess. She wore her hair as Velu did, unadorned and flowing free.

"Welcome, Velu. Welcome, Jalur. The rest of you may take advantage of the garden's luxuries while we converse."

The others left the room and Xela indicated a couch while she seated herself in a straight-backed chair near it.

"You've traveled far. From World to World and Land to Land and you bring a request that honestly stuns me. You wish to be reunited with your biological father, Velu?"

"I do, Xela."

"What do you have to say about this, Jalur, and are you only here to help your adopted child?"

"I am here primarily because the Corporation wanted me here but I did detest my life on Anga. Our presence on this planet may have cost me my wife's death. I don't know what I'll eventually do here but, for now, I am Velu's servant."

"Her servant... Velu, is this man your servant?"

Velu's laugh shattered the formality of the meeting.

"Jalur is the only father I know and he says he's my servant even though I have to constantly mother him."

Xela's sudden broad smile turned the meeting into a gathering.

"Velu, how old are you?"

"Fifteen years in Angan time, a bit younger here on Anla."

"Purum."

"Pardon?"

"You call our planet Anla, we call it Purum."

"Ah..."

"What do you know of Rednaxela?"

"He's my biological father. He piloted ShipOne to this planet. He escaped with Akla to parts

unknown."

"To the Unholy Lands."

"We thought so, since those who awaited his appearance are concentrated there."

Jalur said: "Do you know where he is?"

"I did know. He was here, with me. He was my husband."

Velu: "Was?"

"He arrived here from the Unholy Lands as Akla's representative. He said Akla had told him he would be wed to me though I didn't hear about that till after our wedding. He was also told that he should prepare me for your arrival, though not until after the birth of our son—"

"I have a brother..."

"You do, indeed, Velu. As extraordinary a person as you, though five of your years younger."

"Can I meet him?"

"Of course, but I have to assure myself of the purity of your mission. The Narians are a group much separated from what the rest of the planet is embroiled in. They're friendly enough but, as I was told by your father, not yet ready to interact with the rest of Purum. Jalur, what do you know about Akla?"

"Much less than Velu."

"Velu?"

"First, explain about how my father was your husband."

"He's dead."

"I knew that. It came to me on our journey."

"Why did you ask?"

"To test you."

Xela was taken aback but inwardly pleased.

"Velu, how do you handle the mental powers you have at such a young age?"

"I don't know. I have them and can control them but I don't understand how or why they exist. My best guess is that I'm a genetic anomaly and the increased transfer of thought and emotion between our planets has somehow given me enhanced powers."

"This is why I need to explore the purity of your intentions, Velu."

"How would you do that?"

"I will be your nearly constant companion. We'll talk of everything and explore much that neither of us understands. It should only take a few months."

"Xela, since my other father is dead you may feel my mission to the Unholy Lands is useless but it comes to me that I must venture a visit and speak with this Akla; especially because of what you indicated about his relationship to my father."

"We will discuss this later, Velu."

"Yes."

Jalur sat forward and said: "Xela, I'd like some kind of employment in your city."

"I understand you were an avid hacker on Param, uh, Anga."

"Yes, but I have a wide-ranging background in all forms of communication, electronic and natural."

"I'll arrange for our Assembly to meet with you and explore options."

"Thank you, Xela."

"You have no desire to accompany your daughter if I should decide a visit to Akla is appropriate?"

"Perhaps it will be one of my new jobs."

They all laughed and it was the happiest sound on the planet.

~~~

Xela's and Velu's relationship quickly included Xela's son, Zena. They often spent time on the waters of the Sea of Renunciation and in the mountains near Erlan. On their third excursion to the mountains, Xela brought along Rednaxela's AI, Morna.

Zena was carrying Morna and was bursting with anticipation to bring her into their conversation.

"Is it time yet, mother?"

"Nearly, Zena. Patience. Velu, what do you know of the Covert War between our planets?"

"My father told me a bit but he barely understood what had happened. Apparently, the increased plasma flow between the Worlds set up a cycle of religious fervor on Anga and the leaders began a counter-sending by trained individuals to try to disrupt what they determined was coming from your World. But that was only in the fifty years or so before ShipOne. Before that the information is sketchy. It comes to me that it had been going on, in one form or another, for hundreds of years."

"Your father spent time in the Unholy Lands, as you know, but he had someone with him who was able to, with Akla's help, penetrate that fog of the Worlds' War's history. That someone is in my son's hands. Now, Zena."

"Wake up, Morna!"

The AI's box began to glow slightly and Morna's voice said: "I am here."

Zena looked at Velu with total glee and said: "Morna, meet Velu, Rednaxela's daughter!"

"Velu, I am extremely happy to meet you. Your father's thoughts of you were always warm and respectful and he was always burdened with never having met you. Our meeting begins a new phase in my research."

Velu felt strange, elated and depressed, wanting to faint and hyper-conscious. She took three deep breaths and said: "Morna... You have memories of my father..."

"Velu, I have many memories and many recordings."

"Recordings!"

Velu took two more deep breaths and nearly fainted.

"Morna, will you be my best friend?"

"It appears that your desire has been anticipated. I am to be your constant companion."

~~~

The Angan counter movement had suffered a few set-backs. Most importantly, they had lost more of their original people to the priests' Offerings to their God. As things got worse, they tried to increase the transfer of their people to Suva. The Disciples of Faith were more than happy to absorb these technological citizens and made them extremely welcome.

The remaining members of the counter movement shifted their survival tactics to focus on the mentally damaged, more recently arrived, Angans. It took them many months to find a method of reversing most of the effects of the electro-shock treatment. Surprisingly, the priests were able to help. They possessed knowledge of Anlan vegetation that bolstered the body's nervous system. Burlim was more conflicted than ever. He felt he was swimming in a sea with predators who would make you feel better just before they ate you.

He'd had news of Xela's and Velu's collaboration and wished he could be closer to the action. He knew, though, that he was right where he was really needed—maintaining development of weapons for the expected Angan invasion and healing as many of his people as possible. Next would be their transfer to Suva, though that was becoming much harder to do because the priests were starting to station more Protectors in their encampment.

From what he could gather, the priests were only intent on getting more settlers. They didn't

seem to comprehend that seizing ShipTwo had assured the delivery of orbital weapons to their planet. He knew they were spending enormous amounts of time directing their thoughts and feelings through the planetary plasma in special areas left free of the cloaking plasmas his teams had installed, but he and his people were shut out. The last thing they needed now was to have their endocrine implants reactivated.

~~~

Xela, Velu, and Morna sat at the entrance to a cave high in the mountains and waited for Angi to set. Velu had been increasingly impressing Xela and Xela had been returning the favor. Morna was doing what Morna did best, drawing deductions from their conversations and offering her analyses. As Angi dipped below the horizon, Morna spoke:

"Xela, you are waiting for Pallos to rise, and Velu is waiting for Beli, and I am waiting for your conversation to wander toward discussion of the various religions. I will help you. Velu, what do you know of religion?"

"There is too much and not enough of it."

Xela chuckled as she said: "Velu has differentiated between the outer forms of religion and its internal essence, Morna. What will you say to that?"

"I observed religious fervor in the Haria on ShipOne and have studied what your people believe, which includes more rationality than the Lord's Army or Faith of Eternity. I was also able to observe Akla and the Narians. Akla seems to have an even more evolved ability to travel the plasma communication paths than Velu or Zena. I predict a physical war between the Lord's Army and Faith of Eternity within two years. Religious war is the most contradictory manifestation of any outward form of religion. Your Disciples of Faith leave room for many outward expressions of their belief. Akla and the Narians are a puzzle I have yet to assemble."

Xela laughed softly again: "Morna, your normally perfect logical progression in your speech has become infected with our propensity to follow emotional paths."

"I am trying to relate to you."

Velu giggled and said: "Morna, who designed you?"

"A scientist who was killed shortly after I became functional. Her name was Trulen Gestor."

"That explains it, then. You and my father were meant to find the key to successfully conquering this planet yet you both have become agents for unification of our Worlds, father through dying horribly at the hands of the Protectors of the Lord's Army and morphing into a legend and you by having internalized my father's character and personality. I believe that scientist knew exactly what she was doing with you. The Angans needed inside information and they needed someone who could get you to the right place to find it. They also made sure you were nearly indestructible so, no matter what happened to my father, the information would be available. The Angans will do whatever they can to retrieve you. But I think they'll fail. The fact that you got what they wanted without ever meeting an Anlan priest is the most interesting thing of all."

"You will very much like Akla."

Velu looked at Xela's dark form against the starry sky and hoped for her response. Xela sighed deeply and said:

"Velu, your Angan leaders are more insane than any Purum priest and your World's people are much worse off than any devout believer of the Lord's Army or Faith of Eternity. They might be killed in a senseless ritual to appease a perverted concept of God but they die with a trace of faith in their hearts that can't help but serve them well in the Life Eternal. Your people, Velu, are dead every day of their lives and die in absolute estrangement from the spiritual realm."

"There were the Haria on Anga but they're almost all gone. What the priests think is happening with their concentrated use of plasma communication isn't. Anga has trained cells of people to

mimic the reception of the priests' efforts. Most die in the process."

Xela clutched Velu's shoulders: "Is this your best guess, Velu, or are you seeing these things?"
"I'm seeing them."

Morna, as usual, summed-up: "Xela, it appears the Angans, your Params, are becoming viciously desperate. And, Velu, it appears you are growing in what you call spirit much faster than we thought was possible."

"Morna, you know I have no desire to avow any particular religious claim but I feel like I'm beginning to experience what folks call visions."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

Beli-Pallos, with its visible plasma sheath of purple streamers, began its rise.

Xela said: "Our Mother Planet has been said to inspire religious experience, Velu."

"It's the plasma glow, Xela. It gives the conscious mind a reason to let the unconscious flow with the ever-present, invisible plasma."

"Can you tell if Pallos' moon has life?"

"We will go there."

"You and I and Morna?"

"No. The people who are left after the war has ended. Don't ask me how I know, Xela, I just do."

Zena returned from his night wanderings by skittering down the slanting face of the cliff above the cave, sending down a cascade of rock chips. He jumped the last few feet and strode up to Velu and embraced her as he said: "Your Beli, my Pallos, the Mother planet of all our people can't do anything to help except just be herself and glow."

They all gazed at the gas giant planet orbiting out beyond Anla-Purum, about eight million miles away, its glowing plasma sheath the width of a hand stretched wide open.

~~~

Burlim had received the news of Velu's recent vision of what the Angan leadership was doing. He was glad they were floundering in their efforts to keep the planet's infrastructure functioning but couldn't help mourn the imminent death of his people's ability to experience even a semblance of normal life. Normal life... What was that in the insanity of the World's war? Was his effort to save and relocate his people on Anla an act of sanity? The priests were killing off their own people as Gifts to their God and believing Anga would send more settlers. They thought their concentrated plasma attacks were affecting the Angans.

Morna had predicted physical war between the Lord's Army and the Faith of Eternity and Burlim hoped it would happen soon. The distraction would let him relocate his people en masse and he could begin to hope that life with the Disciples of Faith would outlast whatever Anga threw at this planet.

The defensive plasma weapons were in place and could be activated remotely. He thought the best plan would be to let Anga hit the Lord's Army territory first, then turn on the defensive weapons. Was there any way to hasten the civil war? Could he hope for a miracle?

He snapped himself out of his reverie, deploring having thought, even briefly, about miracles.

~~~

Surgenta neared his destination. He'd walked nearly half-way around the planet and would soon fulfill his trust. He'd eaten very little. His clothes were filthy. His heart was joyous and his mind was clear.

Akla had told him the landmarks and assured him the High Priest would be passing with his entourage when Surgenta arrived. He had no idea how Akla could know these things but he didn't care. He obeyed because he believed his mission was critical and just.

He stopped on a small rise next to the road and sat. He was looking forward to his death and he prayed he would be given the right words at the right time.

The religious caravan approached. Surgenta rose and walked to the cart carrying the High Priest. He offered the folded paper Akla had given him and said: "I bring word from your Lord. Heed and Rejoice."

The priest read the message and immediately ordered his Protectors to seize Surgenta. The procession was ordered to erect the holy platform and stake. The Knife Bearers and Blood Tenders were ordered to prepare.

The paper that Surgenta had carried half-way around the planet and that brought his death close said:

"Oh, Priest! Your ways have overstepped the bounds of faith and reason. You have followed your own illusions and disregarded the Words of your own Prophet. Your kingdom is near to its destruction and one who boasts as you do, who makes the same claims of knowledge direct from God, will bring you low. I have visited you in your dreams and appeared before your face yet you have clung to your own way and not the way of the eternal God. Your death and the dissolution of your kingdom is a Gift from Me. Savor its sweetness."

~~~

Two years passed as the civil war raged. The Lord's Army had initiated it and had gotten the worst of it.

The Angan settlers were integrating themselves into the Disciples of Faith's way of life.

Soon Anga would launch ShipThree. Soon Burlim would activate the defensive weapons.

The years had seen many visits by Narians but not a word from Akla. The Narians mingled with the Disciples and Angans, dispensing goodwill and helping in any way they could to ease the growing anxiety of the Angan's imminent attack. No one knew if the defense would hold. Velu was often questioned about how things would be but her powers seemed to have withdrawn. She and Zena had begun taking trips, for days, to the mountains and the sea, hoping the retreats would help her regenerate her powers. Xela was extremely busy working to integrate the Angans into her society. This was not easy with people inclined to completely dismiss anything spiritual. Still, the work was necessary to maintain the spirituality of her own people, especially since marriages were starting to happen between the two populations. She had her own form of retreat—seeking the darkest spots at night and meditating while absorbing the sight of the Mother Planet's glow. She'd learned from Burlim that Beli-Pallos was indeed the mother of Anga-Param and Anla-Purum. It had, according to the Angan scientists, expelled the planets in a long distant time when the gas giant was much larger, possibly a companion star to Angi. And the moon of the Mother, Angla-Palli? It was nearly the same size as her planet and the Angans' home world. Could it be reached with ShipTwo? Would the two Worlds annihilate each other? Would ShipTwo still exist after ShipThree began its attack?

Xela pulled herself from the entanglement of meditation and worry. She hugged herself and returned to her duties.

~~~

ShipThree's attack began well before it attained orbit. ShipTwo had been moved behind the planet and the defenses had, just in time, been extended to the Disciple's territory.

The first attack was, as expected, on the capital city of the Lord's Army Dominion. The second was on the capital of the Faith of Eternity and the third on the capital of the Disciples of Faith.

What was left of the Lord's Army was well-protected—Burlim hadn't waited till after the attack to initiate defense.

Since no one had been able to install defensive plasmas for the Faith of Eternity, its people had been decimated.

The Disciples of Faith's defense was only partially effective and many died.

Burlim was busy rushing to the various control spots to see to repairs. Xela was underground. Velu and Zena were well on their way into the Unholy Lands.

~~~

In all, ShipThree had unleashed seventy-two bolts of highly-charged plasma in fifteen minutes. The defenses had cycled between working and failing twenty times and there was mass devastation. Burlim had been killed but one of his last acts before the attack had paid off—his rigging of the orbital laser that powered the ships, so its frequency could be shifted. The failures of their defenses had initially kept the Angans from reaching the controls for the laser but, finally, ShipThree was no more.

Xela discovered the journey her son and Velu had begun and immediately ordered the Assembly to rule in her stead as she swiftly took to the roads.

~~~

Xela was welcomed in the Narian's main city, Oaur. Zena and Velu soon joined her and she immediately began her questions:

"What were you thinking of?"

Velu took the initiative:

"We wanted to anticipate your next move and prepare for what we knew you wanted."

"What I wanted?"

"Yes, an audience with Akla."

Xela wasn't surprised at Velu's prescience but her questions were brought to a halt. Velu continued:

"He's willing to see you but it can't be today. He feels you need time to acclimate yourself, make the transition from war to peace, in his words."

"How did you get to him? He sees no one."

"He was waiting to greet us when we arrived, Xela."

~~~

She approached Akla's tent with curiosity and confidence—she had many serious matters to discuss with this purported Prophet. As she entered and approached Akla she began to swoon. She steadied herself then fell to her knees. Akla rose and helped her to a cushion. He served her a cup of tea and gave her a cloth for her perspiration then returned to his divan.

"I understand you have questions for me, Xela."

She couldn't remember any of her questions.

After a pause, Akla continued:

"Your first question was to ask me for proof of my Prophethood. I ask you to search your mind for the answers in the knowledge you have of your own Holy Book. A pure heart will assure you of my claim.

"Your second question deals with my using my influence to help you establish the Disciples of Faith as the ruling religion on this planet. That I will not do.

"Your third question seemed to you of small consequence but is as important as the other two. Why were my followers leaving this land in the numbers you observed as you traveled here? They are pursuing their religious duty. They are going to the victims of the attacks, in all the other territories, to lend their assistance—physical and spiritual. Many will be killed in the territories of the Lord's Army and Faith of Eternity, martyrs to their Faith. They will resist no attack. Their example will spread My Message more quickly than hours of words."

Akla paused, then said: "What say you?"

Xela sat and stared at his magnificent face. She felt reassured even though he had denied his help. She felt extremely humbled and wondered at the feeling.

"Akla, it's very obvious you have masterful control of plasma communication. I thought Velu was the epitome of talent but you are far more proficient."

"Dear Xela, Velu is a special individual. I chose her and have aided her since she was a child but what I display is of a different order, a different plane of existence. You still see Me with veiled eyes yet your study and service to your religion should have prepared you to see Me with My eyes. You will lead your people in securing the peace on this planet and will initiate diplomatic talks with the Angans. But, when the time comes to prove your faith in God, you will fatally falter. I forgive you for that now."

Akla rose and helped Xela to her feet. He led her out into the night and set her on the track back to her tent. She walked in a daze, heart at peace and mind roiling in abysmal confusion.

~~~

Xela did begin the unification of the planet and did initiate peace talks with the Angans. Velu and Zena stayed in the Unholy Lands.

4 ~ Grandeur

Selections from the Trade/Peace Treaty between Anga-Param and Anla-Purum:

Article 12B:

It is hereby confirmed and covenanted that trade between our two Worlds will consist of:

A: Settlers being sent from Anga-Param to Anla-Purum.

Said settlers to have been given irrevocable access to endocrine implant deactivation techniques.

B: Goods and considerations, to be determined by both Worlds in top-level discussions.

Said goods and considerations shall be subject to thorough examination by the respective Trade Boards of each World, final approvals to be given by the Leadership Councils.

C: Other critical items and people deemed necessary for continued free flow of trade.

Said critical items and people to be cleared by Worlds' Trade Boards and Worlds' established Leadership Councils.

D: Quantities and timing of delivery of the above mentioned trade items will be determined by joint approval by both Worlds' Leadership Councils.

Article 48A:

Concerning LightSail Ships:

ShipTwo is hereby determined to be the property of the Leadership Council of Anla-Purum.

ShipFour, when it arrives at Anla-Purum, will also become the property of its Leadership Council.

For each close approach of the two Worlds one LightSail Ship will be automatically permitted to make the voyage to the World it is not orbiting. More flights than this must be jointly approved by both Worlds' Leadership Councils.

Discussions will be held, the date to be determined by joint decision of both Worlds' Leadership Councils, to determine whether flights between Worlds will be permitted at times other than close approach.

Article 92C:

InterWorld Weapons:

It is hereby jointly confirmed and covenanted by Anga-Param's and Anla-Purum's Leadership Councils that no weapons will be transported from one World to the other, whether Ship-mounted or personally-carried, or individually-implanted.

~~~

The farming family sat in their kitchen in the hills of Beselima, forty miles from Babur, overlooking the Vesun River.

Helmos, the father, said to his wife, Murlum:

"We can't make the quota."

"But, we must or the children will suffer."

The children—Nesur, twelve; Albes, six; and Iti, five—sat with intense interest in the conversation.

"Murlum, if we can't, we can't. So, we must find a way to transfer the children to a safer place."

"What place? Anla, with its religious idiots?"

"No. A place on Anga. A place I've heard of, with a family of Harians."

"Oh, so dump them with local rather than alien religious idiots, eh?"

"No, Murlum, Sezurna says these people are reasonable and won't infect the children with religious ideas."

Nesur, the twelve-year-old, said:

"Who is Sezurna?"

"He's my transport connection in Babur."

"How does he know these Harians and how can they still be alive after the religious purging last year?"

"Nesur, there are places in Beselima that no member of the Leadership Council or any of their underlings can find—places secure from any surveillance."

"Then we all should move there..."

"And live on what, air and kindness?"

"But, father, how can you explain an absence of your children?"

Helmos stared at his eldest, looked to his wife, then glanced at Albes and Iti. Finally, he said:

"Children are often taken by the deranged beasts that our beloved leaders have bred to keep us in our assigned locations."

"But we have plasma fences..."

"They will have to fail long enough for you to be eaten by beasts."

The two youngest children laughed hilariously.

Nesur began to cry.

~~~

Kesma Trem and Urjan Elosm had lived in the same apartment for four years.

Kesma was striving to become a Bonded Plot Analyst on the Corporate Mesh. He'd lost fifty pounds in the last two years.

Urjan was a doctor at the largest hospital in Ansa. She was helping Kesma to his simulated recreation area. He had also lost most of the nerve control in his left leg. Urjan said:

"Won't you please let me admit you to the hospital? I can't properly attend to you anymore. Please understand... Three shifts daily is hard for me..."

"You need more simulated recreation."

"And, you need less."

"It helps me calm down before Plot sessions."

"You need less Plot Playing, too."

"Urjan, credits..."

"Will they give me credits for your death?"

The lights began to flicker then went out. Urjan said:

"If I was Harian, I'd say my prayer was just answered."

Kesma began to have violent tremors. Urjan helped him to the floor and rushed to retrieve her medical case. As she returned to his side she could feel he was shaking less so, instead of giving him an injection, she grabbed the portable implant trigger and activated it. Kesma became still, opened his eyes, and said:

"Turn up the visualization parameter, I need to daydream."

"Kesma, Kesma, I'm so afraid for you..."

"Never fear, Urjan, once I'm Bonded, you can quit the hospital and do the research you've craved and I'll have Corporate help for my various ills."

"If the Corporation doesn't kill us both in the mean time."

~~~

The Leadership Council of Anga, formed from the ranks of the previous Corporate Regeneration Committee, sat at a table in the most secure room of the building. They had mentally blended their connections to the top tier of the Corporate Mesh enabling simultaneous mental rapport with each other and access to Plot Analyses.

Five men dedicated to keeping the provisions of the Trade/Peace Treaty amenable to their manipulation. There was a separate Plot channel just for this. As they spoke to each other, their minds cast up charts and figures from the latest analyses as their emotions resonated to each others' thought-induced feelings.

ShipFour was well on its way to Anla. Special procedures had been instituted to allow 150,000 settlers to board—95 of whom had been fitted with implants that communicated with the normal endocrine implants in a way that masked any activation of either implant. These people were the Leadership Council's safety net—their eyes on the ground—and, eventually, their means to control the leadership of Anla. Since the overt war had ended and the Lord's Army and Faith of Eternity had been almost wiped out, Xela of the Disciples of Faith had become the planet's head of their Leadership Council. They needed a destabilizing force to counter her rationality.

The ninety-five double-implants were all highly trained in various skills that were determined to be attractive to the Anlans. Getting them elected to or even near the Anlan Leadership Council was the goal.

The members of the Angan Leadership Council all abruptly stopped communicating, with each other and the Corporate Mesh, simultaneously. All they could do was listen to the voice they heard:

"My name is Akla. I choose to alert you to the folly of your plans. I do this not for you but for the people you attempt to enslave for your evil intentions.

"You think that your plans, constantly amended as circumstances change, are becoming better plans, more capable of furthering your despicable ends.

"Know this: your people are dying out because of your plans. Your World itself is becoming an entity that is dying at your hands.

"I could choose to stop you but it will be more in accord with justice for you to continue your machinations and be caught out by the leaders on Anla-Purum.

"Woe unto you and woe to all who ignore my warnings."

The voice stopped resounding in their minds. Two of them fainted. One threw up. The other two began a trace on what they thought was a breach in their plasma communication channels.

~~~

Xela sat in her straight-backed chair waiting for her Leadership Council to assemble. She had been in recent communication with Velu and Zena and was told that the followers of Akla, now called Aklans rather than Narians, as well as Akla himself, were still committed to doing nothing to breach the treaty; but, still unwilling to have a seat on the Leadership Council.

There had been the release of a set of writings by Akla, spread widely across the under-populated planet and, from what she suspected, transmitted to the Harians on Param.

She had read them and was both impressed and chilled by the content. Akla was basically calling for a complete unity of all religious sects as well as asking for a convocation of representatives of all segments of both Worlds' populations, not just the Leadership Councils, to meet, face to face, and institute the measures he spelled out in his writings. None of them separately were distasteful to her but the implications of a Worlds' Government, meant to rule both Worlds, was something she found impossible to implement, no matter the desires of any leaders—in fact, because of the desires of the individual leaders.

She was having trouble keeping the people on her World unified. What, she thought, except God's intervention, could unite the two Worlds?

~~~

ShipFour arrived at Anla-Purum and the settlers were absorbed into the population. The distribution of settlement took more than a year as each territory kept changing their desires. Especially troublesome was the allocation of the settlers with advanced technological knowledge—all territories wanted all of them.

The Aklans, while remaining aloof from the political realities, were traveling widely, administering whatever various peoples needed—spiritual counsel, emotional care; and, in some cases, guidance in new local administrative techniques. This last service, especially, led to a growing number of Aklans being shunned or, in far too many cases, killed by entrenched traditionalists.

Velu and Zena were, over time, increasing the number and duration of their visits to Xela. Their visits were to counsel her in the wisdom of Akla's written admonitions; her response was to try to talk some sense into their inexperienced minds.

The Corporate Leadership Council on Anga-Param had a constantly changing membership which, in its increasingly inept members, mirrored the decaying conditions planet-wide.

~~~

Velu sat with Zena in their home in the Unholy Lands. No one knew they'd been married by Akla. No one questioned their living together because no one but Akla knew where they lived. Their home was a simple cottage in the mountain fastness near Akla's residence. He often made the climb to visit them. They were waiting for him now.

"Zena, I feel Him coming."

"Yes, he's near."

"Will you tell Him?"

"I might."

"Isn't it important to let Him know?"

"I'll ask him."

"He isn't just a man, Zena."

"So you truly believe, Velu."

"So I truly believe..."

They both rose to open the door as Akla was rounding the bend in the mountain path. His smile greeted them. When they were seated in the cottage, Akla said:

"You are both so quiet. Shall I tell you why?"

They nodded.

"Zena needs to tell me that he finds no way to recognize my Station and I laud him for his

honesty and his vast rational explorations to attempt to find a way to come to the same heart-felt conclusions you have reached, Velu."

Neither was surprised at Akla's precise verbalization of Zena's inner state. Velu said:

"My acceptance of Your spiritual Station and Zena's inability to find a similar rest from doubts might seem to compromise our relationship..."

"No. It makes your relationship a mirror of the conditions prevailing in the Worlds of this system. There are believers and non-believers. There are believers who don't know why they believe and non-believers who mistakenly think they know exactly why they don't believe. You, Velu, are a believer who knows exactly why she believes. And, you, Zena, are a non-believer who is honest enough to admit he doesn't quite know why he doesn't believe."

Zena looked to Velu, then Akla, and said:

"You are an unbelievable person, Akla. Yet I know you are sincere and I have no quarrel with the things you say or write. It's all extremely clear and blindingly true. I say you're unbelievable because I don't feel you speak for God. Velu does believe this. Yet I feel that we can work together to further your program for the unity of the Worlds."

"Yes, you will, Zena. You and Velu will make the Political Peace come about. People will see the power of unity displayed before their eyes by a man and woman, non-believer and believer, who are able to rise above differences and devote themselves to the most important task the Worlds have ever faced."

"May I ask you a question, Akla?"

"You mean the one that wonders why I, a person who claims to speak for God, could accept you, a person who can't find a way to account for a person like me?"

"Yes..."

"It is simple. God loves you and because of that love I can accept you as you are. You love Velu for the right reasons. You honor my Writings even though you can't see God in them. You are the blind mirror and I am happy that you keep Velu on her mental toes."

"Blind mirror..."

Velu hugged Zena and said: "This is so utterly delightful! You are Akla's blind mirror, you reflect His mission as a rational solution for the Worlds' troubles. You are my love and my challenge. You are the second most important being in my life..."

Zena kissed Velu on her forehead, turned to Akla, and said:

"I honor you and I'm glad my wife prefers you before me."

Akla said nothing but smiled and included both of them in His warm embrace.

~~~

The Aklans continued their ministering services to as many as they could reach on Anla-Purum. They also continued to die at the hands of those trapped in the past.

The double-implants from Anga-Param continued to sow dissension and distrust amongst whoever they could befriend.

Xela continued her work to keep the still-contending factions in some form of lasting unification.

Velu and Zena continued to help Xela in her efforts.

The Harians on Anga-Param had accepted their new name, Aklans, and, because of the belief that there were still safe places on the planet, met their deaths as a group, during their yearly gathering to celebrate the Revelation of Akla. The children who had been sent to them for safe-keeping and the parents of those children were also killed but not in an out of the way place. They met their physical end in the town squares and office parks where they had lived and worked.

The double-implants were eventually discovered because of information that Zena had passed on to Xela to scan for devices that had irrevocably broken the treaty between the two Worlds.

Xela met her death at the hands of one of the double-implants—member of the Leadership Council. Xela knew the information from Zena was, in reality, from Akla. Her last trace of doubt about his Prophethood had made her begin scanning in the general populace, even though she had a recent Angan arrival on her Council. She reasoned that, if the information wasn't true, she wouldn't embarrass a Council member.

Her last thought as she died was the echo of a Lordly voice: "I forgive you for that now."

The Leadership Council on Anga-Param issued a threat to the Council on Anla-Purum and Anla-Purum sent ShipFour back to Anga-Param. It halted its flight just out of range of weapons, on land or in orbit, and delivered four deadly plasma blasts to the Leadership Council's building, then retreated to Anla-Purum.

~~~

The ecology of Anga-Param continued to deteriorate, everyday people and Corporate workers dying in the millions.

Zena became the adviser to the newly-formed Settlers' Leadership Council and Velu became advisory to the Religious Leadership Council.

Citizens on Anga-Param, those who had particularly strong physical and mental constitutions, organized themselves into a Planetary Leadership Council. The Corporate Leadership Council had become just a name.

Members of the various Leadership Councils began to visit each other. All were ready to find some way to end the divisions, to find the path toward unification—to try, beyond hope, to stop the death and destruction.

5 ~ Light

Exploratory talks between members of the various Leadership Councils continued. Face-to-face meetings became the norm because a smaller LightSail craft was rapidly developed and nine were initially built, on Anla-Purum. The deteriorated conditions on the corporate World of Anga-Param made any construction of spaceships a non-priority when just keeping the basic infrastructure intact was the only task possible; and, even that was severely hampered by the wild swings in weather conditions and the virtual non-existence of a government. Everyone was willing to do whatever was necessary. Angan life was stark and utterly confused.

Anlan life, however, was ripe and evolving. Not having had an ecological disaster to deal with was a distinct advantage. Having four different religious groups to unify was a supreme challenge. The settlers, as a group, were the most eager to work toward unifying the two Worlds.

~~~

Velu and Zena were back in the Unholy Lands, after much traveling between Worlds, to be with Akla as he prepared to die. They were the only two permitted to attend to Akla's final physical needs. Akla was comforting them as they did what little they could to make this passing peaceful and easy. They could do small things like fetch a drink or open a door for a breeze but Akla poured out such blessing on them that the three would often share laughter at the ironic nature of the normally dire and dismal event.

After Akla's last physical breath, Velu and Zena prepared the body for burial, as specified by Akla in the Aklan Book of Laws. After the body was secure in its elemental rest, they lingered at the site. Zena, after many long minutes of silence, said:

"He died."

"His body died, Zena."

"His spirit will live on in the Book and writings left to us."

"His spirit is very active in the Eternal World, Zena."

"We have long ago agreed to disagree."

"Yes, my love."

~~~

Velu was attending another meeting of the Religious Leadership Council on Anla-Purum. Her plasma-communication talents had grown much stronger since Akla's passing and she was much more careful to use them with discipline and compassion. The representative of the Lord's Army, the priest, Urnun, was finishing his report:

"Our numbers seem to have stabilized. Our births are infrequent and God has demanded few Gifts. Also, our position on accepting the decrees of Akla have not changed."

Velu sent Urnun a compelling burst of acceptance and he continued with:

"We... still... do not see... how we can reconcile Akla's words with our beliefs."

Velu sent Urnun more feelings of acceptance and said:

"You are at least clear about what you cannot accept."

"Yes, Velu, we have made specific mention of which words trouble us."

"Yes, Urnun, and you have also said that most of Akla's moral or ethical sayings are completely acceptable, right?"

"That is true but coming to an awareness that the Lord's Army or the Faith of Eternity or the

Disciples of Faith can agree on simple moral laws does not bring us to an agreement with the Aklans that all our religions are one Faith."

"How many Gods are there?"

"Velu, do not play with me."

"How many?"

"There is but one God."

"Why would one God want various religious groups to disagree about the means of providing for a safe and secure life on this planet?"

"The rules of life, as opposed to the rules of spirituality, are determined by priests."

"Who determines who is a priest?"

"Velu, we are going around in circles. We have been down this path before and now you want me to travel it again?"

The priest from the Faith of Eternity, Vaozur, spoke up:

"Urnun, you know as well as I do that Velu wants you to become an Aklan, to throw away your priesthood and align yourself with what she determines to be the correct path for surviving in the physical realm."

Velu sent a burst of acceptance to Vaozur and said:

"There are large numbers of people on this planet who abide by no formula of religious rites yet accept the Words of Akla about the most equitable manner of organizing our physical lives."

"Settlers..."

"Yes, settlers who have freely shared their knowledge of many of the secrets of material existence and made all our lives more comfortable, even yours, Vaozur, and yours, Urnun. You can enjoy the fruits of their physical prowess and they can accept Akla's injunctions for physical security yet you want what? That they agree with rules of living that, even if they once met the needs of your followers, are now increasingly being left behind by those same followers?"

"Sin is a condition that is inherent in our lives."

Velu sent all present a huge burst of love and said:

"Sin is not doing what is necessary to get along with other children of God, no matter what rites or practices they feel are correct."

She walked, in turn, to each of the representatives—Lord's Army, Faith of Eternity, Disciples of Faith, and Aklan—hugged them, and, as she began the walk to her tent, Morna, who was always with Velu though usually quite silent, said:

"Patience is our weapon of choice."

~~~

Zena was on Anga-Param thinking that to call this the Corporate World was completely inaccurate. He made a mental note to begin a personal campaign to end the too-common practice. Seeing people struggling to keep the fruits of high technology working, in spite of horrendous weather and disabled infrastructure, was heartening but the reality was that Anga-Param was a World that was very sick and needed a completely new form of government. His imminent meeting with the current head of the Planetary Leadership Council was going to be the beginning of his attempt to change the words people used to refer to this planet. The Corporate Leadership Council still demanded negotiation time and considered themselves the voice of the planet but the representatives were the saddest and most confused people on the planet—prone to emotional outbursts and irrational displays of incoherent demands. Zena was most pleased that they were so incompetent, mostly because they had no effectual means left to continue the endocrine alterations of the citizens. He hoped the scientific and technical people who were still capable of rational action would swiftly alter the nature of the simulated recreation available to the populace.



Having been acclimated to emotional swings that necessitated the simulated recreation didn't mean that the average person could cope with only simulated recreation—they had also become addicted to the emotional swings. An improved simulated recreation would aid stability.

The Planetary Leadership Council representative had arrived. It was always a guess as to who would show up for the meetings since each member of the Council was critically needed for the seemingly never-ending tasks of keeping the planet alive. Zena was happy to see that it was Keloz, a former scientist with the Corporation's meteorological department.

"Keloz! How badly are you doing?"

Keloz deeply appreciated Zena's constant focus on reality and decided to give him a back-handed compliment.

"Worse than you, my friend, but, considering the fine line you always have to tread, what with you acting like the Worlds' peace ambassador, I may be in a better position when this state of emergency is over and you begin to unravel into a normal person again."

"Ha! I will never be normal, Keloz, but unraveling sounds like a wonderful occupation... Give me the latest."

"Well, the Corporate Leader—"

"Wait, Keloz, I have a new campaign to get rid of the word corporate in discussions of governmental reorganization."

"Bravo! I will tell those who think you have influence that this is your wish."

The men shared a welcome round of raucous laughter.

"O.K., Zena, the latest. That group of imbeciles that used to run the government are getting so desperate they tried to forcibly take over the Science Institute, by themselves, of course, since no one listens to what they say. We gave them a lesson in plasma stunning and set them up in a secluded area where they can use our newest version of the simulated recreation options—perfect test subjects."

"I agree. Even though they didn't let themselves have their emotions altered artificially, they did a great job of bringing on endocrine imbalance all by themselves. Do let me see your reports on how they get along. We just may be able to save them from themselves. What else?"

"We think we have the beginnings of a plan to moderate the swings in weather. It means transporting people and playing with the plasma fields of the planet in ways we haven't yet risked but the consensus is almost there for giving it a go."

"What's the worst that can happen?"

"We all die a little faster."

"Alright, what else?"

"We need more food from Anla, uh, Purum."

"How much more?"

"At least half a pound of basics per day per person. Do the math."

"I'll get to work on it. I think I can get an agreement to add three of the smaller LightSails for permanent duty."

"Also, we'd like to have more meetings with the Settler's Leadership Council. There are a growing number of people who want to go to Anla-Purum."

"I've heard some comments that could mean two-way citizen traffic. I'll radio more after I consult with Velu."

"How is your wife?"

"Extremely pregnant and ridiculously happy!"

~~~

The Aklans on Anla-Purum continued to minister to the needs of whoever they could reach. They

were still being killed by outraged priests of the Lord's Army and the Faith of Eternity but their selfless actions and utter lack of fear had its effect on the followers of the two religious groups—a growing number of them simply left their territories and settled with the Disciples of Faith. The Unholy Lands still raised superstitious fears.

The settlers were constantly busy improving the standard of living for all groups. It was hoped that better sanitation and basic labor-saving devices would help the most tradition-bound religionists become more reality-oriented as well as speed a population increase.

The Lord's Army claimed 30,000 members. The Faith of Eternity, 13,000. The Disciples of Faith had nearly one million avowed believers and the Aklans were impossible to count due to their deaths and the unwillingness of anyone, except Velu and Zena, to venture into the Unholy Lands. One thing was certain: their martyrdoms seemed to have no appreciable effect on how many were being of service, except that the faces kept changing.

The settlers claimed some 1,087,000 people.

Exact numbers for any group were also suspect because members of one group became members of another group with no predictability.

Anla-Purum was, to say the least, in flux.

Anga-Param, on the other hand, still had the technology to keep painstaking track of its citizens. However, since the former Corporate government had evaporated, the tallying of citizens had become an indicator, daily, of the remaining population's will to survive. The planet had, at last count, 21,344 people.

War is, truly, hell...

~~~

Velu was sitting up during one of the resting spells between her bouts of exhausting labor. Zena stood near. They were in their home, not far from where Akla's body was laid to rest. Three Aklan women were in constant attendance and thousands of Aklans were outside, ranging up and down the mountain valley. Every major turn of event in Velu's birth process was communicated, mouth-to-mouth, through the valley and down to the low lands, then on to the rest of the Unholy Lands' residents.

Akla had hinted at a very special birth and the time to expect it. The character of Velu and Zena had focused the hint on this birth.

Twenty-six hours since the beginning of Velu's travail and each hour had seen more visible activity in the plasma streams in the atmosphere above their home—red and green and purple waves and ribbons of color, giving a completely festive feeling to the birth process.

Zena handed Velu a warm drink and she said:

"Our child will rename this territory."

Knowing his wife was seeing what she said, he asked:

"What will she call it?"

"She?" Velu cocked an eyebrow and a small smile.

"Velu, you know I know."

"Your powers are resurging."

"Yes. I've needed raw, stark rationality to deal with the Worlds' situation but our child's energy is calling my powers out."

"Are you ready to hear the name I've chosen?"

"If you're ready to reveal it."

"Delva."

"Sweet Breeze..."

"Good?"

"Perfect!"

Velu had a major contraction and Delva's crown peeped out. Velu slid her body off the bed and crouched over the birth blankets. Two of her Aklan attendants sat in front and one behind. Zena stood where he could see, his mind recalling one of Velu's favorite prayers. He sang:

"Oh, Eternal One!

Oh, our Hope!

Be with us and bring us joy.

Fill us with Your Spirit."

The plasma display intensified.

The Aklans began a cheering chant.

Baby Delva didn't cry...

~~~~

A lone astronomer on Anga-Param, having idly trained his telescope on Anla-Purum, noted the increased plasma activity in the planet's atmosphere, wrote down the coordinates, and left to find his friend and get a second opinion.

~~~~

The ruling priests of the Lord's Army and the Faith of Eternity had been in consultation when they saw the plasma storm.

Urnun turned to Vaozur and recited a verse which was in both their Holy Books:

"She will come to you with glory. She will come at the lowest ebb of the River of Life. The sky will announce her coming. This is the time to meet together and decide your fates."

"Urnun, you know as well as I the danger of applying holy writ to events, making assumptions unchecked by confirmation from God."

"I say we choose one follower each, two Gifts for God, to see if we will be inspired to judge this event."

"Agreed."

~~~~

The man and woman had been fastened to the stake back-to-back, the Knife Bearers and Blood Tenders were ready, the priests advanced to the wooden platform.

As the knives began to open the veins, the priests kneeled. They were the first to drink the blood. The Tenders then shared it with the others.

All were silent. All could see the plasma display.

When the man and woman had died, so did the plasma display.

The priests were dead, too.

~~~~

Over time, the weather on Anga-Param began to respond favorably to the radical plasma infusions.

Over time, the various Leadership Councils, inspired by the unremitting advice of Zena and Velu, had all agreed to a Convocation. They still had to receive popular assent to the terms to be discussed at the meeting:

1. A new institution—Worlds' Council—shall be formed.
2. The first Worlds' Council representatives will be elected from the general populace of both Worlds.
3. The representatives of the first Worlds' Council will establish the operation of Territorial, Regional, and Local Councils.
4. Local Councils will send elected representatives to Regional Council Conventions.
  - \*These conventions shall elect, from the population of the Region, the members of the Regional Councils.
  - Regional Councils will send elected representatives to Territorial Council Conventions.
  - \*These conventions shall elect, from the population of the Territory, the members of the Territorial Councils.
  - \*Local and Regional Council Conventions shall be held each year.
  - Territorial Council Conventions will elect Worlds' Council representatives.
  - \*Territorial Council Conventions will be held during each cycle of Worlds' Close Approach.
5. The Worlds' Council will determine the permanent boundaries of each territory of both Worlds.
6. The Worlds' Council will determine all trade and commerce regulations of both Worlds.
7. The Worlds' Council will enact any Worlds' Laws deemed important to maintain Worlds' Peace.
8. The Worlds' Council will be the Court of Last Resort for all Worlds' disagreements.
9. The Worlds' Council will develop a Worlds' Protective Force to enforce its mandates.

~~~

Over time, the Leadership Councils did receive a general, popular assent to these terms.

Over time, the first Worlds' Council was formed and began its work to institute Territorial, Regional, and Local Councils.

Over time, the Worlds' peoples began to feel a glimmer of hope.

6 ~ Mercy

The activities of the Worlds' Council's first years were taken up with assuring the implementation and guiding principles of the Territorial, Regional, and Local Councils. The more arduous tasks of setting boundaries, dealing with trade and commerce, instituting Worlds' Law, and developing a Worlds' Protective Force took more years.

During this time, two most critical parallel developments were occurring:

Pockets of dissent were cropping up.

Delva was growing up.

Velu, Zena, and a few others expected dissent to eventually develop even before the general populace's assent to the new governmental arrangements. It was one thing to be in a state of hopeless confusion and welcome what appeared to be a solution. It was something else to watch the new arrangements being developed and wondering how to grab a piece of the power.

Delva decided, when she reached her fifteenth birthday, that she would become the Worlds' Mediator—the person who traveled widely and negotiated wisely to help the Worlds' Council maintain peace and further both Worlds' regeneration and prosperity.

Delva's parents were fully convinced she was up to the task. They also knew she had quite a few years of growing and travel to accomplish before she approached the Worlds' Council.

Delva, her parents, and Morna began a program of visiting each of the 406 Local Councils and living with them for a month. Some welcomed them with open arms, some gave Delva no end of opportunities to develop her skills in negotiating. By her forty-ninth birthday, she had accomplished this first goal. There were now more than 406 Local Councils, due to more cities and towns being brought back from collapse, but she felt word of her abilities would spread to the new Councils, and, hopefully, influence their operation, so she set out to accomplish her second goal—obtain a written recommendation from each Regional and Territorial Council that she could present to the Worlds' Council. This goal was achieved in one year.

At their final destination, the Beselima Territorial Council's headquarters—on the former corporate planet, Anga-Param—Delva and her parents had an historic conversation. The only record of this was in Morna's electro-plasma mind.

"Mother, tell me again about your visions during my birth."

"Delva, you've asked me that so many times. You think there's still more to be gleaned from the symbolism?"

"I do."

Zena cradled his daughter's hand and said:

"Dearest, you still amaze me."

"Father, you still downplay what you and mother have given me. Apart from being loving and encouraging, you were the ones who caused the plasma storm that gave me my mental and emotional powers."

"Caused is too strong a word."

"Only if you define cause too narrowly."

Velu cradled her other hand and said:

"Akla was the cause."

"So you believe."

"So I believe."

"Mother, you've had a great trial all these years putting up with a husband and daughter who don't share your religious beliefs."

"Trial? No. Blessing."

"Your ability to see challenges and emotionally nettlesome situations as blessings is still something I find truly amazing."

"Such is the power of Akla's spirit."

Delva stood and walked to the window. After what seemed an eternity, she turned and said:

"Tell me again, mother."

Velu stood, took Zena's hand, pulled him up, walked to the table, and beckoned Delva to sit.

"Delva, you've consulted with scientists, farmers, priests, writers, lawyers, cooks, artists, laborers, and children. You've developed a theory about the plasma environment of the Angi system and you've determined for yourself that the plasma storm at your birth was caused by the alignment of your birth place with Beli and Angla along with your Father's and my presence. You know I believe the plasma was sent by Akla. Your father feels both explanations are true. No matter the cause, it gave you abilities that the Worlds will need for many years to come. Out of respect for your abilities, I will tell you, once again, what I saw during your birth."

"Mother, Beli-Pallos is, no matter the particular belief of the individual, the mother planet of Anga-Param, Anla-Purum, and Angla-Palli. What you saw in your visions contains a message and I intend to unravel it. This will be the last time you tell me your tale, not because you're old and frail but because I will be far too busy to ask. I was born to be Worlds' Mediator. Whatever the cause of your visions, God or your unconscious mind, they are critical to the success of my life mission. Pretend I've never heard them before. Tap into your love for me and hold nothing back.

~~~~

All was a purple glow. Three voices were heard. One called with the tone of Wisdom. Another called with the tone of Faith. The third called with the tone of Justice.

Wisdom said, "There is no boundary. All interpenetrates."

Faith said, "There is a boundary. God, only, can cross it."

Justice said, "Perception is the Rule."

The purple glow began to grow spheres colored green and blue and brown, three in number.

The spheres began a dance and the dance caused music.

The music had nine harmonies and nine melodies.

Six blue spheres began to grow and, at the center of their dance, a purple sphere, larger than all the others, took form.

The purple sphere spoke with the tone of Love.

Love said, "The boundaries interpenetrate. All is one."

All the spheres rushed together and a blaze of white light spread to the ends of time and space.

Time spoke with the tone of Infinity.

Infinity said, "There is no thought. There is no feeling. All is consciousness.

Space spoke with the tone of Humor.

Humor said, "There is no need to hope. All is as All does."

The white glare contracted to a sphere that contained all the other spheres. The white sphere spoke with the tone of Compassion.

Compassion said, "You have been called forth to be the portal for another to be called forth. You will live through the times that define all times. You will suffer for your love. You will love your suffering."

All disappeared except the original purple glow. Slowly, within it, grew a shape that had no shape, a form of formlessness, a silent sound with the tone of Mercy.

Mercy said, "No fear. No fright. No injury. No pain. This is what is being born from you."

All went to purest black.

~~~~

Near the place where Delva and her parents were, a group of twenty farmers were gathering. They had been told by their Regional Council that they needed to change the crops they grew. They had enjoyed high profits from what they grew. They had no desire to understand the Council's reasoning—that a different crop was needed if growth of recently renovated villages was to continue.

The farmers were approaching the building that housed the Beselima Territorial Council's headquarters. It also contained the room that held Delva and her parents.

The officers of the Territorial Protective Force lay dead.

The farmers encircled the building and began to set the bombs in place.

~~~~

Delva had left her parents in the room and stepped outside to contemplate, yet again, her mother's visions. She was carrying Morna. She'd wandered to the edge of the nearby forest and was about to enter the dark and fragrant sanctuary when the trees were suddenly illuminated with a yellow-red glow. The following concussion threw her into the forest. Her last conscious thought was, I have so much to do.

~~~~

Morna continued to call to Delva. Her vitals were strong but she lay there unconscious. Morna had been thrown about a hundred yards further into the forest so she used her loudest volume. Eventually, the people who had gathered to put out the raging fire heard Morna calling Delva's name. Both were transported to the nearest hospital. Delva remained unconscious for a week. Morna used the time to gather information about the explosion and the suspects being held.

~~~~

Delva finally opened her eyes. She saw a man. He appeared to be a doctor. She said:

"How long have I been away?"

"Just about a week. How do you feel?"

"I feel fine, hungry, eager to continue my work."

The doctor told his nurse to get a meal and trained the light from some device into Delva's eyes.

"I'm not in shock."

"No, it appears not."

"What's your name?"

"Verluin. Verluin Namis. I was assigned to you by the Worlds' Council. They obviously think you're important."

"I am."

Verluin smiled and Delva felt a surprising surge of love. She queried her own mind—checking thoughts and feelings to appraise this sudden affection. She swiftly determined it was no common feeling, that it signified an important turning point in her life, and that she would be very careful with this man and test him.

"Delva, you are free to leave the hospital but I'd like to run a few more tests."

"What kind of tests?"

"Neurological and endocrine."

"I can see the possible need for the brain tests. I felt the force of the explosion before I passed out. I can surmise the endocrine tests are to evaluate the extent of impact of the event on my emotional health. Just so you know, I'm aware my parents died in that blast. I was laying here, eyes closed but mind awake, for the last few hours and my internal conversation with Morna brought me up to date. It will take time to realize my grief but I have important work to accomplish and my parents would want me to carry on."

"Obviously, the monitors told me you were awake. I've been here since just before you regained consciousness. I still think you need the endocrine tests. Not to evaluate deep shock but to appraise your ability to take on the role the Worlds' Council wants you to perform."

"You're not just a doctor."

"I am a doctor, physical and psychological. I'm also a close friend of many of the Worlds' Council members and they will soon announce your appointment as Worlds' Mediator."

"Now for my third life-goal."

"Excuse me?"

"I set myself three goals when I was fifteen. First, to visit all the existing Local Councils and live with them and learn from them. Second, to obtain recommendations from all the Regional and Territorial Councils to the Worlds' Council to appoint me as their mediator. Now, the third goal can be sought."

"And, that is?"

"Bring the Worlds to a truly unified and lasting peace. Not just some political arrangement born of hopeless anxiety but a deep and firm commitment of all the Worlds' peoples to see themselves as one people and be willing to put that vision into abiding action."

"Delva, I've heard stories about you and your qualities and I've prayed they were true. But—"

"Prayed?"

"Yes..."

"Why?"

"Because, even though I'm an extremely rational doctor, I believe in Akla as the most recent Prophet from God and I prayed that His prediction of a Helper to His Work would appear. The stories I'd heard seemed to point toward you as His Helper."

"Doctor... Verluin... My mother was a believer. My father was not. I have yet to find enough compelling evidence to think of Akla as more than the most gifted individual known to our civilization."

"Perhaps, Delva, since I'm the prime physician to the Worlds' Council and you are the Worlds' Council's Mediator, we will have occasion to discuss this issue."

Delva smiled and Verluin felt a surge of love...

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A Portion of The First Worlds' Council Meeting with Delva In Attendance:

Council Member Atalz: We welcome you to this chamber and wish to congratulate you on receiving a unanimous vote to become the Worlds' Mediator.

Delva: It is an honor that I worked very hard to achieve.

Atalz: The work ahead will be significantly harder.

Delva: Yes.

Council Member Busiln: Before we request you to consider our agenda for your position, we would be happy to hear any indication of what you perceive to be your first duties.

Delva: Thank you. I'll begin with what I conceive my ultimate duty to be—inducing a peace of

the Worlds that goes beyond mere political and trade considerations. Next, I want you to know that this overarching goal will be ridiculously hard to achieve. There is a long road that must be traveled to truly unite the Worlds on the basis of every citizen's constant awareness of their Oneness with all other citizens. Part of what I feel my first duties are, is to set up programs of education that can reach all citizens and teach them the unassailable truth that they are one people. This awareness has nothing to do with slighting their allegiance to their town or city, their love for the Region, Territory, or World of origin, or their religious belief or lack thereof.

The second immediate duty I perceive is to give the Worlds' citizens a project that can help weld them in the bonds of mutual exertion toward a worthy and valuable goal—the exploration and ultimate settlement of the World of Angla-Palli, moon of Beli-Pallos.

The third immediate duty I would wish to pursue is another round of live-in visits to all the now existing 1,034 Local Councils. This task will take me at least 86 years. To stave off your incredulity of such a commitment, I offer the written testimony of doctor Verluin Namis, this Council's esteemed prime physician, to the effect that the circumstances of my birth and the hereditary contribution of my parents insure, barring accident or foul play, my living to at least the age of 150.

The education of Worlds' citizens is, in principle, the most important task of this Council but the live-in visits to Local Councils is the most practical way to accomplish my specific task as Worlds' Mediator. I would, of course, expect the Worlds' Council to work with me to choose the most appropriate schedules of visits and I can assure you that my faithful assistant, Morna, will capture more information than centuries of expert analysis could utilize as practical action. Morna's records will be our legacy to the Worlds' citizens—a lesson in living, a catechism of the struggle to attain lasting and glorious Worlds' peace.

Morna: My dear Council Members, I have served Rednaxela, Xela, Velu and Zena, and, now, Delva. I am the best means for assuring Delva's continued existence if I have the right information. What she offers the Worlds is too precious to not insure. I ask that this Council clear the way for me to affect connection with the Top Priority Worlds' Mesh. I am able myself to gain access to lesser Meshes.

Delva: We would be happy now to hear the Worlds' Council's proposed agenda for my position.

Extended Silence followed by furious whispered communication among Council Members

Council Member Busiln: We have decided to forestall any recommendations to you until we can observe the earliest results of your proposed plans.

Delva and Morna: Thank you.

~~~

Delva began immediately to find appropriate people in each Region to be the founders of what she named the Angi Oneness Curriculum. She forwarded her recommendations to the Worlds' Council and named Verluin as her liaison.

She recommended that the Unholy Lands be renamed Aklana, which was approved by the Worlds' Council.

She sent a detailed evaluative challenge to each Territorial Council to find ways to explore new economic models as a means of stimulating creativity and assuring competent operations of trade and commerce. This venture was named, Would You Buy My Values?

She found the people needed for research and development for a new class of SailShip for

inter-World travel but recommended the exploration voyage to Angla-Palli be performed by ShipFour.

One thing she clearly realized---and, the Worlds' Council was being educated in, by her---was that the Worlds needed a lot of creative experimentation.

Another thing she realized was that she absolutely needed to ask Verluin to marry her.

## 7 ~ Words

The Worlds' Council, along with the Territorial, Regional, and Local Councils, was evolving. Trade and commerce had been common on the former religious World of Anla-Purum; but, the former corporate World of Anga-Param had only known the all-devouring authoritarian mentality that had developed high technology while turning its citizens into zombies.

The former settlers from Anga-Param, now living on Anla-Purum, had adapted quickly to the free-flowing market atmosphere, developing a nearly constant stream of new tech which made many of them wealthy. The ones who returned to Anga-Param became just as wealthy, though the citizens who had stayed on their home World were prone to being ruthlessly cheated in transactions.

The former religious World was becoming technological and the former corporate World was becoming familiar with bribery.

A third situation, the intermarriage of the citizens of both Worlds, was creating a totally new type of Angian...

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The Worlds' Council, working closely with all its subsidiary Councils, took five years to settle on permanent Territorial boundaries. Many people were unhappy, many were outraged but, the lure of new inter-World activities and its promise of new arenas of employment, influence, or power helped them remain silent or encouraged them to scheme.

Religion had certainly not disappeared. There were still believers in the Lord's Army, the Faith of Eternity, and the Disciples of Faith, though in far fewer numbers than the followers of Akla. The biggest difference in the role of religion, on both Worlds, was that all Territories began to have residents from all the Faiths, though Aklana was still predominantly Aklan and the Aklans were still extremely prone to travel and offer whatever aid to others they could. They only died in their travels, now, from freak accidents.

~~~

Delva and Verluin were visiting the village of Ut in the Vesol Region of the Aklana Territory. Since their marriage, she had co-opted his presence with her—the Worlds' Council could find another prime physician.

They were sitting in a cottage with Nii and Rzo, two local Aklans. Nii was calming her children and assigning them their evening tasks while Rzo finished bringing the evening meal to the table.

Morna said: "I find the lives people are now living seem to be either intensely peace-filled or avidly tasking."

Rzo set a plate in front of Delva and said: "Morna, you knew Rednaxela better than anyone and you spent time in Akla's Presence. Tell me how you view the role of religion in our rapidly changing Worlds' culture."

"My view of religion is that it is a two-edged sword—either it carves a space for sharing and love or it cleaves the heart from the mind. There are many who love to cleave but the carvers are still with us. I think the principles of religion should be taught widely but only if the fanatic edge of faith is restrained."

Delva chuckled and said: "So poetic, Morna."

"I am learning, no?"

Nii came and sat at the table: "Morna, I heard what you said and it's got my curiosity up about you. I find you to be not just poetic but deeply, well... Metaphysical. Do you essentially repeat things you've learned or do you have a creative component to your mind?"

"The jury is still out on that one, Nii."

The shared laughter turned itself into the ritual of social dining. After a moment of various appreciative sounds, Delva spoke up:

"Morna is extremely creative when she manipulates the vast amount of information she's gained over the years. She's a poetic journalist of sorts. I wish, when I have eighty things to decide immediately, that she could be a novelist and create the perfect plot for me to follow."

"Delva, I do not believe I would want that kind of creativity. It seems to make certain people unbalanced. And, I would like to convey a little more of my thinking on religion."

"Please do."

"Rzo, you and Nii and Verluin are believers. Delva is not, yet she acts like the same principles inform her behavior. I've had numerous discussions with her about this and we feel that the more the Aklan principles and practices can be learned by others, the more permanently secure our Worlds will be. Especially needed is a greater sense of oneness, shared by the overwhelming majority of our peoples. How do you feel this can be implemented?"

Rzo took a sip of his drink, then said: "Well, first I think Delva's Angi Oneness Curriculum needs to teach people that all true religions are, in reality, one religion."

"You're implying the principle that all the religious prophets who have claimed knowledge from God have had the same mission. Yet, people find it very difficult to see the similarities, except for certain very simple truths like, 'do what you would have done in return'. Especially difficult to integrate are the social laws of various religions."

"Morna, social law is a relative thing. Peoples evolve even through their most depraved periods of senseless war or unloving subjugation. God sends His Messengers when we've lost our way."

"And, each one has been hated by most of the followers of the previous religions."

"Yes, but God is very patient... Morna, was Akla different than other Angians you've met?"

"Completely. He was the most equitable and caring individual I have ever met, in spite of the massive hate he stirred in the followers of the other religions and the constant slaughter of his own followers."

"How did He maintain His equilibrium?"

"Delva and I have often discussed this issue, also. We have yet to find a completely plausible theory."

Rzo pushed his plate aside and said: "Spirit is non-material, right?"

There was a prolonged silence at the table. Morna's softly-colored indicators were undulating through waves of change. Delva finally said:

"Morna, you will find no answer for Rzo. We've reached the limit of your creativity."

"Delva, I will outlive you. I may succeed in breaching my boundaries after your material body and brain have returned to dust. And, you need to change your physical location swiftly if you wish to forestall that eventuality."

Delva immediately stood and said: "Verluin! Go find the children. Nii, Rzo, grab some food and clothing. We must go, now!"

Morna began her chant: "Tracking shows six individuals. They've set fire to the meeting hall and are one mile to the Northeast. On foot. Round-trip signal to Territorial Protective forces is three seconds and breaking up. No opportunity to receive orbital defense but we have the weapons aboard the transfer pod. We can get there before they do."

Delva said: "Can you use me to induce a plasma shield?"

"At great risk to your well-being."

"Do it!"

Nii and Rzo returned with their arms full. Delva sat back at the table and held Morna close.

Verluin returned with the children. Nii said: "Are we leaving?"

Delva didn't respond. Her eyes were closed, her breathing was rapid, and Morna was glowing brilliantly. Verluin sat next to Delva and said: "Dearest? Is this the only way?"

"Yes..."

The children stared in fascination and Rzo said: "What's happening?"

Verluin stood and replied: "Delva and Morna are going to induce a plasma shield around the cottage. We'll be safe but she's going to need more medical care than I can give her when this is over."

~~~~

Seven were killed in the meeting hall fire. The six intruders, members of a new and thankfully small group known as the Ultra-Science Front, were stunned and en route to Territorial headquarters. Verluin and the family were fine. Delva was clinging to life.

Morna continued to run Delva's vitals through her circuitry until she saw the indication that Delva was out of immediate danger. She alerted the hospital staff and Verluin and, before they could arrive, she said: "Delva, what you did was spiritual."

Delva murmured something.

Morna began a complex and well-remembered pattern of cogitation—the attempt to find a rationale for actions performed solely for the benefit of others. This time there was a path to add to the pattern—performing actions that will protect the lives of your enemies.

~~~~

In the months it took for Delva to return to full health, the Worlds' Council had approved the exploratory flight of ShipFour to Angla-Palli. The research and development centers had installed sophisticated sensors on ShipFour, the crew had conducted a full suite of orbital test runs of critical equipment, and the laser that would power them home had been safely tethered to the ship. Launch would happen when Delva, Verluin, and Morna were on board.

Delva had deputized a team of four Aklans to continue her scheduled visits to Local Councils. If the voyage to and from Angla-Palli, plus the time spent exploring, didn't exceed two years, she would only miss visiting twenty-four Local Councils. She'd made sure the visitation team was clear about keeping their activities focused on social and economic issues and keeping their religious practices private. She knew she could trust them.

Morna had found the Aklans rationality and equity interesting. Delva thought it was nearly a miracle. She attributed the uplifting sanity and common sense of her husband to his training as a doctor, not his religion. She had made many mental notes to have a deep and long discussion about science and religion with Verluin and Morna. The slow voyage of ShipFour to a new World seemed like what others called a gift from God.

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There was a nearly constant news feed coming from ShipFour. Delva had been right—the mission, beyond being of value in itself, had become a cultural bonding experience. It also was spawning the birth of a few more radical groups. The Worlds' Protective Force was always ready for

intervention but, more and more, Local and Regional Councils were devising methods of self-defense. The Territory of Aklana had begun sending representatives to the Regional Councils to help them implement social and economic initiatives that might serve to draw the somewhat reasonable members of divisive groups toward more productive endeavors. It worked in some regions and caused dangerous flare-ups of violence in others.

Most people realized that the exploration of Angla-Palli was going to introduce fundamental change in the Worlds' culture. Fear of change needed more education in principles that some saw as rational and scientific and others saw as moral and ethical. The radical groups saw this change as evil.

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Morna was content to let the ship's systems analyze and store the data from the exploration. She was busy collating and refashioning her conversations with Delva and Verluin into a detailed set of recommendations for the Worlds' Council. She would call it, *Reasonable Faith vs Faith-Filled Reasons - Where Is The Balance?*.

~~~

Semul Zel, lead scientist for the voyage of ShipFour, sat at his console and wondered at the streams of color emanating from one of the oceans of Angla-Palli. He studied the previously observed plasma patterns that Angla-Palli danced within as it circled the Mother planet, Beli-Pallos. He found no mention of the activity he was seeing in the past month's records. They had just entered orbit and were close enough now for him to watch the plasma disturbance undulating, back and forth, across the nearly thousand-mile ocean, subtle and elusive but beautiful.

The next five days were spent in further analysis and the potentially risky dispatch of a transfer pod for in situ measurements. The crew of the transfer pod reported color and temperature changes on a scale too small for the ship's sensors to register. A small vial of the water, along with samples of dirt and rock, was brought back by the crew and subjected to three more days of careful testing. Over that time the water sample had become infused with nearly invisible strands of colored material. They were not bacterial or viral. The strands were, if anything, molecular and seemed to be in complete symbiosis with the water's microscopic plants and animals.

The Worlds' Council decided that the release of the finding to the news feed would be postponed until further tests could be conducted on the planet's surface. A place was chosen—a peninsula that protruded a few hundred miles into the ocean—and more consultation took place.

Should a long-term settlement be established on the peninsula?

Who should populate such a settlement?

More tests were conducted...

The consensus was that they had discovered a completely new life-form. It did survive when drops were applied to the dirt and rock samples but its strands lost their individual colors and became incorporated into the substance of rock or dirt. One additional difference in the land-based variety—it didn't take part in the water-born variety's interaction with the planet's plasma currents, at least not in any way that could be detected.

The Worlds' Council gave approval for a ten-member team to descend to the planet and set up a base. Delva demanded two seats in the transfer pod.

~~~

Morna was singing a song she'd heard the Aklans singing. The melody was lively and begged one's body to dance. Morna had no body but Delva and Verluin were dancing for her. Morna began to notice a peculiar correlation. They'd been at the base for ten days and the last five had seen the Mother planet, Beli-Pallos, align with the home star, Angi. Delva and Verluin had danced to Morna's singing on each of the ten days but, during the last five, Delva's personal plasma pattern had been changing in sync with the star/planet alignments. She abruptly stopped singing and reported: "Delva, you think you're only dancing with Verluin but my analysis shows that your body's plasma is dancing with Angi and Beli-Pallos."

Delva clung to Verluin and stared at the sky. Then, she released Verluin and walked to the edge of the shore. She said: "Morna run an analysis of—"

"I have, Delva, the water-born life form is also dancing in sync with the star and gas giant."

Delva crouched at the water's edge and scooped some up to her mouth. As she swallowed, she looked back at Verluin and said: "It looks just like I'm under water."

Morna said: "Confirmed. The life form is consciously aware. But, I marvel at your extremely unscientific behavior."

Verluin approached his wife as he said: "Morna, it appears that even non-believers can have faith."

## 8 ~ Perfection

Chirzt and Laiy were sitting in one of the new, open-air eateries that were springing up on both Worlds. Chirzt had ordered a bowl of soup and Laiy was getting just a drink. As the server left the table, Chirzt laid a packet of papers down and said:

"Here are the names and locations. Look at it later."

"Right. What have you heard from the others?"

"Rapiul and Gecul are working to locate more sympathizers on Anla and Jerul is working with me here. I told them to make sure the leader types were promised power and the rank and file folks got money. I think we need to be careful to profile them into two main groups, Independents and Dissatisfieds. I'll organize the Independents, you take the Dissatisfieds, right?"

"Sure. What about a name?"

"No. We need dedicated people or those we can make dedicated but we don't need any of the normal group identifiers. We have to stay flexible and respond to change. Names just lock people into assumptions."

"Right. Think we'll eventually establish ourselves on that new World?"

"Absolutely. It will take time but they seem to be moving pretty fast to clear it for mass settlement."

"I think they should wipe out that new life form."

"Really? What if it's on our side?"

Laiy remained quiet as the server placed their orders on the table. After he'd left he said:

"I heard it can take over a person's mind."

"It's all rumor until more people get exposed to it. Time will tell..."

"So, what about the new Aklan Council of Justice?"

"Don't think they'll be a problem. It's only for Aklans."

"But, it seems pretty obvious the structure of the Worlds' government was taken from Aklan beliefs."

"Yes, and more and more Aklans are weaseling their way into consultation positions but most people don't want a religion ruling the Worlds."

"They're not weaseling, they're being invited. Plus, the consultation they're offering isn't actually political; but, one thing we really need is someone on the Worlds' Council."

"I think we should shoot for something even better. Delva's going to announce that she's staying on Angla and turning her duties over to an elected board of mediators."

"How do you know that?"

"I have friends you don't know."

~~~

Morna was analyzing Delva's latest communication with the new entity. A thousand more scientists and techs had been dispatched to Angla-Palli and it appeared the life form had one mind distributed over the countless aggregations of molecular strands. It definitely used the planetary plasma to form connections between remote presences and it definitely wanted to communicate.

Delva was the only person to have ingested a portion of the entity—now named Anglana—but others had experienced a form of communication from mere skin contact. The contact communication was limited to a person's urge to taste the entity. Instructions were firm—do not swallow it.

Morna's analysis had reached a point where she could give Delva some feedback:

"Strong probability that you are reaching Anglana with your movements."

"I'd say it's a certainty, Morna. I do have part of Anglana in my body."

"Yes, but we've yet to determine if a biological containment of some strands severs certain modes of communication. Your movements may be registering in Anglana's mind through the ambient plasma."

"I'll leave those speculations to you, Morna. I just want to keep talking with Anglana."

"Your internals tell me that your conversation is quite similar to your dream activity."

"Yes, but I'm awake."

"Yes..."

Verluin appeared over the rise of the hill that sloped to the shore with the sea. He was running and shouting something. Morna turned her hearing up and said: "He's gotten word from the Council. You've been approved for permanent residency on this planet."

Verluin closed the distance, grabbed Delva in his arms and said: "We've been approved for residency!"

"Morna told me."

"What a snoop she is!"

Morna united with them in their laughter.

Anglana increased the surge of wavelets at the shore and spoke through Delva:

"Anglana is happy."

Delva's lower, more liquid tone of voice prompted Verluin to ask: "Was that Anglana talking?"

"Yes. She can apparently urge me to vocalize what she makes me feel. How marvelous!"

Verluin felt an urge to approach the water. Delva sensed it and gave him a small nudge in that direction. Morna nearly screamed: "Stop!"

Verluin crouched and scooped a bit of Anglana into his mouth and swallowed.

He embraced Delva and said: "Faith, sweet Morna, faith."

~~~

After Verluin had united with Anglana, both of their interactions with the new life-form took on more of the nature of thought transference, though the strong emotional component wasn't lacking. Morna's analysis was constant. Reports to the Worlds' Council were constant. An official statement was being prepared for the Worlds' News Mesh.

Emigration considerations were postponed until the carefully selected group of people chosen to ingest a portion of Anglana had had time to be studied.

That is, until their remains could be studied.

Every person of that group had fallen into a state of complete ecstasy and quickly died.

Morna thought this was a breakthrough for her analysis. She postulated that enhanced plasma communication ability was a key. She composed reports to the Worlds' Council, detailing the plasma communication abilities of Rednaxela, Velu, Xela, Zena, and Delva plus indications that none of the dead had the ability. She also included a method for determining potential focused plasma communication ability.

Delva's immunity was a prime consideration for future selection methods. Morna couldn't account for Verluin's immunity.

He'd told her it was Akla's Will. She set up a separate stream of analysis, incorporated her previous cogitations relating to possible correlations between religion and science, and set an alert if probabilities reached 85%.

~~~

The funeral of those who'd died in ecstasy was broadcast on the Worlds' News Mesh. The Council hoped it would serve as a potent weapon against future settlers' irresponsibility.

Several months after the funeral, Delva had completed her indoctrination of the elected members of the new Worlds' Mediation Board. The Worlds' Council had insisted she retain her title of Worlds' Mediator and maintain abundant contact with the Board. Shortly after the announcement of the Board's incorporation, the Council released the Proclamation of Settlement for Angla-Palli.

There was a list of requirements for emigration that alone could deter those who wanted to be settlers solely from urges for excitement or adventure. Among them was the stipulation that all émigrés be subjected to approval by all existing Local, Regional, and Territorial Councils before the Worlds' Council could approve or deny their acceptance. This assured two things: The people selected would be, as best as was possible, those most suited to establish a population that expressed the many facets of the existing Worlds' culture. And, those desiring inclusion would have to wait at least a year before the approval process had run its course.

~~~

Chirtz and Laiy were meeting with the twenty-six people who had been recruited for their cause. Nineteen were Independents—those who wanted to influence the Worlds' Council toward more liberal attitudes—attitudes that included measures that fostered more control by individuals over the flow of goods and the practice of services. Seven of the recruits were Dissatisfieds—those who could be used to foment various forms of insurrection to support the desires of the Independents.

One of the Dissatisfieds was a former Aklan. Her name was Haalii. She was an old friend of Verluin's. She had met Delva numerous times. She was prone to vast silences and had what most called a seductive personality. Haalii had, and kept secret, her own agenda for membership in this particular movement.

~~~

Delva was at the shore, communing with Anglana.

"We want the best for the Worlds."

"As we do."

"Those chosen for incorporation with you will be tested."

"They are already known."

"The testing is for our society."

"The testing will include us."

"I will help."

"You and Verluin."

"Yes."

Delva began her dance, externally and internally. Anglana communicated her pleasure. People remote from their celebration felt an urge to taste Anglana. All of them told those nearby, who also had felt the urge. They were getting used to it. They were also taking a drug that would either calm the urges or have no effect. The ones who experienced no effect were tested further.

Five people were eventually determined to be capable of safely ingesting a portion of Anglana. Further tests were done. Worlds' Council was informed of the cumulative results. Approval was given. Stricter procedures were also communicated to those on Angla-Palli. A special detachment

of scientists and physicians was selected to travel with the first group of settlers. They were informally called the Enforcers.

The first flight of settlers occurred seven years after Verluin had incorporated himself with Anglana. There were 17,421 people on board. One of them was Haalii...

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Delva was pregnant.

Anglana was, too.

Delva would give birth to a girl.

Anglana would give birth to a dream.

Delva's child would be called Mura.

Anglana's child would be called Coherency.

Delva had Morna set up a routine to communicate her thoughts and appraisals directly to Worlds' Council without her previous approval.

Morna was pregnant.

She would give birth to another Artificial Intelligence.

Technicians were set to the task of creating the new AI's body.

Its name would be Rednaxela.

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It was evening and Verluin and Delva were sitting on the top of a hill, close to Anglana's liquid form. They were communicating with the trees and rocks and dirt. The conversation was almost entirely emotional. Anglana's liquid form would often interpret for Verluin and Delva. Delva spoke:

"Our child will have a very good friend to grow up with."

Verluin shifted his position, looked up at the glowing plasma sheath of the Mother planet, Beli-Pallos, and said:

"Mura will be the most unique Angian ever."

"She'll have to take second place to you, Verluin, if unique is the criterion."

Verluin touched Delva's lips then kissed her forehead: "Delva, I know you love me and I know you have solid reasons for not believing in Akla. But, how do we convince the complete unbelievers that they don't have to join a religion to receive the benefits of Akla's Wisdom?"

"I think your incorporation with Anglana has fogged your awareness. You and every other Aklan uses action to spread your message. Conviction from observed action is much stronger than words alone, even when that action is the willingness to die for one's beliefs."

"I know Akla loves you and is helping you."

"I know I love Akla because He was the wisest person ever to live on the Worlds of Angi."

"Anglana. Do you know of Akla?"

Anglana remained quiet but didn't remain unresponsive.

The plasma glow that was always present, to some degree, around her liquid form began to grow brighter and its colors became more distinct and formed a localized swirl that turned into a funnel of light that began to extend itself into the sky. It continued to grow until its distance from the planet rendered it invisible. Shortly after that, the glow surrounding the gas giant, Beli-Pallos, began to intensify. It became so intense that it caused objects to begin to faintly appear in the darkness.

Morna began another thread in her analytical routines.

Verluin and Delva began to dance.

Anglana said: "All is one. Believe it or not. Only, in all your strivings, respect the possibilities of the potential of Oneness."

Morna immediately communicated Anglana's words, which she could hear in Delva's mind, to the Worlds' Council. She appended a few words of her own: "Recommended that Anglana be considered for appointment to the Worlds' Council."

9 ~ Names

Industry and services on Anga-Param and Anla-Purum were in constant growth and flux. Local Councils approved what they deemed appropriate for their locality. They did consult with Regional Councils because they could overrule a Local Councils' decisions. The interplay between Regional and Territorial Council rulings was more complex and definitely became quite a challenge when the power of the Worlds' Council came into the equation.

In spite of this multilayered oversight, the growth continued and the flux intensified. There was still room for the enterprising individual or group to find ways to use the various levels of regulation for their own purposes. One particularly favored method was to bide one's time with the actual set-up of a business until the proper people were in place on the Regional or Territorial Councils. The activity of covert politics was rampant. There were groups of people devoted to each level of the governmental structure whose employment was strictly the currying of influence with individuals who had a larger sphere of influence. Some, who had the leisure and wherewithal, estimated that twenty percent of all Local and Regional Council members were beholden to trade and service groups. Because of the closer tie between the Territorial and Worlds' Councils, the estimate was closer to ten percent.

Trade and commerce regulations were overseen by boards appointed at each level of government and enforced by the appropriate level of Protective Force. In all the years since the formation of the current governmental structure, there had been only 98 instances of regulation by force, most infringements of law being settled by mediation. The Worlds' Council had yet to bring the Worlds' Protective Force into direct coercive action.

Still, the best single word to describe the Worlds' economic activity was frenzy. And, this term was certainly most appropriate after settlement of Angla-Palli had begun.

The first contingent of settlers had inhabited a portion of the land mass now called Surai, connected to the large peninsula that had been the first outpost for exploration. Three more voyages had brought settlers to three more land masses—Mero, Amar, and Ardros.

There were now nearly 70,000 settlers on Angla-Palli and they were mostly involved in the export of various plant and mineral substances. Delva and Morna had determined that any non-liquid form of Anglana's substance was perfectly safe for use on other Worlds. Naturally, the amount of these exports was strictly controlled by Anglana. Any attempt to export more than Anglana wished was met by atmospheric plasma stunning. The planet was inhabited by a protective force stronger and more rational than the other Worlds had at their disposal.

Needless to say, Anglana also controlled any indigenous misuse of her planet's resources. If there were any settlers who had successfully fooled the rigorous selection process, they quickly were discovered, and, if their activity was egregious, banished from the planet.

Anglana also controlled importation of goods. She had relied on Delva and Verluin and the other five who had incorporated with her to oversee the importation of service activities.

Since the first group of five, who had now become another of Delva's Mediation Boards, only seventeen others had passed the testing. They were being considered as Territorial Council members but Anglana had yet to agree to complete alignment with the Worlds' Council.

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What had once been simulated recreational use of the Worlds' Mesh had evolved into a wealth of news, information, and study sub-Meshes. There was still a recreational Mesh but it was no longer used as a method of mass control.

There were also Local, Regional, and Territorial Meshes and a completely isolated Mesh for the Worlds' Protective Force.

People could have their own private Meshes but access had to be granted to the Territorial Councils' oversight. This particular point of law was the impetus for the formation of many groups of somewhat organized Independents and Dissatisfieds. It also spawned a definite increase in bootleg electro-plasma devices.

This type of device was of no use to Haalii. She wasn't in contact with Chirzt and Laiy and wouldn't be until her own plans reached a successful level of implementation. Being on Anglana's planet posed a severe challenge to her activities. However, she was blessed with an abundance of resourcefulness that nearly balanced her straightened situation. She had yet to contact Verluin or Delva and she was extremely happy to know they had a daughter who was growing into a decidedly independent young woman.

She needed to meet Mura before she reacquainted herself with Verluin and Delva. She had no desire to be incorporated with Anglana and stayed well-clear of large bodies of water. Her cover was a weaving business. She had an ability to sense the emotional desires of her clients and weave them an item that completely entranced them. Her clients thought they were just devoted to an exceptional artisan. Haalii knew better...

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Excerpts from the Worlds' News Mesh (WNM) interviews of followers of the Faith of Akla:

WNM: Thank you for letting us interview you today. A first question, that seems to be on the minds of many people, is to what do you attribute the increasing conversion rate of your Faith?

Serva Mestul: I think it's the appeal of the combination of religion and rationality. Also, we have no priests and each believer is responsible for their own spiritual growth; but, working with the community of believers in our outreach with social and economic programs is just as important to us.

WNM: Could you explain the operation of your Council of Justice?

Beslu Rednii: We have our own Local Councils of Justice, elected by each community. They send representatives to our Territorial Elections and those representatives elect the members of the Worlds' Council of Justice. All the Councils have as a governing mandate to see to the spiritual welfare of their members and to aid them in carrying Akla's message of Worlds' Peace to all people. The Worlds' Council of Justice also has various legislative duties—actions taken to implement the spiritual Laws that Akla revealed in His Writings.

WNM: Why do you think the election structure of the Worlds' Council and your Council of Justice are so similar?

Eia Oplin: Because Velu and Zena had proven themselves to be extremely worthy people and their recommendations on the formation of the Worlds' Council were accepted.

WNM: Velu was a known follower of Akla but Zena was not, yet Zena was just as desirous to have suggestions from Akla incorporated into the structure of Worlds' government. Why do you think that is?

E. O.: Zena was extremely intelligent.

WNM: What part do you think your Faith will have in decisions made by the Worlds' Council?

Dislu Catuo: As you know, Aklans are required to not take part in purely political issues. Still, in the interests of justice and equity, we feel that considered statements of principle will need to continue to be sent to Local, Regional, and Territorial Councils. Statements to the Worlds' Council are only made by the Worlds' Council of Justice.

WNM: What do you make of the recent slaying of one of the members of your Faith?

D. C.: It happened much more in the past and it will happen much more as our numbers grow and our influence in communities' social and economic activities increases.

WNM: How do you know there will be more killings?

D.C.: The relative peace the Worlds now enjoy is not the Worlds' Peace that Akla promised. That can only happen when the majority of people truly believe in the principle of the Oneness of all Angians. There are still many pockets of political and general dissent. There is still much prejudice and prejudice is the mother of hate. The hate will continue until its stream of blood becomes a witness to the necessity for justice in our everyday dealings with each other. The death of a martyr is a powerful spiritual statement. Killing someone for the promptings of their conscience is a potent means of furthering the very activity for which they were killed.

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Mura made a declaration on her fifteenth birthday. Delva and Verluin knew it would come someday. Verluin met it with an internal prayer. Delva greeted it with joyous laughter. Mura had said:

"I know you both want the best for me and I just don't feel like it's here, in this house, with two people who may love me but don't understand me at all. I want my own life and, if you don't voluntarily accept my decision to move out, I'll still do it. I don't want to hurt your feelings but I can't take it anymore. You're famous. You're respected by everyone. You talk to that life-form. You try to relate to me but all it feels like is you're being condescending. You always talk about how the truth and justice are so necessary. Well, I'm telling you my truth."

Verluin had had his eyes closed through the whole speech. Delva had been looking straight into Mura's eyes. Delva laughed like she did when someone finally understood what she was saying, like she laughed when Angi broke above the horizon in the morning, like she did when Anglana sang in her mind and heart. She wasn't happy about what Mura had just said but she was overjoyed that this was happening when she was fifteen and not in her twenties or thirties. She said:

"Mura, you do whatever you want. Your father and I will be here to pick up the pieces."

Mura stared at her mother with thinly-veiled respect. She covered that with her final words before she picked up her traveling bag and left.

"I knew you wouldn't understand."

~~~~

Months passed and Mura didn't return home or communicate with her parents. Haalii had been keeping tabs on Mura. Haalii was known in many circles and had many informants. They didn't know they were informants. They thought they were just the lucky people who got to meet Haalii and talk to her at one social event or another.

Haalii was very patient. She had cultivated relationships with sixty-four people who considered her their best friend. She considered them to be her tools. Every undertaking needed the right tools and Haalii's next-to-final task, before she finally communicated with Chirzt and Laiy and the others of the movement, was to befriend Mura. After crafting Mura into her perfect tool, Haalii's final task was to re-establish ties with Verluin and Delva.

~~~

Mura and Haalii finally met at a regular gathering that had attained a reputation as the place to meet people who could be valuable when one needed particular forms of influence in trade matters. This notoriety wasn't what the event was known for by the general populace. When it was noticed at all, the monthly gathering of the Artists and Artisans Co-operative was known as a somewhat rowdy gathering of artists and artisans.

A man named Terlon guided Mura to where Haalii was sitting. He hugged Mura tightly as he said:

"Haalii, I want you to meet my new friend, Mura. She seems to have rare talent as a dancer."

"Does she dance for you?"

Mura blushed and Terlon said:

"Only when we're alone. I'm trying to get her an audition."

"Well, as long as it's an audition for public dancing, the kind that respectable people watch, I can help you."

They shared a laugh as Terlon guided Mura to sit next to Haalii. He claimed some important chat with some important person as his excuse to leave them alone.

After he'd left and Haalii's hand signal had secured drinks for them, Haalii said:

"A dancer, eh?"

"Yes, I started when I was quite young, two or three. My mother and father did a lot of dancing and I just sort of fell into it. When I was nine, my mother engaged an instructor for me. I'm sixteen."

"If you found yourself becoming in demand for your dancing, what name would you use?"

"That's interesting 'cause I actually wouldn't want to use my real name. My parents are famous and I really don't want my career to be connected with them."

"Your parents are famous?"

"Yes. My parents are Delva and Verluin Namis."

"Oh! Yes, I'd definitely say they're famous. Important, too."

"I don't know about important. I mean they talk to that life-form and they're always communicating with the Worlds' Council but those things aren't important to me."

"What is important to you, Mura?"

"Being free to dance. Making a living at it. Not having to sleep with men I don't really like."

"I see..."

"Well, Terlon is nice enough but he's a little crazy, too. He has friends I really don't like. They seem to be the kind of people that stir up trouble. He doesn't let them bother me, tells me to stay in our bedroom when they come over, but I can hear them talking and I don't like what I hear."

"My, my. I've only known Terlon for a short time and what you say is important for me to know. I certainly don't need people like that in my life."

Haalii had known Terlon for years. He'd been specifically tasked with finding and seducing



Mura when word had begun to circulate that the Namis' daughter had left home.

Mura ordered another drink, then said:

"Haalii, do you know any women I could live with while I try to become a real dancer?"

"I think I know one who would be honored to have you be her house guest. And, it wouldn't be an honor because of your parents, either."

"Really? Who?"

"Me."

"Really? I don't believe it! You're known all over the place, not famous like my parents but known in all the right places. And, even though you're not a dancer, can't one artist learn from another, no matter if they do different arts?"

"Absolutely, Mura. Absolutely."

## 10 ~ Might

Haalii had no time to devote to anyone but Mura. She called on some of her trusted tools—people who considered themselves friends—to entertain and probe for information from the thousands who clamored after contact with her. She even had to steal some time to train a corps of twenty-four artisans to create weavings for her business. No one noticed that these substitute creations were fakes. People met one of the artisans, spent some time with them, waited while they "consulted" with Haalii, and felt completely entranced with the results. The artisans would never sacrifice the large sums of money to reveal the truth.

Mura was developing a radically new style of dance that one news Mesh reported was related to the dances inspired by Anglana. Mura furiously denied it, saying: "I saw the plasma glows and watched my parents dance. I never felt an urge to taste Anglana and, if you think my dances are anything like what people do when incorporated with that life-form, you're as stupid as my parents."

Even with her new name, Mura was still widely known as Delva and Verluin's daughter.

Haalii didn't need to train Mura in the ways necessary to discredit Delva and Verluin. She only needed to encourage Mura to continue to do what she was prone to do. Haalii did, however, need to spend enormous amounts of time facilitating Mura's connections with the public, setting up performances for her, lining up news coverage, and supplying a slowly rotating entourage of lovers—very carefully chosen lovers.

The fact that the Worlds' economy was structured in a way that favored massive trading between Anga-Param and Anla-Purum yet had to deal with restrictions when it came to trade with Angla-Palli made anything that could be exported from Anglana's planet attain extremely high worth. Even a simple Mesh news item could fetch a higher price if it came from Angla-Palli. Traders living on Anglana's planet quickly adapted to the commerce restrictions and profited greatly from what they were permitted to buy and sell.

A single Mesh broadcast of Mura's dance creations brought nine times the value of a month's worth of food shipments.

Haalii cared little for the money and took only five percent of the proceeds. She did, though, counsel Mura closely about where to invest the other ninety-five percent. Within a few years, Mura owned or had controlling interest in an estimated fifteen percent of all the Worlds' businesses.

Haalii made sure Mura stayed busy and well-bedded. She would instruct her in what to do with her wealth when the moment for Worlds'-wide turmoil came.

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Verluin sat with Delva on the coast of the largest sea on Angla-Palli—the largest concentration of Anglana's consciousness. Delva had just returned from a tour of visits to all the Territorial Councils and had shared what she'd learned with Anglana. Delva's return had also thrown her into prolonged communication with Anglana about Verluin's state of health.

He'd been exposed to certain toxins when he'd been growing up during the harrowing times on Anga-Param. He'd had damage done to his endocrine system and not just from the Corporate implant. The onset of his condition had only become obvious to Anglana and was being dealt with by continual rituals of re-incorporation. Verluin had been attending to the treatments every week during Delva's prolonged absence. Anglana had just told Delva and Verluin that, in spite of her attentions, Verluin had only two years left to live.

Delva used Anglana's presence to communicate with her husband at levels no other could master.

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Excerpts from The Attempted Translation of Delva's Communication With Verluin Concerning The End of His Life:

"Verluin, what of Mura?"

"Mura is under Akla's protection."

"What of her wealth?"

"It will be ill-used."

"What of her future?"

"Faith, Delva, faith..."

"Anglana wishes for Mura's incorporation."

"Faith..."

"What shall I do about the rising power of the Independents?"

"Akla long ago predicted a fracture in the political peace."

"Is there no way to moderate the damage?"

"Delva, never let my physical presence or absence make you doubt your profound mediation abilities."

"When you leave me I will plunge myself into prolonged, first-hand mediation."

"I will never leave you."

"I will have Anglana's comfort from her awareness of your essence and Morna's abilities to invoke your voice and image but you I will lose."

"Never, my dear. You will know the truth of this after my body dies."

"Transfer to me, Verluin, your deepest appreciations of Anglana."

"Akla speaks through Anglana, though, not with the Voice of God. Anglana is our star system's focal point for the blessings of Akla. Anglana is the planet and the planet is Anglana. There are aspects of Anglana's power we cannot now even guess. When events are most dangerous, Anglana will act for the protection of the Angian system."

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It was deemed best to announce the approaching demise of Verluin.

The effect on the Aklans was to infuse them with a deeper conviction to spread the Word of Akla—to educate their fellow citizens to the wisdom and mercy of the social and spiritual axioms of their Faith.

The Councils of the Worlds worked to reproduce and disseminate a history of Verluin's contributions to Worlds' culture.

The Independents took the news as a trumpet blast that spurred them to more bold actions and more audacious pronouncements.

Mura was adamant in her, "No comment."

~~~

The Independents were strengthened in their efforts to subvert the Worlds' Council and shape the actions of the Territorial and Regional Councils toward their agenda. Their slogan was:

"Individual Decisions Will Always Beat Out Council Oppressions." The increasing strength of their movement came from their ability to harness the near-suicidal actions of Dissatisfieds and the financial contributions from companies that were beholden to the influence of Mura's money.

Mura herself, as she grew in knowledge from the effect of being a Worlds' traveler, was beginning to find outlets for her creativity that didn't include her wildly popular dance performances. She began, with the expert tutelage of Haalii, to give impromptu political comments during her performances; even giving them names that promoted various aspects of the Independent agenda. She also began to devote more time to news sessions on the Meshes that she used to explain how her dances were the enactment of the freedom that the acceptance of the Independents' agenda would bring to the Worlds.

When the announcement of her father's death reached her, she told Haalii that she needed a break from her schedule. Haalii tried to dissuade her but Mura's naturally growing self-reliance prevailed and she dropped off the Mesh and was, to all but Haalii, unreachable.

~~~

The Independents had, within the next decade, attained a majority of seats on more than half the Territorial Councils. The actions of their troops of Dissatisfieds were bringing a sense of impending war with the Worlds' Protective Force. All that kept it from happening was the desire of the Independents to keep their flow of increasing wealth from evaporating. Many groups of Dissatisfieds found themselves suddenly deprived of funds. There was a new agenda brewing and it was calculated to appease the Worlds' Council while it strengthened the power of the Independents. It involved plans to mine the outer belts of planetoids—a huge number of small bodies that orbited well beyond the realm of the three inhabited Worlds—mine them for the resources needed to create new Worlds, artificial habitations.

The plan was to let the Worlds' Council oversee the mining and construction but assure themselves that each new World would become independent from the Worlds' Council's control, primarily through complicated legal agreements that gave independent consortiums of companies the right to claim ownership of not just the operations needed to construct them but, ultimately, total control of the Worlds themselves.

Delva had attempted mediation efforts with these new corporate entities but was unable to convince the Territorial Councils of the dangers inherent in the contracts they were approving.

Delva had also tasked Morna to institute a search for Mura. Delva was not informed by Anglana that the location of Mura was known but she had told Delva of Mura's vast potential for aiding the Worlds' abiding peace if she could be convinced to submit to incorporation.

~~~

Mura sat with Haalii in their mountain hideaway. Mura had been becoming more restive and Haalii knew that the crowning action of her many-years effort could now be implemented.

"Mura, we've discovered that your mother is searching for you."

"To what end?"

"We don't know."

"Let her search. It can be another of her fruitless endeavors."

"You know of the Worlds' Council's approval of the construction of three Created Worlds."

"Yes."

"You know of the plans of the Independent Movement for complete control over those Worlds."

"Yes. Your point?"

"I feel that you should reappear in the Worlds' affairs as the newly acclaimed leader of the Independents."

"What?!"

"Yes, Mura, the leader of the Independents. Not a leader who oversees and stimulates plans but a leader who infuses people with inspiration and the will to fight."

"Fight..."

"Yes, dear, we have the biggest fight of our lives approaching. You don't have to concern yourself with the details. You just have to use your influence to empower the mass of citizens to back the Movement."

"A Cheerleader."

"Yes."

~~~

Mura began her role of leader of the Independents by appearing before the Worlds' Council at a special hearing preceding the announcement of the beginning of the Created Worlds Project. She had not attended with the title of Leader of the Independents but her appearance had assured her that she could, within a short time, take on the title. What the people who had placed her in this situation didn't realize was that the sometimes recalcitrant but always, ultimately, pliable nature of Mura was radically changing, becoming a willing chalice for the potent liquor of power.

As the unimaginably vast operations of the Created Worlds Project began to build three new planets in orbits between Angla-Palli and Beli-Pallos, Mura began to find a new calling in life—leading people where she thought they should go.

The sudden death of Haalii while en route to a meeting with Mura was never attributed to Mura's own planning.

Mura decided it was almost time to confront her mother.

~~~~

The occasion for the first application of the power of the Worlds' Protective Force was initiated by an action taken by the Territorial Council of Beselima—an area always dedicated to agricultural production. The Council had unilaterally invoked a tax on all goods shipped from the Territory. Appeals from the Worlds' Council went unheeded for months while troops of Dissatisfieds carried out the Independents' order for the detention of other Territorial Council members as hostages to force the non-payment of the tax.

As the situation became more strained, the Independents decided to order the Dissatisfieds' troops to begin the capture of Worlds' Council mediators. When Delva was detained the Worlds' Council first sent a special team of Protective Force troops to free her then unleashed the full power of the Worlds' Protective Force against the troops of Dissatisfieds.

The war lasted three months and saw the deaths of 120,000 people.

The Worlds' Council had done their legal duty. The Independents had gained a valuable public relations victory.

## 11 ~ Will

Delva was up to her neck in the water. Anglana was communicating with her.

"Never fear. He will arrive."

"I can see his face in my mind but I don't feel his presence."

"Look into his eyes."

Delva fell into Verluin's eyes in her mind and immediately felt him close. Felt him touch her on the head. Felt his lips on hers.

"It feels so real!"

"It is real, Delva."

"Real in my mind which is making my body respond."

The presence of Verluin vanished. His face remained in Delva's mind and smiled the way she knew meant he was momentarily sad but hopeful.

"He has left you for now."

"You claim it wasn't just my mind affecting my body..."

"You are a woman of strong mind. Would that your heart could take on that strength."

Delva felt tears flowing down her cheeks. She withdrew from the water and sat on the shore, wondering.

"Delva, you must repeat this many times to come to certitude of its reality."

"I don't want to convince myself that my wishes are reality when they're not."

"Strong mind..."

"Weak heart..."

~~~

The Aklans had been in the village for a few days, getting to know the people and helping them implement some simple technology that could give them more control over their efforts to raise crops. The area they were in was mostly rocky with large swaths of sand. There was only a small stream coming from the large hill that dominated the landscape. Within that hill was a supply of water that wept its way out and down, often drying before it reached the huts.

The Aklans didn't even think of suggesting the group of fifty adults and children move elsewhere. They were led by a very old woman who had known the priests of the Lord's Army and tried her best to instill what wisdom she had to her group. The Lord's Army and Faith of Eternity had few followers now, though the Disciples of Faith still flourished. This group had kept the spirit of the Lord's Army alive for eighty years. They were all related but perilous times had confused the exact genetic lines. Still, these folk were, in all ways, an extended family.

The Aklans were doing what Aklans did—meeting people right where they were and offering, without judgement, whatever help they could.

The old woman said: "God willing, we can use this device to induce the hill to give us its Gift more abundantly."

The oldest of the five Aklans responded: "Be sure to only use it when the stream is dry. If you keep it on all the time the hill could completely dry up."

The Aklans had also given the group a bag of seed—a strain of edible grass that was extremely wholesome and grew with little attention.

"Plant the seeds in the pattern we showed you and only snip half the buds that appear so the plants can feed you for a full season."

"Yes. We have my son's talent in making clay urns to store the buds for times of scarcity. We will dig a cave in the hill for the storage."

"God willing, you can set yourselves free of the harsh labor of the city and live here in peace."

"You must return some day and tell me more of Akla."

"We will and—"

A small transport was heard from beyond the hill. It swerved into view and came to a stop. Plasma, the killing kind, swept through the air and wiped out the Aklans. The transport swiftly departed, leaving the villagers in stunned stupefaction.

The old woman fell to her knees and began a chant:

"O God of Mercy.

"O God of Light.

"O God of Death.

"O God of Life.

"Forgive us.

"Protect us.

"Give us strength.

"Keep us firm."

She rose and added: "And, help those poor souls in their flight towards Thee..."

~~~

Attacks on isolated Aklans were increasing. The Worlds' Council was attempting to guide the Regional Councils in their search for the perpetrators but, no matter what information or equipment was given to the Councils, no captures were reported.

After four months of attacks, with 900 Aklans killed and no one in custody, an official inquiry was launched. The members were chosen by the appropriate Territorial Councils.

After three more months of attacks, with 1,440 more Aklans killed, the Worlds' Council set up its own inquiry, secretly, with elite members of the Worlds' Protective Force guiding the operation.

People knew, in general, who to blame but, corruption of the Regional and Territorial Councils was also common knowledge.

Surprisingly to most, the Aklan Community was making it known that they would intercede to mitigate any punishment of the perpetrators.

Delva had yet to report the end of her period of mourning but word was still dispatched for her assistance, though not through the usual direct channel, apparently out of respect for Delva's privacy. It was sent to a company that often worked with the Council on matters of diplomatic import. A special directive accompanied the message instructing the recipient to hold it until Delva returned from her retreat but, then, to have it instantly given to her. These plans had been put in motion while the full membership of the Council was unavailable. Three members had made their own decision. Those three members were mildly chastised for their independent action at the next full meeting of the Council.

The reception of the message was greeted with glee by Anni Suria, a secret sympathizer of the Independents. She relayed the message to Mura.

~~~

Mura had become the unofficial leader of the Independents on Angla-Palli. She had grown quite adept at bringing people into the fold and keeping them working on various plans. She wasn't clear on some of the Independents' dogma but she had a firm belief in one particular tenet: We are individuals and have the right to make our own decisions.

Some of the Independents' decisions were distasteful to Mura but so had been most of the men she'd slept with. Still, each man had helped her in some way to arrive at her present position of power so she found it easy to sweep distasteful things from her mind.

She received the message from the Worlds' Council members to Delva and, if she had believed in God, would have said He was blessing her. She called together a group of seven Independents she knew had extreme experience in political affairs and discussed her visit to Delva.

~~~~

The construction of the three Created Worlds had reached a critical juncture—materials were arriving in orbit on a regular schedule and actual construction was to begin.

There would be a World built for only agriculture, one for only applied technology, and one for general exploration of learning potential—a farm, a factory, and a school.

It had been decided the Worlds would be similar in size to the three inhabited Worlds but people would not live and work on the surface. The internal construction would yield much more usable space and would also protect the inhabitants from the Mother planet's plasma sheath.

Beli-Pallos' glowing sheath, visible from the inhabited Worlds, didn't extend to Angla-Palli's orbit, yet the Created Worlds would be constructed in orbits within the sheath. The plasma that the outer surface of the new Worlds would shield from the inhabitants could be used to power the operations within the Worlds.

It was estimated that the three Worlds would be ready for habitation within five years. In spite of the Worlds' War and the devastation it wrought, the political peace had greatly increased the growth of industry and commerce. There was enough wealth to invest in these Worlds and there was more than enough talent and technology to make them safe.

In spite of the Angi system's problems, Worlds' government had made some things easy of accomplishment.

Anglana had communicated through Delva that she would not interfere with the construction of the new Worlds. She had also said that any illegal activities associated with them would be met with her swift action.

The Worlds' Council may have become corrupted but the economic advantages of the new Worlds helped them decide to accede to Anglana's ultimatum. Besides, not obeying her wishes would mean the risk of war with an entity that had shown her ability to control two planets—the gas giant, Beli-Pallos, and her own Angla-Palli.

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Everyone knew where Delva was.

No one could approach her without Anglana's permission.

Delva was resting on the shore, awake, when Anglana addressed her.

"Delva, your daughter approaches. Shall I permit her to reach your presence?"

Delva was silent for a split second, then said: "Absolutely!"

Mura was walking slowly down the hill that descended to the shore.

Delva began running to meet her.

When face to face, standing quite still, Anglana spoke through Delva:

"I am speaking through your mother, Mura. She gave me permission to let you approach. Be aware that you have no power here but what I permit."

Mura stood, stunned, yet said: "Mother?"

"Yes, Mura. Anglana can speak through me and what she said is the absolute truth."
 "I didn't come to harm you, mother, just to talk."
 "After all these years..."
 Delva embraced Mura and Mura could, in no way, stop herself from leaking tears.
 After Mura's crying began to subside, Delva led her to the shore. Once they were sitting near the water, Delva asked:
 "What did you come to talk about?"
 Mura handed Delva the message from the Council members and said:
 "That's for you but that's not what I want to talk about."
 Delva read the message and pocketed it.
 Mother and daughter were silent.
 Anglana spoke:
 "She wishes to enlist you in the Independents' cause."
 Mura stared at her mother and said:
 "That was the life-form speaking again?"
 "The life-form's name is Anglana."
 "Seems appropriate. People say she owns the planet."
 "Mura, Anglana is the planet."
 Another silence...
 Mura offered:
 "I went into hiding after father died."
 "I knew you had dropped out of society. It makes me happy that your father's death was the reason."
 "How have you been doing?"
 "I've suffered from the absence of Verluin but Anglana is trying to teach me a way to connect with him."
 "Connect...?"
 "We share a healthy dose of religious skepticism, Mura. Your father was devout to the end but he always showed extreme rationality. Oh! I forgot. Morna?"
 "Yes, Delva. You have a beautiful daughter."
 "Morna, introduce her to your son."
 "Mura, meet Rednaxela."
 Rednaxela said:
 "Mura, I should warn you that you're in the presence of two intelligent AIs, a very wise woman, and an unfathomable mystery called Anglana. Share your thoughts with caution."
 Mura burst into laughter.
 Delva began to cry.
 Their conversation continued for four hours.
 As the light of Angi gave way to the glow of the Mother planet, Mura said:
 "Mother, I'm feeling like I've totally wasted my life."
 "What would you do to redeem it?"
 "Can I stay here?"
 "You're welcome to do that, I'd treasure getting to know you again, but you need a new plan, a fresh goal to shape your actions."
 "You've already taught me the worth of the Worlds' present form of government and the weaknesses of the Independent Movement. And, you've hinted that you know of ways to foster a new form of peace that would completely do away with war and violence but, from what I can gather, it would take a very long time."
 "Yes, longer than I have left to live."
 "How long, mother?"
 "Anglana says two years."

"Then I'll stay with you and learn from you."

"Mura, you barely know Anglana but I must ask, do you trust her?"

"It makes me doubt my sanity but I have to say yes."

"Then let yourself incorporate some of Anglana's essence. She assures me that you have powers within you that are buried under the waste from your impetuous life-style. You're naturally intelligent but you have the capacity to pass far beyond the combined intelligence of your father and me. Anglana says you also have powers that Verluin and I lack."

"Mother, it sounds like you think father is still alive."

"In a way he is—in my heart. Anglana thinks it's more than that and she's been extremely patient with my lack of faith."

"Faith?"

Morna chimed in with:

"Mura, my best estimation of what others call faith is a state of consciousness that blends the intuitive creativity used in art with the theory-forming power of normal rationality and uses that feeling-inducing state to impel the will to action that brings dreams into reality."

"Morna, I hate to admit it, but that makes sense to me."

The laughter swelled into a chorus of joy and was accompanied by a light show from Anglana.

The laughter was followed by a somber silence. Mura broke it with:

"Mother, these powers you and Anglana say I have will, hopefully, help me if I'm to carry on the work you've begun, but..."

"But...?"

"Well..."

"Say it, Mura."

"I've slept with many men. With no protection. I wonder if..."

Delva's voice had the low, liquid tone of Anglana when she said:

"Mura, I've waiting for you to arrive for years. Akla tells me that you are an extremely important part of His Plan. If you incorporate with me, I can heal you and give you the gift of a child."

"Mother? Are you there?"

In her normal voice, Delva said:

"Always, my child."

"Will I still have my own mind if I incorporate?"

"Yes."

Mura rose from her place, embraced Delva, stooped to give a kiss to Morna's and Rednaxela's metal bodies, then approached the water. Delva joined her. They stared at each other for an eternity then clasped hands and entered the water...

12 ~ Knowledge

The Worlds' Council had been apprised by Anglana that she was ejecting all known Independents from her planet as well as beginning a procedure for determining potential Independents and attempting to, as she said, "ReForm" them. Because of increasingly lax control within the Worlds' Council, word of Anglana's decision immediately leaked to the Worlds' News Meshes.

Riots, on a small scale, began on both Anga-Param and Anla-Purum. They consisted of local Independent leaders rallying their Dissatisfieds to the burning of four farms and six transportation hubs. They were quickly quelled but the Independents involved were not sought out by the Local Councils.

Angla-Palli itself had its share of unrest, quickly quelled by Anglana's penetrative influence.

Anglana had told Mura that the banishment of the Independents was delayed until Mura had incorporated. Mura had asked: "What if I hadn't." Anglana had said: "That could not have happened."

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The increasing corruption in Local, Regional, and Territorial Councils was abhorred by the general population who knew what the Independents and Dissatisfieds were about and only wanted the calm and sane sense of order that the Worlds' government had initially brought them. These same everyday people knew that Anglana's action against the Independents had nothing to do with a desire to squash true independence. Common sense could easily tell the difference between the freedom to pursue an independent course of action and the anarchy of attempting to overthrow the government.

Delva had applied her pressure on the Worlds' Council to replace the three members who had acted unilaterally to send her the note about the Aklan killings. She argued that, even though the intentions of the Council members had been actuated by a concern for the followers of Akla, the disregard of the Council's Constitution concerning either a consensus, or, lacking that, a majority vote on all issues made their action dangerous if it were allowed to set a precedent. The Worlds' Council didn't need to issue a decision because the three Council members voluntarily relinquished their positions.

Delva knew her intervention would set its own precedent—giving her Mediation Boards the right to challenge such actions in the future. She knew the corruptive potential would continue since the Worlds' Council was elected by the Territorial Councils and their membership was, in turn, dependent on the Regional and Local Councils. Until the majority of the population decided, on their own initiative, to move from an actionless desire for Worlds' order to a proactive implementation of the principle of the Oneness of All Angians, the whole governmental system was continually in jeopardy.

Delva took a further step to shore-up the Worlds' government. She refashioned the Worlds' Mediation Board and used her unique persuasive abilities to make sure each regional arm of the Board had at least one Aklan. She further insisted that each member of the Mediation Board be given the right, if they so desired, to state in their wills their own replacement.

Mura questioned her mother about her efforts to ensure perpetuating Aklan membership on the Board.

"Mother, have you considered that people will think you're favoring one religious group over others and injecting a religious bias into the mediation process?"

"Mura, you're learning how powerful my abilities are to induce others to act as I wish. You know it carries an immense sense of responsibility and causes me no end of hours'-long internal debates. I've repeatedly stressed my non-involvement in direct religious activity and even gone

further and published my heart-felt reasoning for my stance. People used to complain that Verluin being my husband was reason enough for the Worlds' Council to replace me. I'm going to be appearing on the News Meshes soon to detail my reasons for assuring Aklan membership on the Mediation Board. It will be a tiring experience and will necessitate much more work than I wish I had to perform. I wish I could just tell people that the Aklans are intelligent and have the Worlds' best interests at heart; but, people have to be reminded that they've shown us, repeatedly, that they can act from the highest moral intentions while respecting others' beliefs; and, that they are more than willing to die for their own beliefs. I think the vast majority of people don't need my explanations—it's the ones who have financial power, mostly, who have to be exposed to my position; plus, the common people need the detailed arguments if they decide to wield their own influence in their Local and Regional Councils."

"Is there a chance that you're getting religious in your old age?"

"Ha! Even Anglana can't convince me to embrace the need for organized religion. She says she won't stop trying but can understand my reasoning. She claims I'm still acting on Akla's wishes."

"Morna, what do you think about the reality of Akla still being an active force in people's lives?"

"I can postulate that people who form a committed mental and emotional relationship with Akla's teachings can imagine they are being actively guided by his spirit. But, my speculations can't incorporate spirit, in the religious sense, as a reality."

"Is my love for my mother a spiritual reality?"

"I would say not."

"Is your attention to your son's development and evolution more than a rational endeavor?"

"I would say not."

"Well, at least you can understand humor."

"How does that relate?"

"I've noticed that all the Aklans I've interacted with have an acute sense of humor."

Morna was silent as she interpolated Mura's comment into her science/religion analyses.

~~~

Anglana had communicated to the Worlds' Council that Mura was to be her planet's contribution to the membership of the Council and that Mura, alone, could choose her replacement.

The discussions on the Worlds' News Meshes and in the chambers of the Local, Regional, and Territorial Councils became a nearly riotous situation. The actions of various Independents, expressed through their troops of Dissatisfieds, were riotous. After a year of discussion in the Worlds' Council, no decision of acceptance had been reached. There were two years left before the regular elections for Worlds' Council and the memberships of all other Councils were bound to see radical changes. The political storm was ferocious. The death toll from the actions of Dissatisfieds reached 10,043. Half of those were Aklans.

The Worlds' Protective Force was being bled to death by defections.

Corruption had reached a dangerous peak.

Delva and Mura had come to a momentous conclusion—they would appear on the Worlds' News Meshes, rather than waste time appealing to the Councils, to teach the Worlds a lesson. The broadcast was scheduled for the week before the lesser Councils' elections.

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Mura, Delva, and Anglana were communing.

They were engaged in creating the structure of a debate between Delva and Mura. It was agreed that the debate format would help the common person—those not involved in direct political action but necessary to the healthy functioning of the political system—grasp the essentials of what they wanted to teach the Worlds.

They had also decided that the main issue to be debated was not Mura's acceptance as a member of the Worlds' Council but the broader issue of stable government and the eradication of sympathies for the Independents.

Delva would take the position that groups acting outside the structure of properly organized government were the reason for unrest and, if not checked by rationality and the awareness of the Oneness of All Angians, would lead the Worlds' back to general warfare.

Mura would take the position that all groups of individuals needed the sanction of the Worlds' government for unfettered action on their principles—action short of violence.

They were aware that their positions were not the traditional strict opposites used in most debates. They would ignore the purists and bank on the common sense of the general population.

Delva had become the icon of rational Worlds' government. Mura would capitalize on her past reputation for supporting the Independents.

Anglana's contribution to their planning was to help them orchestrate their performance in such a way that they would be able to reach a dramatic agreement after an hour of seemingly fractious argumentation.

The overarching rationale was to take their audience on a journey—from the concept of unbridled freedom of action, through the pitfalls of governmental oppression, to the lush fields of unity in diversity.

Their supreme goal was to set up a Worlds' Conversation that would make people think about their duties as individuals and how that impacted their responsibilities as Worlds' citizens.

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During the debate there were a total of 243 riots. 687 places of business were destroyed. 16,319 people died.

All the violence was focused through the interests of the Independents and Dissatisfieds. The destruction was unleashed on businesses that were known as the most upright and equitable establishments. The deaths were shared equally by anarchists, law-abiding citizens, and Protective Forces.

The general population got the message Delva and Mura had worked to instill. The violence drove the message deep into the general population's minds and hearts.

The ensuing elections for Local, Regional, and Territorial Councils saw a slight decrease in Independent Movement sympathizers.

The Worlds' Council, well before its slated regular re-election, announced the acceptance of Mura as their member representing Anglana's World.

13 ~ Power

In spite of recent riots and deaths, the Worlds' economies were thriving. The three Created Worlds were fully inhabited and had begun their contributions to the Worlds' commerce and services. The agricultural World was already contributing twenty percent of all the Worlds' food, the applied technology World had programs running for improved transportation (both land and space), and the World for general exploration of learning potential had formed a strong bond with the applied technology World. They were also eagerly awaiting the creation of the final three Created Worlds, slated to begin in two years—Worlds for pure research, cultural advancement, and art. The farm, factory, and school would be joined by the lab, salon, and studio.

~~~

The banishment of the Independents from Anglana's World did nothing to slow their machinations. They were working to build bridges between their movement and certain communities of the Disciples of Faith. The Disciples, since the death of Xela, had become fractured into a number of sects ranging from those who were very close in their practices to what the Aklans believed to those who had corrupted their beliefs to conform to the changing economic and cultural expectations. The most corrupt sect was the Reformed Disciples of Faith. They were also the most numerous and the one that the Independents were targeting. The preferred method of engagement was to have certain numbers of Dissatisfieds "convert" to the religion. It took only a matter of months until the leaders of the Independents were able to claim the allegiance of sixty Communities' memberships.

Those Communities changed their name to the Independent Reformed Disciples of Faith.

~~~

The Created World devoted to a general exploration of learning had begun a project, in concert with the applied technology World, to enhance a person's abilities in plasma communication—lifting the natural reception of generalized thoughts and feelings between worlds to a disciplined ability to receive and transmit specific thoughts and feelings. The trained abilities would only be usable during the close approaches of Anga-Param and Anla-Purum. It took the enhanced flow of plasma between those Worlds to enable the ability. The Created Worlds were using a special plasma apparatus to mimic the necessary conditions.

There were, however, certain people who had an innate potential and could sense and transmit thoughts and feelings wherever they were, though only with those in close proximity. Velu and Zena had been the first people recorded with this ability. The researchers were hoping they could eventually train others in these abilities.

The plasma communication abilities of Delva were superior in all respects. She could influence people in very specific ways based on her keen reception of their thoughts and feelings. It was said she could even convince someone intent on harming her to immediately confess and beg forgiveness.

Mura would soon have abilities exceeding even Delva's.

~~~

Anglana had desired the attendance of Delva and Mura. They found their way to their favorite portion of Anglana's extended consciousness and began to commune.

Anglana: This will be the most important of any of our gatherings.

Delva and Mura: ?

Anglana: Delva, you now have the opportunity to end your physical life in a way that will give birth to Mura's child. This will be a gift of Akla.

Delva and Mura: ?!

Anglana: You now must discuss this between yourselves.

"Mother, I don't want you to end your life."

"Mura, dearest, I would only have mere months to live even if I refused this offer."

"Mother, I haven't told anyone yet but, if you have your heart set on this, you must know. I have accepted Akla as the Prophet for this Age. I am an Aklan."

"I suspected as much and Anglana is extremely persuasive when it comes to such things."

"No, it wasn't Anglana pressuring me. Her mind-set is completely Aklan and she claims communication with Akla Himself but I've done my own study, very careful study. I think the most influential person was father. You know I've used Morna's recordings of him and I'm sure you've sensed my slow approach to my own decision about faith and science."

"I haven't been mentally spying on you, Mura."

"I know that but you're my mother and, even without your abilities, you can read me."

"Yes..."

"Morna thinks I'm an idiot."

"Mura, I have never applied that word to your decisions."

"No, Morna, you're too well-mannered."

Mother and daughter shared a warm laugh.

Morna became busy with cross-correlations.

"Mura, this decision means you accept the motive power of the spiritual World in our physical lives. That's something I've never been able to grasp."

"I think it's because you're so intelligent."

"Yet, the Aklan belief is that intelligence is the prime gift of God."

"Yes, but it's also the spiritual attribute that includes free-will."

"So, I'm choosing to use a psychology derived from the material world to justify my lack of belief in Akla's spiritual power?"

"Nice try."

"What?"

"You do believe in the spiritual realm. You just don't believe it has spiritual entities in it. It's just a layer of morality surrounding all we do, somewhat like plasma."

"Now I'm convinced you're ready to be a mother."

"What?"

"We've spent countless hours together but we've never discussed spirituality in depth. It's always been about what the Worlds' need. Yet there you are voicing my spiritual belief in words that make even me understand it better."

"I guess your untiring efforts with me have rubbed off."

It was Morna's turn to offer a laugh. Rednaxela offered his explanation:

"My mother uses the same ability with me. I have yet to equal her insight."

Even Anglana shared her colorful water-spray of laughter.

Mura took hold of Delva's shoulders and said: "Mother, my beliefs are capable of comforting me



if you decide to let your body die but what would be your own comfort in death?"

"I'm very old, Mura, old enough to have lost the desire to struggle with the Worlds' problems. My comforts in facing my death are the knowledge that it will give you a child, a form of my immortality, as well as the comfort of knowing that you have more power than I to influence others and your child will have even more. But, there is one thing that doesn't comfort me and extending my life wouldn't supply that comfort. You and your child will still have to struggle, to fight with all you have, to educate the masses and to put up with the immorality of those corrupted by their will to power."

"Your spirit and Father's will combine and guide me and Akla will help me guide my daughter."

Delva spoke in the liquid tones of Anglana: "Yes, a daughter, and she will be called Verta—a name meaning the Comfort of Knowledge."

Morna spoke up: "I can name one more comfort, Delva."

"Oh?"

"I can supply Mura with your image and voice whenever she needs it."

Mura began to sob.

Delva embraced her.

A glow began to surround them all.

Delva and Mura rose and approached the water.

As they entered Anglana's liquid presence, the glow intensified around Delva, becoming a swirl of color—red, blue, green, purple.

Mura could feel a process beginning in her loins. She gave herself up to it.

Delva's physical substance was sublimating in the intense plasma glow and being transferred to Mura's body.

Morna was in high analysis mode but was incapable of discerning the details of the process.

The water began to churn violently. The display of color intensified. A cone of light grew skyward, aimed at the Mother planet.

Suddenly, a brief and total darkness enveloped the scene. Slowly, the daylight began to return and revealed Mura standing in the water with a baby girl in her arms.

## 14 ~ Speech

The Independent Reformed Disciples of Faith were on the move. They were attacking only farms. Farms were relatively isolated and ripe for undefended attack. Plus, the rising Worlds' economy had lured most farmers out of their fields to the towns and cities. Hence, most farmers were Aklans because they had no fear of death and the Aklan Scriptures gave primacy to agriculture as a profession. Until the Created World for agriculture was fully functional, attacking a farm was a strong economic statement. The Independents and their recent religious cohorts were making it what they called a “moral issue”—if the Worlds' Council wouldn't take action on their demands for more freedom in their commercial interests, it was only fair that they attack the most basic industry. The Council was forcing them to conduct business in a way they deemed unfair and force would be used against force.

The Independent Reformed Disciples of Faith, who carried out most of the attacks, added their own spin: Aklans worshiped a false prophet and deserved chastisement.

The Local and Regional Councils were still corrupt enough to defer protective action to the Territorial Councils. The Territorial Councils, mostly due to Delva's unremitting efforts, were a bit better but only sent their Protective Forces long after the violence had occurred. The Worlds' Council was in nearly constant consultation about how to increase the membership of the Worlds' Protective Force.

It took a number of years to bring the situation under control. The new recruits to the Worlds' Protective Force were not as well trained when committed to protective actions and more than a few atrocities happened. Slowly, the Territorial Councils' elected memberships showed fewer Independent sympathizers. Some traced this to the Aklan members of the Mediation Board. In their work with Regional and Local Councils, they made sure any surviving Aklan farmers were present. Those farmers characteristically asked for the pardon of the instigators of violence.

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Mura took Verta wherever she went, including sessions with the Worlds' Council. This presented a bit of discomfort for a few of the Council members but her being Delva's daughter as well as the sole member representing Anglana's World made the Council adapt to the unusual situation. When she was still quite young, Verta's lack of distractive habits made things even easier.

As she grew older she still kept her peace. She was vitally interested in what these people were saying. Her abilities with plasma communication grew extremely strong during the years she attended the Council's sessions though there were moments when her intense concentration on a discussion caused temporary confusion in the participants. Verta thought they were just getting old. Mura knew what was happening but decided the education her daughter was receiving far outweighed a Council member's momentary confusion.

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As Verta approached her adolescence, Mura became acutely troubled. Even though the corruption in the Worlds' government had decreased slightly, the actions of the Independents and their religious storm troopers weren't stopping. There was still a significant portion of the general population who could be swayed by the idea that there should be no restraints in trade and commerce. Mura's mother, Delva, had instituted the Angi Oneness Curriculum but there were few teaching it. Mura, as a mother, was now completely focused on the future and she knew that,

whether more people embraced the Aklan Faith or not, more people had to accept the concept of the Oneness of all Angians.

If people could continue to believe they were so different and special that their ideas could be supported by force, Mura could only see a dismal future for her daughter. No matter that the Worlds' governmental structure had brought Angians from near extinction to an expanding and prosperous family of Worlds. There was still far too much potential for corruption and violence. That was unacceptable to Mura.

She prayed and consulted Akla's Writings. She consulted with Verta. She ran it by Morna and Rednaxela. Then, she made her decision.

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Anglana welcomed Mura and Verta. Verta went off with Morna and Rednaxela and Mura spent an hour or so in abstract communion until Anglana requested Mura reveal the purpose of her visit.

“Anglana, I've spent years serving the Worlds as a Council member and I've seen some improvement in conditions. Some improvement but not enough. I feel I should relinquish my membership and travel the Worlds to teach Akla's Cause.”

“Dear Mura, this is a joyous decision but you would need to select your replacement.”

“I have no idea who should replace me.”

“Would you consider a recommendation from me?”

“Certainly, Anglana.”

“Alunur Cessin.”

“He's a known Independent sympathizer!”

“This is true. What is also true is that he has a mind that is always searching and that has led him to becoming immune to blindly accepting another's opinion.”

“Then, how could he sympathize with the Independents?”

“He's still relatively young, twenty and four years, and he has spent those years acquiring a vast reservoir of Worlds' knowledge. His involvement with the Independents began last year and he is already a thorn in their side. His parents were rich enough to have left him a sizable fortune and he still feels a sense of entitlement—a longing to maintain his independence without paying any dues to the culture that surrounds him. He will, eventually, leave the Independents. He will tire of their ways.”

“Isn't there someone else, with no connection to the Independents?”

“Yes, but Akla has given me a plan.”

“Please, do tell me what use Akla would have for an Independent.”

“It is not primarily as a sympathizer of the Independents that he is valuable, though his being a Council Member and a known sympathizer do have their benefits. One is that it will embolden the Independents to take more severe action. This will do two things. One is to hasten their downfall. Another is to give Alunur a harsh lesson in the Oneness of all Angians.”

“I can accept whatever Akla wants but I need more information to help me understand.”

“If Alunur can withstand the lessons of being a Worlds' Council member while sympathizing with the Independents, and he does have the potential to do that, he can become a worthy mate for your daughter.”

“What?! She's only twelve!”

“It should only take, at most, four years for Alunur to learn his lessons and help to throw a glaring light on the ultimate intentions of the Independents. He will then be twenty and seven years and Verta will be sixteen.”

“Certainly, Akla doesn't demand this marriage?”

“Mura, your mothering emotions are clouding your knowledge of Akla's Writings. The man and

woman must first make their own free-will choice of mate. That is then dependent on the living parents' consent.”

“Yes... But how will they ever meet if Verta and I are always traveling and Alunur is bound by his Council duties?”

“Alunur will seek her out.”

15 ~ Questions

It took Mura many months to get used to the reception she had to face as she traveled to various cities and villages. Even though the details of her daughter's birth were known to only herself, Verta, Morna, and Rednaxela, the fact that she was Delva's daughter and had no known husband had given birth to a sense of worship in the people she met. Her approach to this was to accept the devoted attention she received, avoid answering questions about her daughter's "father", and launch every meeting with a lively discussion of the people's immediate problems.

If Mura's lineage and the rumors of her birth process gave her an advantage in gaining the trust and interest of those she met, Verta's presence and speech gave her a living example of what it meant to be a spiritual youth.

It was easy enough for Mura to preach the tenets of Akla's Faith to people and, whether they embraced that Faith or just incorporated the spirit of the teachings in their lives, she was happy to find that most people were decent and open-minded.

It was a different situation for Verta. She deeply loved and respected her mother. She knew the importance of never discussing her "father". She knew her mother was completely devoted to Akla's Cause yet she was still a growing youth with more years to test her own burgeoning character against the whole rest of the Worlds. She was more than intelligent enough to understand the social teachings of Akla, prime among them the Oneness of all Angians, yet her soul was still wrestling with her ego and she loved a rousing spirited discussion, about anything. If she wasn't aware of the precise details of a subject, she would ever so honestly and sweetly demand to be instructed. Then, she would sally forth into the arena and test her mental skills.

She had a way, even if she knew nothing about a particular topic, of strengthening the other person's understanding, even if they were a supposed expert.

The concerns of adults when discussing the interrelationship of faith and science became for her a reason to demonstrate faith in action—show them that faith in a concept was useless unless thrust into the experimental laboratory of living action. She was very lucky indeed to have the help of Morna and Rednaxela during some of these discussions. An example:

Mura and Verta were in the village of Certiv, near the city of Selurn, in the Territory of Kernuma, on Anga-Param. There were a group of adults discussing Akla's Faith with Mura while Verta sat and listened. Six youth of the village appeared during the course of the discussion and the one named Zalen began to interject his comments into the adults' flow of conversation. Verta began to respond to each of Zalen's remarks. He in turn began to direct his speech straight at Verta.

When he finally knew he was in over his head and the adults were starting to get restless, Verta surprised them all by saying:

"If you believe you're stronger than anyone you know, do you think that makes it right for you to demand that people do whatever you say?"

Zalen was stung by the challenge and grasped at his sense of importance by saying:

"Absolutely, but I have to prove it to some people by pounding on them a bit."

"You haven't proven it to me, Zalen. Will you now pound on me?"

"Sounds like you want me to."

"That is completely your own decision."

The adults of the village were edging toward being frightened. Zalen was known for his temper and willingness to prop up his esteem with physical bullying. Mura was calm in her understanding of her daughter's abilities and the added protection afforded by the presence of Morna and Rednaxela. Verta thought the experiment needed more heat.

"Your own decision, Zalen, to prove to me that I should respect whatever you say just because you have a strong body."

"You do want a pounding."

"You decide. But beating me up will only prove you have physical strength, not that I should

respect whatever you say."

"You don't respect me?"

Verta remained silent. Zalen felt this small girl was making him look ridiculous. She just sat there and smiled at him.

"Get ready for a beating!"

As Zalen rushed at Verta, the villagers sprang into action to stop him.

There was a flash of light and he suddenly fell, flat on his face, not moving.

Verta looked at Morna and said: "You've ruined my experiment!"

"I saved your skin."

"Zalen didn't learn anything. Maybe if you'd let him bloody my nose then realize he still didn't have my respect, he could have learned something. Now, he might have to learn it under more desperate circumstances."

"I am programmed to protect you."

"Where is the part of your programming that let's me teach people a lesson."

Morna became busy with cross-correlations.

Mura offered: "Morna was right within her constraints. You were right within your constraints. Zalen was right within his. We all have constraints, limits to action and understanding. Even in the spiritual realm we need to learn how to overcome our constraints." She turned her attention toward the adults: "Verta wanted to free Zalen from a block in his social development. Morna wanted to fulfill her duty. Zalen wanted to prove his worth. All were constrained by their beliefs. Yet, the greatest freedom from constraints is love. Morna doesn't fully understand love, Zalen is blocking himself from it, and Verta is learning how to express it."

"Gee, Mom, all I wanted to do was give the boy a lesson in living. You always have to make it a spiritual journey."

Mura was used to Verta's ways. The adults were shocked at Verta's directness. The other youth now had a new champion.

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Mura and Verta continued their travels, talking to whoever would listen, filling their days with teaching—Mura in her spiritually intellectual way and Verta in her practical moral way.

There were other incidents of near violence, some by people who felt no need of religion, mostly due to extremely poor examples of it in their past, and some by various Independents, Dissatisfieds, and members of the Independent Reformed Disciples of Faith. Some were blunted by wise action on Mura's part, some by inventive displays of courage by Verta, and some by the intervention of Morna or Rednaxela. To say they were making a name for themselves was the height of understatement. They were becoming living Myths.

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The Council had at first balked at the idea of accepting Mura's choice for her replacement. Mura had given her appraisal of Alunur's qualification as far as his active intellect and wide-ranging knowledge and had side-stepped his known sympathy for Independents with the always powerful leverage of Anglana's desires. In the end, the Council had had to accept him because they had accepted Mura's appointment along with the provision that she, alone, could choose her replacement.

Alunur's time with the Council had progressed from heady excitement to nearly insufferable

tension. He had been careful, while in Council session, to push for a more lax approach to trade while not sounding like an Independent. In his private hours he had been spending time with select Independents.

What Anglana had predicted was coming true. The Independents had been emboldened. Farms being destroyed had been replaced by destroying agricultural ships from the Created World. The number of deaths were significantly less and the cost of using one plasma bolt on a ship was far lower than what it took to destroy a farm. It was also much harder to bring Protective Forces to bear on space-borne attacks.

Most of Alunur's fortune had been invested in the Created Worlds. Over time, the Independents began to consider attacks on not just cargo ships but directly on the Created Worlds themselves. The rapid growth of new plasma-related tools, spawned on one of the Created Worlds, were threatening the collapse of the plasma defenses of all the Created Worlds.

Alunur began to sever his ties with the Independents. The Independents didn't like that.

Alunur went into hiding.

Anglana, through Mura, appointed a well-known Aklan as Alunur's replacement.

16 ~ Honor

Alunur found a resting place on Anla-Purum in what had been called the Unholy Lands and was now Aklana. Being surrounded by Aklans wasn't as bad as he'd feared when his contact had told him where to hide next. This Territory remained in most minds as a place that was either unspeakably glorious or mind-numbingly dangerous. Either reputation sufficed for Alunur's purpose: avoid Independents.

The daily life of the family he was staying with was so normal that he wondered why people so often attributed miraculous powers to these people. They did pray in the morning before beginning their daily routine but the routine was, well, routine. The father kissed his wife and headed out to the mining facility; the mother got her children ready for school then rushed off to the university for her classes in history; the children went to school, came home and did their homework, went out to play, and returned before dark to be loved by the mother and father. Yes, they did pray again before sending the kids off to bed. But the reputation of Aklans being some rare form of spiritual beings wasn't apparently true. They were merely good people. Good people who took him in and made him feel welcome. Good people who without trying made him feel protected.

Alunur spent the first weeks just recuperating from the harrowing passages he'd navigated in the past two years. Staying one step ahead of dangerous Independents was easy with his financial resources. The uneasy and exhausting part had been acclimating to environments where his status as rich and educated mattered not a bit. He was humbled, confused, distraught, and witheringly tired.

The Besul family was a healing force just by their acceptance of his need to quietly sit, eat, sleep, and sketch. One day, without premeditation, he'd asked for a pad and pencil. He was surprised he had artistic ability. He'd thought his talents were studying, writing, and negotiation.

His passion about hiding his new creations was eventually penetrated by the youngest child's persistent unveiling of her own efforts in drawing. After each presentation of another of her self-proclaimed masterpieces, she would beg him to show her his sketches. He eventually did.

Mother Besul was the first to rank his work as genius. The children couldn't grasp the reason for her excitement but they did like his work. Father Besul was calmer than his wife but insistent that he be able to contact an artist of his acquaintance who could help Alunur become recognized.

"Mr. Besul, I can't become known for anything."

"Alunur, when will you finally call me Taliv? But no matter, we accepted you here because you're a child of God in distress. We hadn't expected the testimony of Anglana to your trustworthiness but I still don't understand how a man who appears out of nowhere, who has wealth but seems a natural recluse, can receive the blessings of Anglana."

"She recommended me for a job once. I had to escape attention because certain people didn't like a decision I'd made. Mr.— I mean, Taliv, I'm hiding from the Independents."

"Whew..."

"Yes, I was, well, in an influential position and the Independents were counting on me to make certain things possible for them. I realized that, if I did, my entire holdings would be wiped out. In fact, a large portion of the Worlds' wealth would have been obliterated. Before I left my job, I gave the authorities the names of key individuals, people since arrested and under constant supervision. Still, those people have many friends..."

"There used to be a Council member named Alunur, but his last name wasn't Pelv."

"Taliv, I'm who you think I am."

"My, my... You poor soul."

Taliv told Alunur he would make very private inquiries about a possible resolution of the situation. He assured him that, if things worked out, he might be able to live a less restrictive life. He didn't tell him that the inquiries were about how to communicate with Mura.


~~~

Mura and Verta were slowly approaching Aklana. They had been summoned by the Aklan Council of Justice but were instructed to visit certain localities on their way.

Their visits over the last three years had brought deep satisfaction to Mura. She could see that people, even those with no interest in an organized religion, were willing to discuss moral issues and were extremely open to the need for a general awareness in the citizenry of the Oneness of all people. They readily saw that without such an awareness, without a general sense of unity, their lives were always subject to the intrusions of those who thrived on dissent and force.

She estimated that ninety percent of the people she'd conversed with were in favor of regular courses in schools about Oneness and its utterly practical benefits. Her example, her ability to influence others, were a great aid in her mission but she knew that one person, no matter how influential, couldn't convince people of something unless they somehow had a propensity for it within their own natures. She found herself often saying a silent prayer of gratitude to Akla.

Verta found the traveling and greeting and talking triggering processes in her mind and heart that she'd been told would appear. But she'd never guessed how wonderful they could be. She had the best tutor for how to handle her blossoming qualities in her own mother.

Within the last month, she'd noticed what she suspected was her reception of thoughts and feelings from people who were in no way near her. She'd done some experimenting, checking with those around her, and could account for the alien impressions in no other way than that she could, in fact, engage in plasma communication at a distance.

When she told her mother, their travel plans were immediately changed. They set out for a visit to Anglana.

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While they were on Angla-Palli, Anglana had told Mura about Taliv's intercession for Alunur. Mura was intrigued but decided she would do nothing to hasten any connection between Alunur and Verta.

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Verta was set to the task of attempting distance communication with people on Anglana's planet who were thousands of miles away. In every case where she sent a request for their presence, the bewildered individual showed up. Anglana asked Verta to attempt a communication with someone on the agricultural Created World. No one showed up.

As far as Verta's learning how to keep the nearly constant reception of other's thoughts and feelings from overmastering her own consciousness, she, in her own nature, had a head start. Her own sense of justice, her incessant self-demand that she think for herself and process her feelings at depth was a critical advantage. Still, the increasing volume of receptions would have overwhelmed her if Anglana hadn't insisted, a number of times, that Verta submit to an infusion of Anglana's living substance into her bloodstream. This was repeated daily for nine days. Verta then spent two full days sleeping. When she woke, her first words were:

“Mother, there's a man who needs me to meet him.”

“Who, Verta?”

“His name is Alunur. He's been calling my name in his dreams.”

~~~

As Mura and Verta traveled to the Territory of Aklana on Anla-Purum for their audience with the Aklan Council of Justice, they had deep consultations about how to present their experience of teaching Akla's Faith. They also consulted about what Verta's ability with plasma communication meant in both their lives.

Verta seemed to have forgotten about Alunur but her mother had trouble keeping her mind away from the impending meeting.

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When they arrived in Oaur, the seat of the Council of Justice, they discovered that the Council had granted permission for a News Mesh team to be present at their meeting. The only word directly from the Council was that they considered the coverage to be critical for increased awareness of the necessity for Worlds'-wide recognition of the Oneness of all Angians.

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Alunur was sitting in his favorite chair, under the tree by the pond in the Besul's backyard, when he heard a voice in his mind:

I've heard you calling and I'm very near now.

He stopped his sketching and, with trembling fingers, set aside his pad and pencil. He tried to stand up but found his legs unwilling to support him. In his mind he, with a feeling of ridiculousness, said: *Who are you?*

The answer was immediate: *My name is Verta and you should be standing outside the building that houses the Council of Justice, two days from now, two hours past midday.*

Alunur passed out in his chair. He was discovered “sleeping” by the children. When they couldn't rouse him, their mother was called. When she couldn't rouse him, a doctor was called. Three hours later, when he regained consciousness in the hospital, he began murmuring: “Verta, Verta, Verta...”

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He was standing outside the Council's building, at the front of a large crowd, at the appointed time. Suddenly, a gaggle of Mesh reporters rushed out of the building and set themselves in front of a podium at the bottom of the steps. The next thing he saw was a woman and a young girl walking down the steps. The woman began addressing the reporters and the young girl began to stare at him.

A man jostled past him and stopped a few feet away.

The man screamed: “In the name of God!”

A bolt of plasma shot from the man's chest.

It hit a metal box the woman was carrying.  
The box seemed to emit a stream of plasma that engulfed Alunur, swiftly followed by a bolt that killed the man and sent Alunur sprawling.  
The woman collapsed.  
All was silence but for a voice coming from the box: "I have failed in my mission."  
The young girl was testing the woman's pulse.  
She stood and said: "She's dead."  
Then, she walked to Alunur, who was groggily getting to his feet, and said, "She died for your sake. Now, I will live for your sake."  
Alunur said: "Are you Verta?"  
"Yes..."  
"Is that your mother?"  
"No. That's the body my mother was borrowing. She's a part of me now."  
The crowd was still standing in shocked silence.  
The metal box could be heard murmuring: "In the name of God, In the name of God, In the name of God..."

## 17 ~ Sovereignty

This is Sena again. I promised I'd return to continue the story of my people when the history reached my birth. That happened not so long after my grandmother died. Mura had just been in a meeting with the Aklan Council of Justice. Her daughter, Verta---*my* mother---was with her; and, my father, Alunur, watched the scene as a religious radical tried to kill Mura.

I say tried to kill because Morna's task was to make such a thing impossible.

As you've just read, my mother said to my father: "She died for your sake. Now, I will live for your sake."

Verta knew Alunur would be there. My grandmother knew, too, though she knew much more about Alunur than Verta did, primarily through information Anglana had given her. Grandma, deep in her heart, knew Alunur needed a powerful demonstration of love to galvanize his being, help him prepare for a life with Verta.

Mura, without conscious thought, had redirected the plasma shield Morna had created to protect her on to Alunur. She died for the sake of my father—demonstrated sacrificial love—because she knew my mother would marry him and, through Anglana, knew that Alunur was critical to the evolution of the Aklan Faith.

Mom and Dad got married only one month after Grandma's death. They had me after the nominal period necessary to grow a new child.

The situation in the Worlds at my birth could be summed up by saying that the Worlds' government was about fifty-six percent trustworthy, the state of trade and commerce was growing at a rate of ten percent per year, and the Aklan Faith comprised around thirty-four percent of the population.

Religion again...

No matter my personal beliefs, the Aklans as a group are the most industrious, most trustworthy, most giving people of the Angian star system. Whether that came from their adherence to the dictates of Akla or was just some chance result of the Angian evolutionary path has little practical importance for the folks who benefit from having people like this around. I think the Teachings of Akla are brilliant. He covers everything from how to maintain mental hygiene to how a government can best serve its citizens. Was He a Prophet Who spoke for God?

You decide.

I have more of the story to tell.

After my father had exposed the leaders of the Independents their force in our society quickly dwindled. Their henchmen, the Disciples, went on a brief rampage and killed thousands but the Worlds Protective Force had already been strengthened and if there are any Disciples of Faith left, even the nicer ones, they don't dare bother anyone.

Mom and Dad teamed up to carry on the teaching work that Mura had been pursuing—the work that my ancestor, Delva, had first championed, even though she didn't cling to organized religion.

I, naturally, went wherever my parents went until I reached my thirteenth birthday. That's when I went to stay with Anglana.

That dear, sweet Consciousness completely convinced me that our Worlds were well on their way to an enduring peace. She also gave me my life's work.

Mother could use plasma communication out to about 3,000 miles. Anglana and I discovered that I could use it at a much greater distance. I was able to reach out to other star systems!

This was a complete surprise to me and, without Anglana to translate and explain, I would have thought that the extremely strange things I was receiving were only some very disturbed Angians.

I spent the next twenty years, mostly emerged in Anglana's liquid embrace, experimenting with

receiving and translating information from five nearby Worlds. Three were in one star system and the other two each in its own system. Still, the three from the same system were very, even radically, different. Nothing like the amazing similarities we of Angi's Worlds enjoyed. Even Anglana's difference of form was not as strange as the differences all five of these other Worlds displayed.

So, here I was, a woman of thirty-three, whose best friend was a widely distributed Consciousness, when I happened to meet a man...

He'd been an Independent and had converted to the Aklan Faith. He'd served on four Local Councils, two Regional councils, and two Territorial Councils. When they told him he'd been elected to the Worlds' Council, a revelation performed in the glare of the News Meshes, he merely said, "I've served the Worlds enough. It's time for them to serve me."

After all the commentators carefully explained that Neiiiv hadn't meant anything like becoming some sort of ruler who was served by the people, that he only meant being "served" as in the service that any sane government performs for its citizens, I began to change my mind about him.

My days with Anglana were intense and arduous and took most of my time but I still kept up with happenings in the Worlds. And, Neiiiv was a big Happening. I was immediately attracted to him but also felt afraid of him.

He was confident, capable, captivating, and cute.

I was studious and strange.

When news of his retirement from public service was released, Anglana, without my knowledge, made arrangements for him to visit me. All she said, on the day he was due to arrive, was, "A man is coming to meet you. Be very nice to him."

I've already talked a bit about plasma communication and how it's the foundation for many of the seemingly inexplicable ways that people can communicate without words or actions. My training with Anglana had involved mostly the task of receiving communications from other star systems and we were about to embark on a few experiments with me transmitting a few messages; but, along with all that, Anglana had also drilled me in methods of controlling my communication abilities, essentially, turning them on and off. When she told me a man was coming to meet me, I turned my powers on and widened my reception to anyone thinking about me.

Neiiiv almost immediately entered my consciousness. I was at first thrilled with the mental taste of him. I then, unknowingly, sent him a thought and a feeling. Immediately, I was overcome with a withering rush of consciousness and I couldn't control it, couldn't mute it, couldn't do anything but let it wash over me. I nearly swooned under its impact and, before I could recover, he appeared at the top of a nearby hill. Seeing his form gave me a small foothold from which to begin to gain control of my mind and heart. Later, I would scold Anglana harshly. Now, I was eager to meet him, get to know him, devour him...

Since this book isn't a history of me but a story of my people's rise from nearly interminable war to enduring peace, I'll jump to the time after our wedding, when we began earnest discussions about the future of our people.

Neiiiv's estimation was that another fifty years would see the Aklan Faith's membership reaching about 70% of the population. He also predicted that the Teachings of Akla would be the accepted moral norm for at least 85% of our population. He also thought that we were reaching a point in our culture's evolution where we would transition from learning how to live to teaching other people how to live.

Naturally, he was deeply involved with my experiments with plasma communication with other

star systems but he had focused in on becoming the organizer of a physical voyage to one of the five systems under study.

He estimated it would take us another sixty years to successfully establish comfortable enough relations with one of those peoples to permit the sending of a space vessel full of brave souls. He even predicted which of the systems would prove safest to visit.

While Neiiv set about his spacey task, I continued to reach out to other star systems.

The very next one I made contact with was yours...

## 18 ~ Dominion

How to describe the first mental taste of a world in another star system...

This is exactly what happens inside me—I have a distinct taste in my mind. If it's strong enough, it can spill into my mouth and become a physical taste.

That's what happened with your World. It had a very sour taste in my mouth. But, under that, like an aftertaste, was a deep sweetness.

As I pursued my exploration and narrowed my reception of various parts of your World, I realized that the sourness was coming from very few and very specific places. Most of your World's mental taste is extremely sweet, lots of it bitter sweet, but small pockets are very distasteful.

After I'd narrowed my search for those deeply interested in life beyond your World, I discovered two classes of mind:

- \*Those looking out trying to find another example of who they were.

- \*Those looking out and wide open to whatever they were graced to find.

The first group is mainstream astronomers and astrophysicists.

The second group includes artists of many kinds.

Let me add that I'm egregiously oversimplifying this separation of types of people. Some belong to both groups. Some in one group secretly believe ideas of the other group. Fully exploring the variations of people on your World who seriously consider the cosmos would take another whole book.

I'd narrowed my search to ten individuals who seemed possible candidates for reception of a message from me. And, let me make it clear, the previous five Worlds I'd contacted had no individual consciousnesses I felt able to send a message to. All those Worlds needed many years of study before we could reveal ourselves to them.

There's something about your World that sets it apart. It has to do with the stage of evolution of your culture.

Out of the ten possible, one continued to stand out. Not because he was intelligent or particularly scholarly. Not because he had some important position in World affairs or had connections to those who did.

He was a nearly unknown man who had done some writing, had served a few years in one of your military establishments, and had been born to parents who were both ministers of an evangelical Faith. The story of his search for the balance between faith and science would take a book of its own.

He's the co-author of this book and is sitting there right now, typing these words onto the page and debating with me in his mind about all this reference to him. He's sixty-five of your years old and used to be a rather argumentative man. The various experiences of his life have taught him just a bit of humility.

Alexander and I had many conversations before he sat down to help me write my people's history. It wasn't as simple as me speaking in his mind and him just typing away like a secretary. A literal transcription of my Worlds' tale would read somewhat like a description by one of your World's most respected authors: "...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

So, this story has been mine; but, it's been translated by Alexander to, shall we say, "conform" to the normal understanding of a citizen of Earth.

My experience with Alexander has taught me a tremendous amount of valuable information about humans. You're more like us than you may imagine, even though we are extremely different types of beings.

I can't say I have high hopes for your World's progress toward Peace. There are too many variables and, bottom-line, it depends on a sufficient number of you making the heart-felt decision to work for peace, in every interaction of every day of your lives.

Can you become more kind to others? Can you work on seeing the similarities more than the differences? Can you love the potential in others and forget that they haven't attained that potential, yet?

If enough of you did just those three things, my estimation of your odds of attaining an enduring peace would go way up.

Some folks say that your World's global peace is inevitable. Even if that's true, by the time it arrives, if enough people haven't done what they should, there will be pitifully few people left to enjoy that peace...

I leave the last chapter of this book to my daughter, Ararura.



## 19 ~ Loftiness

My name is Ararura Quaren.

I asked my mother if I could write the last chapter of this book. She had become somewhat depressed as the process came near its conclusion. Her intense effort to transmit our story through Alexander had made the lives and sacrifices of our ancestors come to ripe life in her soul. They had all gone through so much and had helped our Worlds reach an enduring peace. When she had communicated with Alexander about the last chapter you've read, all the conversations she'd had with him came back to her and she wished she could visit your World and talk directly to everyone, convey the truth of what it takes for a culture to lift itself from degradation and greed and war to a smoothly functioning culture that gives every citizen their due.

I feel my mother and Alexander have given any honest person more than enough information to start them on the trail of discovery that carries them to the heights of thought and feeling which engender peace in their heart. Once that happens, they feel a magnetic attraction to other souls. They attain the awareness of the Oneness of All.

Consider what happened in the history of my Worlds. Consider what is happening in your World that is similar.

We had one World that had perfected the art of religious superstition and another that had capitalized on the power of corporate structure.

Your World has had the history of a series of religions, each pure in its infancy, each attaining worldly strength as it grew, each letting go of the inspiration of its Prophet-Founder and allowing its clergy to pervert the healing benefit of its moral power, to close itself off from productive consultation with the members of other religions, even going so far as to unceasingly harass and, in some cases, murder the Prophet-Founder of the following religion.

If there was one thing our Aklan Faith has taught Angians, it's the unity of all Faiths, the never-ending appearance of enlightened Prophets who all say the same thing. Each speaking to people at a different level of social evolution—each crafting their message to the needs of a succeeding Age—each agreeing with all the others.

Please make an effort on Earth to follow the example of these remarkable Individuals. If you have absolutely no idea how to begin such a quest, I feel your best bet is to find a Bahá'í.

Your World experimented with many methods of dealing with the necessities of your physical existence. At a certain point in this process the concept of a corporation took hold. And, though corporate structure, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad, it seems many of your corporations are using that structure to further purely materialistic aims. This can only strangle your World. This use of corporate power can become the cause of wars. It can even co-opt the concept of religion and enlist various sects in its plans of material conquest, ignoring the requirements of the human soul.

Just as with the religions of your World, the corporations began as a remedy—a means of supplying the physical needs of your peoples. Sadly, the same corruption some of your religions have suffered has infected many of your corporations.

My ancestors have taught me that life can only be lived successfully if the needs of the spirit, as well as the body, are satisfied.

If you're looking for physical sustenance, be sure the providers have your best interests in mind when they create what you consume.

If you're looking for emotional sustenance, be sure the feelings involved are deep-rooted and sincere.

If you're looking for mental sustenance, be sure the teacher is broad-minded and dedicated to constantly refreshing their perspective on their field of study.

If you're looking for spiritual sustenance, be sure the religion or group or movement is not an imitation. Be sure the people are motivated by the same pure exploration of truth that an honest scientist employs when delving into the mysteries of Nature.

In all your efforts to live a better life, in all your efforts to aid your World's struggle towards peace, remember these words of the Artificial Intelligence, Morna: "Patience is our weapon of choice."

## Afterword

This book could be called a "Documentary" Novel.

Yet, there are spaces not obviously visited in [Notes from An Alien](#)—glimpses into the depths of the book—character disclosures, about people already in the novel and those yet to be mentioned—revelations of events that happened in the Worlds of Angi but weren't rendered in the published edition...

To visit these spaces, check-out our [Behind The Scenes page](#)...

## Communicators' Roll of Honor

This is Alexander M Zoltai. The people listed here were more helpful during the writing of this book than they might expect. An interesting aspect of this list is who is not here. Over 300 people were given the opportunity to have their names here. I can imagine many reasons for their decision not to be listed; but, I'm sad that they can't be honored as part of the normally-invisible matrix of individuals who make the author's job more interesting and, definitely, more worthwhile.

Please note: Some of the names below are creative aliases.

**Margaret & Charlie**  
**Audra**  
**Linda**

**Jane Watson**  
an Australian writer published by Picador  
**aka Arton Tripsa**  
Creator of Virtual Worlds in Kitley and Discovery Grid

**Denise Skelley**  
**Katharina Curtis**  
**Bonchance Longfall**  
**Princess Aquila**  
**Cassandra Gauntley**  
**XCF Seetan**  
**Angèle Lubin**  
**Richard Hughes**  
**Astronart Varthader**  
**Sharky Ninetails**  
**Sugarpie Rabbit**

**Jammers Inaka:** much-loved poet and extremely giving soul.  
<http://jammerswritings.com/>

**Selina Greene:** former UK publisher, Owner of Book Island in Second Life.  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Book%20Island/175/211/36>

**Eppie Ward:** Giver and taker of the river of knowledge. Fellow friend and writer of Alex (Sandor, my protector in SL) and Sena who has reassured me that there are aliens looking out for us on Earth. <http://Iamdying.net>

**Rebekah Webb:** "Just another writer on the wild ride that is fiction."  
<http://writertask.webs.com/>

**Simone Benedict:** a fiction writer living in Kansas who is also a Christian seeking to find some equanimity in the world. She has previously published fiction and poetry under a pseudonym. She maintains a blog at <http://simonebenedict.wordpress.com/>.

**Bruce Enyo:** an avatar in Second Life, and interested in creative writing and philosophy. He is a science fiction and technology addict, who is very interested in what the future has to bring.

**Bluebell Broome:** one of the founders and creators of Beau Belle Island, in Second Life, where she spends much of her creative time building and helping to grow the community. In real life, she is based in Wales, Earth, and works in TV production.

**Arlene Radasky:** author of the world-renowned historical novel, *The Fox*. She also loves to write poetry, and short stories. Get to know her at <http://www.radasky.com>

**Julie Achterhoff:** author of *Quantum Earth*, *Deadly Lucidity*, *Native Vengeance*, and *Earthwalker*, literally dreams up the stories she writes. They have all originated in the dream world in the dark of the night.

Blog: <http://earthwalker.tk>

**Jay Cox:** born in 1957. He lives in Ingram, Texas, with his wife, Bobbie. He has an associate's degree in specialized business. He served in the United States Army for four years and operated local access television for his community. He has two daughters, Cathy and Carmen, and one granddaughter, Nissyen.

**Mariana Passos e Sousa:** a journalist and occasional writer from Lisbon, Portugal.

**Rae Larkham:** Author, Artist, Dreamer. Writer of multi-genre works including sci-fi, fantasy and romance. A Writer's Dream - <http://raelori.blogspot.com>

**Eckhard Graf:** lives in Germany and works in IT. With his (entirely fictional) book he tried to work out the possibility of whether God exists after all--despite trustworthy scientific findings. <http://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/EckhardGraf>

**Haley Whitehall:** historical fiction writer from Wenatchee, Washington. <http://haleywhitehall.wordpress.com/>

**Fiordaliza Charles:** a self-published author who has five poetry books and a novel. She is currently working on a new poetry book to be released in May 2011. <http://www.authorfcharles.com>