

... for Ruth and all the lovely hobbits ...

D O W N S T E P

by Robert Roy Smith



Part I

***All I have done and left undone
now weighs upon my soul.***

Who am I?

A fragment of Creation?

A self conscious hologram?

For the last time,

the illusion of fear.

My old enemy.

My old friend.

Oh . . . the lovely faces.

Prologue

Deep into the unexplored territory of space the lightship Chrysolis plunged wildly toward the blaze of an unnamed sun.

"Shut it down! Shut it down!" L-5 cried from below.

The robot struggled frantically to energize a patch for the ruptured tachyon tube.

"There's still no response!" shouted Helaah, struggling to mentally entrain control over the Chrysolis through the hand grooves.

He wiped the sweat off his face, took some deep breaths, and looked at his three human crew members, so thankful now that this one time, this only time, he had left Pheledra behind. *That ridiculous argument ... stubbornness. I acted like ...*

"Sevret, report on the condition of the rim field." Noctera's voice was shaking.

Sevret stared at the monitors overhead, her eyes wide with terror. "No power control. No direction control! We're headed into that sun! The stray tachyon waves from the explosion are eating up the rim on the starboard side!"

Suddenly the craft changed course.

Payra tried frantically to recalibrate the balancers. He shot a quick glance at Helaah. "Did you do that?"

"No, no! We're completely out of control!"

Payra quickly rolled over to the output indicators.

Helaah ripped the cover off the hand controls to examine the insides. "Did that direction change help us any?"

"No, we're curving back around," replied Payra.

Helaah probed the circuitry with a testing tool. "The problem is not here. L-5, how are conditions down there?"

"Bad!" answered the robot, "I can't neutralize the stray energy from the ruptured tachyon tube ... *shock blending* may start at any moment!"

"Oh no," Helaah whispered.

"What are the droids doing?" Sevret demanded.

On the power deck below, L-5 glanced over at the brilliant multicolored lights flashing back and forth. "There's nothing they can do! They're in conference trying to come up with something . . . frustrated and desperate!"

Helaah fought the panic with every inner resource in his being and quickly began to run his hand over the pulse generator to prepare for density shift.

"Payra, can you calculate our arc so we can form a portal?"

"Yes, if we don't suddenly shift directions again."

"Do it quick."

"Okay, okay ... upcoming coordinates ... forty seven ... ninety two ... seventy eight ... thirty three ... everyone together. Let's sing!"

The entire crew began to mentally entone the gate frequency for an energetic boost to the light ship's neurological processes. A bright blue light appeared in space off the port side of the Chrysolis.

"Oh, my spirit," said Sevret, as the blue light opened like a flower from its center with boiling white clouds.

"There it is!" exclaimed Noctera.

"But can we intersect it?" Helaah sounded doubtful.

"It's moving away from us as we approach it," said L-5 from below.

"Damn!" Payra exclaimed, "I was afraid that might happen!" He was almost beside himself. "The strong gravitational vortex won't let us pass through the filter curtain."

Helaah opened his hands in a gesture of surrender and calm acceptance. "We're stuck ... we can't upstep through the vortex portal. L-5, send Amber up here immediately. I want to preserve at least one droid in case the entire power deck becomes compromised."

Amber flew up to the control deck. "I'll just stay out of the way until you need me."

A terrific explosion resounded from below and everyone went sprawling to the floor. Undulating electromagnetic rainbows crackled in and out of existence from every direction. Helaah scrambled back to his station. "L-5! L-5! Answer!"

"There goes the last tachyon tube," replied the robot, "I'm shaken but still operating. However, the droids were completely toasted from the magnetic pulse. Fortunately, my shields were up. Is Amber still okay?"

Helaah glanced over his shoulder as Amber gave a thumbs up. "She survived. The pulse must have been localized."

"Payra, what is our critical ETA?" asked Noctera as she looked through the wide angle scope.

"We're way passed it," Payra said, trying to sound calm.

Everyone sighed almost at the same time as the grim reality hit home.

"All external monitors out." Sevret said getting out of her seat. "I'm going outside to inspect the damage. Maybe there's still some way to get us headed away from that sun!"

The lightship gave a sudden lurch, changing directions again, then again, then again returning to its fatal plunge. Helaah took a deep breath and started to shake his head but thought better of it. "Sevret, be sure to

turn up your field generator so you stay with the ship."

Sevret snapped on an EV belt, which would produce the survival bubble around her, and quickly entered the lock. Once outside she hung close to the saucer and made her way around the rim.

"The stray energy pockets are bouncing everywhere on the starboard side," she reported. "The edge is completely dissolved away and the deterioration is progressing laterally."

"How fast?" Noctera asked, trying to stay in control of herself.

"Who knows," replied Sevret, "jerky ... irregular ... Wow! Those tachyon bolts almost fried me!"

"Get back in!" shouted Helaah.

"Right away!"

A strong vibration began. It quickly grew stronger making it difficult for anyone to see the instruments. Sevret couldn't get the outside hatch open to get back inside, so she moved vertically up the dome where she could re-enter the ship through the soft chamber. She only had to activate the quantum structure change and pop herself through to the observation deck.

She was just about to key her EV belt when the first shock blending occurred. The pain and mental distress was indescribable as all material particles flew apart at the speed of light then contracted back in. Sevret saw that her leg had become embedded into the

metal of the lightship. She panicked and broke her hip trying to get free.

When the vibrations decreased, Helaah was sick to his stomach and trembling. "Report in," he said weakly.

"I'm okay," said Noctera catching her breath. "Poor Sevret."

"Intact," said Amber.

Payra moaned. "I've dislocated my shoulder."

"Sevret ... report in!" Helaah was worried. He could hear her crying.

"L-5, are you still with us?" Noctera's voice was tense.

"Ahhh ... you might say that," he said, "I now find my left side mingled with the bulkhead. For that, there is no known cure ... but I've still got all my wits."

Helaah shook his head. "Sevret, report if you can!"

He could hear her crying but she didn't answer. "I'm going out to get her."

Helaah was shaking badly and fumbled desperately to put on an EV belt. It took him way too long but he finally made his way out through the lock. He was in terrible shape from the shock blending and it had been a long time since he'd experienced the vastness of space up close in a survival bubble. He was disoriented. Particles of dust and tiny meteorites whizzed around him, diverted by the protective field. A cloud of

particles pummeled the survival bubble and he almost lost his grip. He turned up his field generator, calmed his mind and looked around. Behind him a trillion stars gleamed, as if a single brilliant light was shining through holes punched in the fabric of space-time. In front of him, the fiery mouth of the monster beckoned. He tried hard not to panic or throw up, took a deep breath and carefully made his way around the rim and up the side of the dome where Sevret was struggling and writhing in pain. He quickly bathed her in a numbing ray and saw that she was in serious trouble.

"Sevret, the shock blending has caused your leg to become molecularly bonded with the ship. I can't get you free. I'll have to amputate."

"It's no use Helaah. My protective field has already been compromised. It will collapse in a few microns." Sevret became very calm. "No one lives forever."

"Oh Sevret ..." Helaah closed his eyes. "What can I do for you? What can I do for you?"

Sevret winced in pain, then managed a smile. "If, by some miracle, you live through this, tell Pheledra how much her wonderful friendship strengthened me and got me through my doubts. Tell her ... I died happy ... and so in love with all of you."

"Oh Sevret ..." Tears streamed down his face. "I ... I can't leave you like this."

Her eyes had a far away look. "I want to go now ... into the beyond. Tell Pheledra ... promise?"

"I promise ... but please ..." Before he could finish his sentence, her survival bubble collapsed and she died instantly. **"No ... no Sevret,"** he sobbed, but it was too late.

He felt the vibrations starting up again and knew he must work quickly. ***This precious soul deserves the utmost honor and respect.*** With his laser he carefully cut through her trapped leg and gripped the body. He wanted to get her back inside but without the survival bubble to deflect the meteorites and space trash, her corpse was quickly shredded apart. A sudden shower of particles ripped her body out of his hands and she was gone. Frustrated and angry, he slapped the side of the dome with his hand as the tears streamed down his face. His heavy heart dampened the fear as memories of the long and wonderful friendship flashed before his eyes.

He found the soft chamber and activated the quantum structure change, allowing himself to slip through the wall of the dome and emerged onto the observation deck. He switched off the survival bubble. The vibrations became erratic. Another shock blending took him away. When it was over, he was completely disoriented and it took several microns to recover.

"Everyone report." he finally said through the communicator.

"Payra and I are coming up now." Noctera sounded out of breath. **"The tachyon radiation is too strong down here."**

"I'm not damaged," said Amber, flexing her mechanical arms.

"Still functioning." L-5's voice sounded far away, "but it's hell down here on the power deck. My machinery is frozen up. Most of my circuits are damaged beyond repair. I can't move at all ... but I still have all my wits."

Noctera was just helping Payra up through the hatch when another burst momentarily blew everything apart.

When Helaah came to, he found himself lying upside down across one of the observation chairs. He rolled off onto his hands and knees and saw Payra's head and upper body protruding from the floor. "Oh no!" Noctera's face was embedded in the wall. She was obviously dead. He quickly checked himself and was thankful to see that his own body was intact.

"I took a hard hit," said Amber. "Now conducting self-examination."

"L-5, speak to me." Helaah's voice was desperate.

"I still have all my wits. ... I still have all my wits ... I still have all my wits." He obviously didn't.

Helaah crawled over to Payra. He was in shock and slowly dying. A big pressure blast knocked him flat and at the same time he heard Payra's neck snap from the force. "Payra? Payra?" Then, all power and lights went out. The terrible sounds made it clear that a portion of the ship had blown away. He shouted into the blackness. "Amber, Amber, are you still functional? Can you seal us off?"

"Trying ... trying ... yes ... I can still generate some energy fields but my inner light is growing weak."

"Seal us off, scan the ship, assess the damage and open up transparency in the dome!"

"Okay ... just a micron ... observation deck isolated. All crew dead except for you and I. Most of the power deck, all tachyon tubes, the two recon saucers, four droids and L-5 gone for good, control deck smashed and unusable ... dome transparency activated."

Fiery light engulfed the observation deck. It was too bright to look up. Now, there was no more vibration. An eerie silence prevailed for a moment as the suns gravity accelerated them headlong toward oblivion. The atmosphere inside the ship was getting hotter by the moment. Then a high pitched whine and violent shaking ensued.

Helaah lay face down on the floor with his hands clasped behind his neck. The back of his head felt like it was on fire. His body was soaked with sweat. He looked up a little and quickly shaded his eyes. "Tint the transparency, Amber."

"Aye, aye sir," she said. The dome clouded over. He rolled onto his side and remained still for a moment silencing his mind and preparing for death. As the whining vibration and heat increased, he flopped back and forth from one side to the other, his heart pounding as searing death drew near. "Pheledra ... Pheledra ... love of my soul ... forgive me ..."

One - The Mission

The great planet with its crystalline seas turned slowly, an ever changing panorama of light across the mountains, valleys and distant shores. Here and there, through clouds propelled by gentle winds, ribbons and patches of green, white, blue, red, purple and tan blended into every shade. Sparkling snow capped mountains threw shadows from the light of twin suns burning like watcher's eyes in the blackness of space.

Three bright orbs appeared on the northern horizon and moved southwest. They stopped, flashed a greeting and sped out of sight.

Life carriers, she thought.

Through the observation dome of her lightship *Firefly*, Pheledra smiled, enjoying her own flash of joy which had gone out in response.

To this unnamed third density world far from home she had come for rest and recreation - a vacation - taking in the sights, remembering her soul in the light of this pristine planet which was just beginning its evolutionary journey. And as she gazed upon this beautiful sight, she also remembered the terrible heaviness of third density and thought about the countless souls that would struggle here to become. Just as her own ancestors did long ago on her planet.

Oh, Helaah, she cried in her mind, I love you.

A single tear rolled down her cheek but she quickly wiped it away.

Nestingwave looked over at Pheledra, stroked his white beard and adjusted his seat. He put both hands behind his head and grinned, drinking in the magnificent view. "And a sight to behold it is!"

"Lovely beyond words," she exclaimed to match his enthusiasm.

In many ways Wave was like a father to her. She valued his advice and respected his point of view. He was a gifted engineer who played the lightship like a musical instrument, keeping the *Firefly* in top running condition. She trusted him. So many times his keen intuition and level headedness had prevented tragedy, solved the unsolvable and saved the day. But, more than that, he was a good friend and cheerful companion on long journeys.

Inky, Ginger, and Boots lay on their pillows basking in warmth, living in the moment as felines do. These sapient cats were not just furry companions but full crew members who came from a long line of space-faring adventurers. Their dexterity was enhanced by prehensile paws and tails. And, of course, like cats everywhere, they were curious, playful and independent.

Inky and Ginger curled up in fond embrace, licking each others fur. Boots snoozed and sighed. He twitched his ear and opened one eye, wishing for a little action.

Pheledra immediately responded to his body language. "Okay, Boots, let's put on some music."

An acoustic probe left the ship and shot downward, bathing in the resonances of the planet's song to be instantly translated by the ship's sound system. She placed the program pad in front of Boots. "Here you are."

Boots tapped and scratched with his right front paw and kneaded the program pad, purring loudly. Inky and Ginger perked up with expectation as Pheledra adjusted the gravity. Inky's eyes got big and Ginger mewed with some concern as they began to bounce and float. Although they were well adapted to a variety of gravitational situations, they still felt most comfortable with something solid beneath their feet. So, in this case, they simply snagged their claws into whatever was available in order to stay put. Like all cats, they were hard on the furniture.

Nestingwave knew what was coming but didn't feel all that energetic today, so he drifted out of his observation chair and bowed in mid-air to Pheledra and the cats with a gesture of farewell. "Enjoy, my dear friends, I'll be down on the control deck playing chess with Fabby if you need me."

"Have a good game, Wave!"

He swung past, gripped the ladder and disappeared through the hatch that led to the control deck below.

Rhythm-tones of the Ehnala drum filled the air.

"Well kitties, shall we dance?" Pheledra undid her light brown hair and led the way with slow flexible movements, disciplined

and sensual. She purred softly and extended her right leg behind her, wagging it back and forth like a tail. Boots reached out his paw, took her hand and the dance unfolded as music caressed the senses with profound melodies of the Aquadian harp, flute and strings. They performed a mid-air ballet. The music became layered with full orchestration evolving into counterpoint. The rich tone of the solo trumpet sang a new melody as percussion intensified. Pheledra arched her back and slowly spiraled like a leaf floating on the autumn breeze. Boots meowed as he splayed, pedaled and tumbled across the room, segueing into doubletime diving and rolling.

Inky and Ginger were content to remain as spectators until Boots began pirouettes and slow-motion airborne somersaults. Soon, all four were stretching, spinning, and twirling through the air. The music flowed from rhythm to rhythm. Gradually, the song returned to its original simplicity and the dance unwound as the flute and Ehnala drum spun a dark tale of mystery.

Finally, exhilarated but tired, the cats floated to their pillows. Pheledra readjusted the gravity and plopped down into her observation chair. She slid her fingers into the hand imprint on the arm and moved the lightship further out into space.

A warmth filled them as they rested in the beauty of that unspoiled world below. It seemed even more beautiful from afar, as the light and color trembled with expectation.

Suddenly, the air was charged with an eerie presence, light coalescing into uncertain

form. Inky, Ginger, and Boots were already alert. Every hair stood on end.

Pheledra bounded out of her seat.
"Aramanda?"

"It is none but I", the voice warbled. "State your truth, child!"

Pheledra took a deep breath. "Mandhi ... I have concerns."

"Yes?"

Aramanda's penetrating eyes were gateways of foaming light. Pheledra turned away.
"Balance over these strong emotions, loneliness and doubt ... fear, I suppose."

"Or pride and arrogance." The odd voice seemed to echo from every direction.

"Mandhi, I would gladly give everything ..."

"But what can you receive?"

Pheledra thought a while before she answered. "Only as much as I will embrace."

"Dip into the water. Drink deep."

Pheledra turned back to face Aramanda's eyes. "Helaah ... we argued that day ... silly nonsense ... my fault. I made him angry and he left on the mission without me ... he was upset ... did he become careless? Am I responsible for the death of my beloved friends?"

"That is for you to discern."

Pheledra nodded and sighed. "Mandhi ... I want to accept who and what I am. I want to

accept this tragedy ... my love is stronger than death. But I let them down ... I just want my regret swallowed up in love ... closure and peace."

"Pheledra, nothing of love is ever lost. Whatever is lost is not of love but illusion."

"I know that's true."

"Always speak kind and blessed words to those you cherish. In your present incarnation it is always possible that you may never see them again."

Pheledra closed her eyes and nodded.

Aramanda continued. "You have far to travel and lessons to learn."

"True, Mandhi."

"Your soul tells me you are ready to return."

"I am refreshed and ready, although things are not yet fully resolved within me."

Aramanda's disturbing form came close to Pheledra's face, a quivering, fluctuating and boiling exchange of energy and matter. Those eyes, bottomless magnetic vortices, beckoning. As Pheledra plunged into their depths, an incomprehensible high pitched warble gradually became Aramanda's clear voice. "Sometimes giving a fish to the hungry is a blessed thing, but there are other times when giving a fish is insufficient, even harmful."

"Harmful?"

"If a man is overtaken by thieves and abused, take him into your own home, care for him. Broil him a fish. But, if anyone sits by the river and begs you for a fish, ignore him. On the other hand, if he calls upon you and asks what he should do, teach him how to fish for himself and teach him well. I see many sitting by the river who already have fishing poles and plenty of bait. They've had those items for quite a while, but they're so use to begging for fish, they never learned how to use the equipment already available. Lately though, due to overcrowding of the beggars market, they've been noticing the tools at hand and wondering what they're for. Teach them how to fish, Pheledra."

"How shall I proceed?"

"Move according to your intuition, wisdom, and judgment ... within the allowances and restrictions of the Cosmic Directive."

The cats squinted and watched the shimmering swirls of light. They could no longer distinguish Pheledra or anything else in the room and all ears swiveled forward in response to Aramanda's voice: "Remember who you are, Pheledra."

Aramanda sent forth a single bright pulse of violet light and faded into the void.

Ginger peered out from behind her paws and, seeing that the coast was clear, went back to licking Inky's fur. Inky stretched and purred, returning the favor. Boots flicked his tail in anticipation of adventure. Pheledra slid down to the control deck to set course for a remote planet far out on the rim of the Anadine galaxy, a planet called *Miraba* by its

inhabitants but often referred to by celestial lightworkers as *The Planet of Forgetfulness*.

Two - An Astral Roach

The lightship Firefly accelerated. A bright disc of artificial intelligence. A perceptive nervous system moving faster than the speed of light through the folds and frequencies of space-time.

Pheledra sat with her companions on the control deck. She didn't say much but contemplated the mission and used the Psychotronic Adjuvant to familiarize herself with the external data concerning planet Miraba. She learned fourteen languages instantly.

The Psychotronic Adjuvant, a powerful consciousness focusing device, was invented by Dr. Carl Neilsen in her planet's previous age and had gone through multiple upgrades and innovations but the name still stuck, *Psychotronic Adjuvant*, a helper indeed.

Nestingwave talked a blue streak, mostly to Fabby the Bioborg but occasionally to Boots, who was the only cat who even took a passing interest.

"Boots, my friend, I know what you're thinkin'. You're excited about this mission and sense the challenge that lies ahead. You're a lot like me when I first became an engineer. All those individual separate parts that make up technology confused me so I took the opposite approach. I started with whatever the technology was trying to accomplish and worked logically backwards

to get the parts list. Retro-engineering. That way, you eliminate a lot of extraneous middle-men parts and find the technological path of least resistance and simplicity. And that's the approach I use to communicate with the Firefly and give her counsel for self-adjustment."

Boots pretended to be asleep but rolled his eyes at Wave's pontification.

For the moment, Inky and Ginger remained together on the observation deck, curled up under the stars. Periodically the cats patrolled the ship. If they perceived that something was amiss, they instantly communicated it to the humans.

Old Nestingwave loved the sheer thrill of acceleration and the experience of seeing the fantastic tourbillons of light during the transition to hyperspace. They streaked past comets and asteroids.

"Look at thatun' Fabby! We come so damn close I coulda taken an ore sample!"

"All is well, Wave" said Fabby. "Besides, in about twenty zeron we'll be so shifted we can go right through them and never notice."

"In-deed," said Wave in a sing-songy voice, "me density's a gettin' mighty thin."

Fabby smiled and whistled loudly between his teeth, then struck up a lively tune.

Wave slapped his knee, threw back his head, and laughed. He loved it when Fabby whistled. Not only could Fabby whistle just about every tune ever written, but he could

produce counterpoints, harmonies, and make up his own melodies hitting certain pitches and timbres that would trigger specific emotional responses. Fabby made everyone around him feel good, but if the occasion ever arose, he could whistle an enemy into a quivering pile of gelatin. He was a customized Frequency Adjusting Bioborg B synthesized by Space Ocean Technologies. Everyone affectionately called him “Fabby” for short.

The lightship streaked down through the worm hole, moved forward in time by a fraction of a micron, and was transferred instantly onto the outer edge of the Anadine Galaxy.

Pheledra’s awe was constantly rekindled by the beauty of it.

The light show thinned and the Firefly plunged into the dark vastness of deep space.

The deceleration and materialization proceeded. *Miraba ... so troubled, she thought. Birthpangs ... awakening from the bondage of illusion into transformation ... ascension.*

The gradual frequency drop into greater density began well beyond the edge of Miraba’s solar system. It had one dying sun, only a few million annoms left in its life before it would recycle. Long before that, the Mirabans would reach out for the stars. It was their destiny, if they survived. Time future is never written in stone.

Fabby continued the deceleration process while Nestingwave cheered the downhill

rollercoaster. "Eeeehaaa! Comin' through ready or not!" he exclaimed, as they began a mad dash through a boiling cascade of fireworks and glowing plasma.

Pheledra always appreciated Wave's uninhibited responses, but right now her mind was on the mission. She politely excused herself and went up to the observation dome to sit in silence with the cats.

As the Firefly streaked into Miraba's solar system, it slowed down considerably being fully materialized into fourth density. Fabby moved around the control deck checking instruments. He seemed puzzled.

"What's up?" asked Wave.

"I don't know yet. There is a strong magnetic anomaly effecting this entire sector. I can't tell what it is."

"Could it be a solar discharge?"

"Yes, it could be. I'll keep an eye on it."

Up in the observation dome, Pheledra was preparing herself. They would soon be in the vicinity of Miraba and the time had come to tap into its Akashic record. Every thought, word, intention, hope and desire produced on Miraba from its very beginning was permanently etched there, as well as its true history.

For now, she would use the Psychotronic Adjuvant. Relying upon technical rather than spiritual means to engage the record would insure the practical interpretation and application of thought forms according to

the planets unique cultural archetypes and mental processes. There was one drawback. The Psychotronic Adjuvant would limit the information to her specific inquiry. She needed to ask the right questions.

Inky, Ginger and Boots were on their haunches in a semi-circle. Pheledra sat cross-legged on a cushion in the center. She donned the headpiece and entered into meditation. Today, her journey through Miraba's Akashic record would be a general overview. Later, she'd focus on more specific information.

Pheledra's mind explored Miraba. Images, archetypes, symbols, myths and all experiences blended with its recorded history and hopeful destiny. The information available was extensive but difficult to interpret. Parts of it were automatically recorded for further study. Later, after she had put some of the many puzzles together, the information could be played directly into Wave and Fabby for their mutual consideration.

She was just emerging into normal consciousness when she heard Fabby shout over the communicator. "Breach on the control deck!"

"Damn!" Wave cried.

Inky, Ginger and Boots were dashing about as if being chased from several different directions.

"What is it Wave?" Pheledra was trying hard not to jolt her nervous system coming so suddenly out of meditation.

"Intruder!"

"What?" Pheledra was already sliding down to the control deck.

"... I'm ill ... dizzy ..." Wave's voice was strange and far away. He was slumped over the console and Fabby was desperately trying to help him.

"What happened?" Pheledra's heart was pounding as she quickly surveyed the scene.

Patches of iridescent yellow goo were splattered on the walls and console. Some of it was running down Wave's back and globbing onto the floor.

"Don't touch that stuff!" Fabby said quickly, "It's definitely poisonous."

Pheledra examined Wave, being careful not to touch the strange substance, as Fabby continued. "It came right through the walls of the ship ... very fast ... hard to describe ... like an enormous astral cockroach. It scampered across the walls and ceiling shaking off phosphorescent yellow muck like a hound shakes off water. It disappeared down through the floor into the lower part of the ship."

"Wave? ... Wave, how do you feel?" Pheledra tried to bring him around.

Wave was distressed. "... a ghost ... bug ..."

"Look Fabby! That stuff is evaporating! Get a scan on it before it dries up!"

A blue ray shot out from Fabby's forehead onto the rapidly shrinking puddle of shining ooze beneath Wave's chair. "Got it," he said, "It'll take a while to analyze."

Pheledra and Fabby were concentrating so much on their friend's condition and the rapidly dissolving mystery substance, they didn't see Boots, who had scooted in to investigate the commotion. When Pheledra finally caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of her eye, she lunged toward him. "No, Boots, no!"

With eyes closed and ears laid back, he was tasting the puddle on the floor and by the time she grabbed him, he had already passed out.

"Oh great! Now we've got two casualties," said Fabby, as Pheledra handed him the limp and unconscious Boots.

She was distressed but wasn't about to waste any more time lamenting the situation.

"Put them into the Protoron! I'll head down to the lower decks and get the droids to help search for this 'astral roach' or whatever it is. Meanwhile, turn on all your sensors and see if you can get a fix on it. Stay in close communication."

"Right", Fabby answered. "Pheledra, you really don't need to go. The droids can handle it."

"This is my mission, Fabby, and I'm going to give it all I've got."

"Be alert, that thing moves fast ... look, it's gone!"

The glistening yellow ooze had completely evaporated and there wasn't a sign of it anywhere; nevertheless, Fabby was careful not to touch the affected area on Wave's back as he slung him over his shoulder and, with Boots safely cradled in his other arm, quickly headed for the med pod.

Pheledra fastened on a power belt, opened the weapons cabinet, selected two spectrum disrupters, strapped one to the top of each wrist and headed down into the heart of the ship. She suspected that the monster would go for the six tachyon tubes in order to feed, so that's where she headed. On the way, she summoned all five droids to assist her, giving them telepathic instructions to bring up their light shields until such time as more information was available as to the nature of this intruder. The five droids responded instantly.

The ZR90 droids stood about shoulder height and looked like cut diamonds consisting of two translucent octagonal pyramids; one pointing up and the other inverted, joined in the middle by a flat revolving sensor ring with folded in arms, weapons and tools. Each droid radiated colors which distinguished them. Occasionally, they sang light-songs among themselves. The resulting visual concert was extremely beautiful to experience.

"Initial scan report in", said Fabby over the communicator, "that roach is a phantasm consisting of astral scum with one purpose, dissolution of connective biological

memory. At this very moment it is moving up the tachyon tubes."

"How are Wave and Boots?" asked Pheledra, as she sent the droids on their way with instructions to spread out.

"They are alive," came the reply, "but their memories are deleted."

"We'll have to keep them in the Protoron for now," she said. "Any details on this phantasm?"

"It's not a living entity but a manufactured cluster of illusory thought forms copied from the lower astral of the planet Miraba. It will be hard to destroy because these forms are spaced irregularly across the spectrum in which they reside. Best chance for a kill is to adjust weapons to 4, 31, and 109 simultaneous disruption. Meanwhile, I will set up a shield around the ship to prevent any more intrusions."

Pheledra adjusted the disrupters on her wrists and telepathically communicated the information to the droids so they could set their weapons accordingly. For this operation, they were totally under her command.

"Fabby, reduce the gravity on the power deck by 95 per cent." She wanted increased mobility as she moved among the tachyon tubes.

Pheledra activated her power belt and started a slow decent past the static spheres above the array.

"Psychotronic shield online", said Fabby, "multiple layers of filtermesh building."

"Fabby, I'm going to float down among the tubes. The droids are covering me from the outer passageways. We'll all meet at the bottom."

"This phantasm will try to draw energy from the tachyon tubes", said Fabby.

"That's right", she agreed, "no telling what will happen then. We've got to destroy it now. The sooner the better."

"Right. Psychotronic filter shields are fully activated. There'll be no more of those vermin coming in from outside. Now, let's see if we can locate that sucker."

Half way down, Pheledra weaved in and out through the array and slowed to a stop. The six tubes were aglow with inner rings of color. Wobbling toruses of photons traveled up inside the tubes, silently exploding at the top and cascading in a shower down to the base. Then the process repeated itself but the light show was never the same twice.

"It's clinging to the right side of tube three." Fabby's voice was intense.

Pheledra had already seen the dark shadow, about twice the size of a man, adhering to the tube. She moved in for a closer look. The droids were already coming up from below having received Fabby's transmission. They were spread out at different altitudes in case it ran. As Pheledra got closer to the thing, Blue came up to her level but some distance away.

"You were right, Fabby," she said. "That thing looks like a giant cockroach ... what are those other appendages? I think it's seen me. It doesn't appear to be in a hurry to escape."

It slowly crawled up the tube as Pheledra and the droids moved in for a shot. They'd have to wait until it reached the static spheres or risk damaging the power system. Then it froze and began to vibrate, exuding bright yellow ooze that flew in all directions. Pheledra had to quickly swing out of the way to avoid being hit. Violet wasn't quite fast enough and got a huge gob on her light shield instantly blocking her sensors. The droid headed for the floor of the array to clean herself off but seemed otherwise unaffected.

"That stuff is really sticky", said Fabby, taking in the whole scene on his monitor. "Be careful, Pheledra, you have no protection."

"No filthy vermin is going to weaken my focus. It's that roach or me!"

Just then, the thing scampered around one of the static spheres and darted across the ceiling. Pheledra aimed with her fist, dropped her hand, and a sizzling white ray caught the beast midsection blasting it in two. The rear piece remained stuck to the ceiling while the front legs, head, and eyes fell writhing through the air.

Red fired his disrupter and the falling piece of roach exploded into two more pieces. The front legs and one of the eyes wound up stuck to the side of a tube. The head and other eye went all the way to the floor. In a

heart beat, all three pieces began to vibrate into a blur, throwing yellow goo everywhere. Pheledra and the droids swung behind the tubes for protection. Violet, still down on the floor trying to clean up, got inundated.

When Pheledra looked again, all three roach pieces had morphed into fully intact creatures.

"Get out of there, Pheledra!" Fabby yelled. She looked up to see the one on the ceiling leap down into the tubes. The one on the floor sprang upwards and all three began darting madly up and down and from side to side, jumping from one tube to another, quivering and spattering ooze everywhere. A torrent of the stuff barely missed her.

"Go ahead! Go ahead! Get me if you can, you filthy slugs!"

Suddenly, the roaches headed for the base of the array and took off in three directions disappearing somewhere into the outer perimeters of the lightship.

"Targets reducing in size", Fabby said.
"Targets down 600 percent of original size and continuing to shrink."

"What a situation," Pheledra breathed. "They have imploded. We'll never find them now until they decide to show themselves. When they do, we'd better have these spectrum disrupters adjusted correctly. Fabby, I can't believe your calculations were so far off!"

"Sorry, Pheledra."

She felt very uneasy but the immediate danger was gone so she gave some

telepathic commands to the droids and told Fabby to seal off the lower decks and keep an eye on things while she went up to check on Wave and Boots. They were lying unconscious in the Protoron. She programmed their biological archetype discs for psychological restoration and began the Protoron treatment. It took a long time and many readjustments for the healing rays to finally restore them to their former selves.

"Whew, I don't want to try that again", said Wave, slowly getting out from under the bubble. Pheledra opened the adjacent bubble and Boots jumped out with ears laid back and tail looking like a bottle brush, then darted out of the med pod to find sweet refuge upstairs with Inky and Ginger.

"Wave, when we fired our weapons that thing split into three parts. Then it morphed into three full size critters who then shrank to microscopic size. They're hiding somewhere downstairs, too small to be detected."

"What in hell are those things?"

"Fabby says they're some kind of astral scum, a conglomeration of thought forms that wipe out biological memory. The droids don't seem to be affected. I've stationed them down there to guard the tachyon tubes and Fabby has sealed off the lower portion of the ship."

Soon they were back on the control deck with Fabby who was communicating with the droids and keeping a vigilant eye on the instruments and monitors.

"Fabby, do you have a better way for us to adjust these weapons?" Pheledra was irritated. "I'd rather not proliferate any more roaches if we can help it."

"I'll work out some better settings but it'll take time to analyze the data and come up with a proper solution."

"Get on it," said Pheledra.

Three - Conspiracy of Light

Biltar ap Dyn stood on the rear balcony of his dome smoking his pipe and watching the harvest rain. It had come suddenly and in torrents after months of the worst drought in history. Miraba was once a beautiful jewel with life abounding in its seas, forests and mountains. Now, many species perished because of unregulated mining, deforestation and water poisoning. Greediness and blindness coupled with a suicidal disconnection from nature seemed to prevail.

Most of the crops had already been ruined in the breadbasket of Shaluma. The rain came much too late to save the withered grain and pulses. Something strange was occurring. He had seen the geological reports of alarming increases in strong quakes throughout the planet, especially deep activity a mile or more below. Many of his scientific colleagues were voicing concern about highly unusual volcanism now swelling under the entire north coast and seismic reports indicated that the whole planet was wobbling and shaking far more than usual. Many of his old colleagues were

even near panic, claiming that Miraba's rotation had slowed measurably.

Measurements proved that the magnetic field of Miraba was collapsing and the frequency was increasing. They were quietly packing up survival gear and moving their families out of the cities to safer locations in the countryside in order to ride out the expected cataclysm and the devastation it would surely bring. The instigator, they claimed, was a planetoid - too large and too magnetically potent to deal with or divert in time with nuclear explosions. Some claimed to have already photographed it on its deadly collision course, though the government, with its controlled media, acted predictably as if nothing was happening.

Biltar flinched as there came a heavy pounding on his front door. *Uh oh.* He went back inside his dome to look through the front peep hole and saw a pod of machines standing in the entry way. The three 'chines wore gray jumpsuits and leather belt harnesses with straps across the shoulders and near transparent glasses with a cobalt tint. Their heads were bald and each had some kind of small appliance on the very top connected by wires to ear plugs. None of them looked like they had a sense of humor. A black VTL aerocar was parked next to his blue one on the landing pad.

National Security Police, he thought. I'm surprised it took them so long. I guess they want to close in on us before the chaos hits.

Biltar opened the front door. "May I help you?"

They stood motionless and did not answer.

"Hello," said Biltar, "what can I do for you?"

There was no answer.

"Are we having a staring contest or have your batteries run low?"

The three figures on the porch still did not move nor say anything.

"Well ... I have things to do, so let me know if you need anything." Biltar started to close the door but the 'chine on the left quickly blocked it with his boot.

"Look out there officer," said Biltar, "you're going to lose a toe doing that!"

The 'chine in the middle grabbed Biltar by the collar and pulled him outside while the one on the right cuffed his hands behind his back. "Hey," said Biltar, "don't you fellows have any identification ... or a warrant ... or something?"

"You know who we are," said one of them. It was hard to tell which. Then, all three dragged him through the rain and put him into the back seat of their aerocar. The 'chine who had stuck his foot in the door got in the right front passenger seat and turned around to stare at Biltar while the other two went inside his dome.

"Nice day, isn't it," said Biltar. "We sure need this rain."

The expressionless face staring at him wasn't saying anything, so Biltar settled back in the seat and tried his best to relax. He knew what was happening and was

worried, but wouldn't let on. The pain in his back tormented him.

Biltar's eyes fixed on a monitor next to the pilots seat. Pictures of suspects were cycling up the screen followed by information. At first, he didn't recognize any of the faces or names but suddenly, Fryd was there, front and side. Fryd ap Lat – NSS #227-680-4002 - white male - violent fanatic sympathizer - charlatan and fraud - suspected revolutionary - keep under surveillance - open warrant - suspected of anti-Shaluman activities - may be armed and dangerous - do not apprehend without special approval.

"My, what a photo album you have," said Biltar. "Would you like one of me?"

"We already have one," the 'chine in the right front seat said as he brought Biltar's photograph up on the screen.

"I hope so," said Biltar, hiding his surprise. "I sure don't want to be left out."

The picture scrolled up followed by the information. Biltar ap Dyn - NSS #327-982-1411. *It contains the exact information as for Fryd, he thought. I guess they think we are clones.*

After a long while, the two men returned to the aerocar. One got into the pilots seat and one sat in the back seat next to Biltar.

"Am I being apprehended?" asked Biltar. "If so, do you have ... *special* approval?"

No one answered and the hydrogen engines roared into life. The aerocar went straight up

and accelerated north. Soon, they flew over a bustling exchange center. A huge polished black citadel with the red letters "NSP" appeared. The aerocar zoomed over the complex and went straight down into an inner quadrangle to land. The three manchines hustled Biltar out of the aerocar into the complex. They took an elevator down to the basement and led him into an empty waiting room where they uncuffed him.

"Wait there!" one of them ordered, pointing to a metal folding chair. Biltar sat and two of the 'chines left, while the third went to a door at the end of the long room and knocked once. The door opened. He went in and shut the door. In a few microns, he came back out and left.

This place has the sterile odor of every other government building I've been in, Biltar thought. How long will I have to wait?

There were no clocks but it seemed like a very long time before the door opened and a dapper looking gentleman appeared. He was well manicured and dressed in an expensive light blue tunic.

"Come in Mr. ap Dyn," he said with a gesture of invitation.

Biltar walked into a plush office and sat down where the man indicated, in a wooden chair across from a huge desk. The man took his seat behind the desk, in a heavily padded executive chair, and began going through some folders. Biltar immediately noticed the strong smell of expensive cologne.

"Your papers please," said the man holding out his hand but not looking up.

"I'm sorry ... I don't have them," said Biltar. "Your 'chines didn't give me time to get my coat. Am I under arrest?"

"Not at this moment," said the man looking up with a glance and then back to the folders, "this is an interview. My name is Hersh ap Zet. I am National Security Advisor for Urbantia 7."

"An interview? Why am I here?" Biltar asked.

"Just to have a little chat, Mr. ap Dyn. More than likely, we'll fly you home after we've finished."

"This is some rain, isn't it? We sure can use it."

"Do you recognize this, Mr. ap Dyn?" The man pulled out a pouch from the desk and held it up.

"Yes ..."

"This pouch is full of illegal drugs." The man pulled out a pipe from another drawer and held it up. "And here is your paraphernalia. You're a drug addict."

"No," said Biltar, "those are herbs I smoke to lessen my pain and strengthen my immune system."

"Pain?"

"The doctors say I am a dying man. Surely you have my medical records in one of those folders."

"Probably ... but to save time, tell me."

"Fifteen years ago, my whole family was poisoned while I was working on a project for the government. My two children, Vali and Jyla and my beloved wife Sinya are already dead ... and I'm next. It's just a matter of time."

"Project for the government?"

"Project Quant."

Hersh went through his folders on the desk. "Yes ... I see it here ... Project ... Qua ... Quant?"

"Yes ... it was the near proximity to the experiments."

"Our government doesn't poison people, Mr. Ap Dyn."

"Oh yes they do ... and they do it knowingly every day. My family died horribly from the insidious diseases which resulted from the gradual collapse of their immune systems ... and I will too. I'm already in constant pain and pick up every bug that comes along."

"You are a dope head, Mr. ap Dyn. You just want to get high ... get out of your mind ... escape from reality."

"Heh ... well ... that too. Is that what this is all about?"

"Not yet, Mr. ap Dyn ... but it could be."

"Quit beating around the bush and get to the point," said Biltar.

"Ah ... the point. What is a ... *Point Source Generator*?"

"My invention, sir. I have a Shaluman patent on it."

"How come I never heard of it?"

"Your National Security State is afraid of it ... because it can empower people."

"What does this Point Source Generator do?" he asked, looking through the papers on his desk again.

"The PSG extracts electromagnetic energy from the ambient vacuum to produce unlimited amounts of free energy for all."

"Free?"

"Yes ... that's why your National Security State is afraid. It can make people independent of your electrical grid."

"Where are those PSGs?"

"There aren't any," Biltar lied easily.

"You're a confidence man, aren't you, Mr. ap Dyn. A dope head and a fraud. It says right here in this scientific report that it is impossible to pull electricity out of the air."

"Well, if a scientific report says so."

"You're a scientist?"

"Yes, a physicist and electromagnetic engineer."

"Where are those PSGs?"

"Well ... I had one ... but dismantled it."

"Why?"

"Because real scientists say it's impossible."

"How did you get a Shaluman patent on something that is impossible?"

"That's a good question, isn't it?"

"Trickery ... that's how."

"If you say so."

"No, I don't say so. Our legitimate scientists say so, Mr ap Dyn. Our legitimate scientists say so."

"Okay."

"Our great Nation of Shaluma is the hope of Miraba, the only true superpower. You're either with us or against us. There's a war going on, Mr.ap Dyn. A war on violent fanatics who want to destroy our way of life. A war on illegal drugs. And, most important, a war to eradicate evil everywhere. We're going to sanitize this planet."

"Well, you're going to be pretty busy then," said Biltar. "Do they pay you extra for the added stress?"

"You're deluded, Mr.ap Dyn. Probably because of all the drugs you smoke. You're a radical liberal. Do you talk with space people too?"

"Only on the full eclipse of Avengarone."

"I'm going to have you checked out by our psychiatrist who will recommend a course of therapy to straighten you out. If you do not follow his advice and take all your medications, I'm going to turn you over to my narcotics division for prosecution. I have the evidence. In the meantime, you can go home. Be back here for your appointment.

"I'm writing down the day and time on this piece of paper. And ... if you come up with a working PSG ... let me know."

Hersh ap Zet gave Biltar his card and the piece of paper then showed him out. The three machines were waiting. Without a word, they flew him back to his residence.

I must contact Fryd and Rysen, he thought. The NSS is closing in.

Biltar got into his VTL aerocar and took off. When he was sure no one was following, he headed east and landed at a small pub in the suburbs of Urbantia 7. He used the audicom to contact Fryd and Rysen, then bought a bottle of wine, picked up three glasses and went into an empty back room to wait. He sat down at a table and poured himself a drink.

Fryd arrived first. "Greetings, Biltar my friend, we have a lot to talk about. The National Security State is getting desperate. They can smell death on the wind."

"Yeah, things are getting intense," said Biltar trying not to shake while he poured Fryd a glass of wine. "What do you think, Fryd? How far away is the cataclysm?"

"Right on top of us," said Fryd. "What do you think the NSS will do?"

"The bastards probably have plans to save their own skins and emerge after the devastation as total world dictators. Perhaps they will crawl out from those expensive underground complexes to find nothing but a civilization in ashes and some indigenous people roaming the countryside gathering food. Ah, but those simple people will have electric power to help them, I've seen to that."

"Yes," Fred asserted, "that was a smart move. Those indigenous people have a lot to teach us and they'll need an edge after the cataclysm in order to survive. The PSGs will help them get their own agriculture going when the government commodities come to an abrupt end. But it is so important for us to get those devices spread out in places where the surviving technology will eventually allow for further development."

"Well," said Biltar, "the planetoid may postpone the further development of the PSG but nothing can stop it. Project Quant paid off in the spin off ... even though it cost me everything ... Sinya and my precious children."

"I know," said Fryd looking down. "... I'm so sorry about that."

Biltar nodded. "We need to get those fifty PSGs out and check on the Native Preserves. I haven't heard a thing from them."

Rysen arrived and sat down while Biltar was talking. "So they paid you a little visit."

"Sure did," said Biltar. "It was surreal beyond belief. They have me set up with an appointment to see a psychiatrist."

Fryd shook his head. "Better not get into their clutches. They'll have you so drugged and mind-controlled you'll tell them anything."

"Why did they let you go?" asked Rysen.

"I really don't know for sure," Biltar replied. "Interrogation and torture could easily become an embarrassment for them. Perhaps they think I'll lead them to the PSGs."

"That's why we've got to be extremely careful," said Rysen.

"They've got your picture, Fryd, as well as mine," Biltar said. "I didn't see yours, Rysen, but you're probably there somewhere."

Rysen nodded as he poured a glass of wine.

"Do you think our rendezvous point is still safe?" asked Fryd.

"The cabin in the mountains is as safe as any place I know," Biltar answered. "We just have to be sure we're not being followed. We're under surveillance. Be careful."

"Look," said Rysen. "I'll go to the Native Preserves and check on them while you and Fryd distribute the rest of the PSGs. I'll get back with you after that, if the sky hasn't fallen."

"Thanks Rysen," said Biltar. "That'll be a great help. I don't know how far we're going"

to get with this before we hit a wall. Regardless, the cat is out of the bag forever. Free energy is here and once the powers that be have slithered back into their holes, everyone will know about it."

As Biltar poured himself another glass of wine, Rysen looked at him with admiration.

"Biltar ... we both appreciate what you've done."

"Yes," said Fryd, "in the whole history of Miraba, there are few examples like yours. Hardly anyone ever does anything like that. You gave this invention away to the whole world. That's why it will survive. No one ever expected you to do that."

Biltar smiled. "Well ... that was back in the days when we still had a world-wide computer network."

"Yeah," said Rysen, "before they brought down that last bastion of freedom."

"And blamed it on the 'violent fanatics' of course," Fryd added, then finished his drink.

Biltar picked up the wine bottle and looked thoughtfully at the label, running his fingers over it, then set it back down. "I hope visionaries in other countries have picked up and fully utilized the plans and data I sent out. There should be a few copies of the PSG up and operating by now throughout Miraba."

"Say, Biltar," said Fryd, changing the subject, "what about security?"

Biltar thought for a moment. "Don't use the audicom unless it's an emergency. With the kind of crisis we're likely to have, they'll be too overwhelmed to come after us. I intend to keep going until I'm either dead or arrested."

"Me too," said Fryd.

Rysen gave an affirmative nod. "We'd better get out of here now."

They left the pub one at a time and were careful to be sure they weren't being followed. Fryd went north and Biltar south. They encountered no problems.

Rysen headed east. The traffic wasn't too heavy on the electronic airway but he took his time. After twenty zeron, he noticed a black aerocar behind him.

Is he following me?

Just to test it out, he swung left and lowered his altitude. Sure enough the black aerocar followed.

"A coincidence?" He spoke out loud.

He took another couple of turns and knew for sure he had a tail.

"Okay," he said, "catch me if you can, Mr. NSP."

He hit the turbo-boost and disengaged from the electronic airway. The pursuer turned on flashing purple and blue lights and stayed right behind him. *I'll never be able to outrun him*, he thought. *That vehicle is too hot. Others will join him and cut me off*

*electronically. I have to land. What to do.
What to do.*

Rysen shot down to low altitude and looked desperately for a way out. He saw heavy power lines and headed straight for them. He aimed directly for the steel tower supporting the power lines and at the last possible moment swerved to the left. He zoomed under the wires and pulled back hard on the stick roaring straight up and barely missing a line of traffic directly above. “Whew!” he exclaimed and looked into his rear view mirror a moment before his pursuer hit the tower and exploded in a ball of fire. The power lines shot out arcs of electricity and a large area of the city below went dark.

I know they have my number now! I'll have to ditch the aerocar!

He found an unoccupied parking pad in front of a busy market place and set down, then quickly disappeared into the crowd. He slipped into an audicom booth and called the NSP to tell them he'd just discovered that his aerocar had been stolen.

The report is registered just in case they get me now. It may confuse the issue and at least give me some legal standing, if that still means anything.

He boarded the monorail and got off a short distance from the safe house. He didn't go there until he was positive no one was following him. Inside, he pulled the shades and flopped down exhausted. *No need to tell Biltar. He has enough problems ... and soon it probably won't matter anyway.*

Four - The Kultaki

Far away on the *Firefly*, Nestingwave was seated at his console. Pheledra saw him concentrating intently on the monitor.

"What's up?" she asked.

"There's a ship out ahead of us. They want to communicate."

"Who is it?"

"I'm getting it ... just a micron ... *Kultaki* ... asking who we are. They wish to meet with us and exchange gifts according to the custom."

"Okay, but the three of us need to discuss some things first. How long before we're close enough for them to come aboard?"

"About ninety five zeron." "

"Fine. We'll greet them on the observation deck. Fabby, are the lower decks completely sealed off?"

"Yes, and the droids are on guard. They'll alert us to any activity down there."

Pheledra unstrapped her weapons and secured them while Nestingwave sent an invitation to the Kultaki. Fabby made one last check and the three ascended to the observation deck.

The three cats huddled together in expectation. No one was purring or licking. Boots was still nervous from his encounter with the roach slime and clung tightly onto Inky's neck.

Pheledra, Nestingwave and Fabby sat around the conference table. Pheledra took a few deep breaths and closed her eyes for meditation. The others followed. After ten zeron, they returned to normal consciousness.

"The time has come for us to discuss this mission," she said, as she held up two discs.

"Download this information from the Psychotronic Adjuvant and we'll confer. This is the exterior data only. The additional information I have retrieved from the Akashic record is far from complete and I'll have to glean more over time. Also, there is information from Aramanda which I must share with you."

Wave and Fabby put on their headpieces and had the download in twelve zeron.

"Wow," said Wave, "That's a whole lot of material and I'm not sure I understand it."

Fabby nodded. "It will certainly require sorting and analysis to determine what's useful for the mission and what isn't. That's why we must contemplate, discuss and share among ourselves as the mission unfolds."

"Right," Pheledra agreed. "It'll take constant coordination in order to determine the best focus."

"Well," said Wave, "I now speak three Miraban languages fluently. Fabby, how many did you get?"

"All 237."

Wave's jaw dropped in surprise and he said under his breath. "Well ... that's what them built in cyberchips will do for ya."

"There will be more information for you to download later," said Pheledra, "but this is a good start. The Kultaki who are about to visit us have carried on a relationship with Miraba for quite some time. Their activities of exploitation and control have been exceedingly reckless and have stretched the limits of the Council's allowance. We must be aware of all the implications before we meet with them. Let's review and talk."

Pheledra looked at Fabby and said, "Help us recall Miraba's history from the exterior perspective."

Fabby closed his eyes for a moment while he accessed his new download.

"The indigenous peoples of Miraba advanced normally in tribal diversity until the exiles came. In a far off star system, those exiles had been genetically altered into aggressive warriors to protect their master overlords. The overlords had unwisely tinkered with their own genetics, removing their ability to fight and defend themselves against predators."

"Probably a blissful way to live," said Wave, "but with a terrible price."

"Exactly." said Fabby. "The genetically altered warriors rose up against their masters and killed them. Afterward, they began to fight among themselves and eventually destroyed their own planet. The survivors escaped in spaceships and became wandering pirates for millenia."

Finally, a balanced and wise race subdued and captured them. Rather than exterminate them, the wise race had compassion. They exiled the genetically altered warriors out on the edge of the Anadine galaxy ... on planet Miraba. All memory of their past was erased. They were placed on Miraba with no technology. This was done so that they would learn survival and harmony with the laws of Creation by direct experience and through contact with the indigenous peoples who had already achieved a remarkable harmony and balance with their environment. Unfortunately, many of the aggressive exiles attacked the indigenous peoples and almost wiped them out. Others interbred."

Wave interrupted. "To what extent are today's human inhabitants on Miraba genetically effected?"

"Everyone," answered Fabby. "However, it is a matter of degree depending upon the self-realization of each individual. Genetics affect consciousness and consciousness affects genetics, a difficult binary to neutralize."

"But well worth the effort," said Wave.

Pheledra nodded in agreement. "Such balance assures spiritual growth. Fabby, give us your interpretation of the Kultaki involvement with Miraba."

"Okay. The Kultaki originated in another galaxy and time configuration. Of all the reptilian races, they have the most mammalian genetics. The majority of their reptilian genes are those which influence their higher mental functionings. They

originally traveled through a worm hole into the Anadine Galaxy, like we did, and soon found resonance with the exiles. They desired the resources of Miraba, an unclaimed planet due to the cosmic immaturity of the inhabitants. The Kultaki created a strong control paradigm to influence the mental processes of the planet. They invented totalitarian religions and political systems, introducing their own genes into the leadership at the top of the hierarchies. Today, in addition to plundering the resources of the planet, they entertain themselves by experimenting with the dissolution and creation of reality itself through social engineering, cultural programming, propaganda and mind control on a massive scale. They are highly intelligent and technologically advanced fourth density beings who normally remain invisible to the third density inhabitants of Miraba. Occasionally, however, they downstep into third density as various types of phenomena. The most advanced among them are shapeshifters. They sometimes appear in person to Mirabans at the top of the political, religious, and socio-economic structures. They rule by secrecy, lies and deception."

"In fact," said Pheledra, "according to the Akashic record, the Mirabans are often looked upon as nothing more than an astral food supply. These Kultaki put on a very elegant act but in reality they are parasitic vampires who feast upon the intense emotional energies generated by fear, terror, hatred, pain, and despair. They find it easy to use the warrior exiles to generate these 'tasty meals' and many of the exiles themselves have developed a similar

appetite, especially those who have allowed themselves to be deceived by believing and accepting the lies."

Fabby nodded in agreement. "Evidently, their lawlessness and separation from reality brought a blindness upon the various Miraban political leaderships which renders them unwilling to see the ecological damage they are inflicting upon the planet and all her species, including themselves. Of course there's much more."

"Yep," Wave replied, "we all got some reptilian genes. Otherwise we wouldn't have any defense mechanism at all. Fight or flight is the name of the game when it comes to physical survival. Aggression is sometimes called for ... but damn, there's gotta be balance."

"That's right," said Pheledra, "I'll tell you something I found in the Akashic Record of Miraba. The Kultaki have been reprimanded many times by the Anadine Galactic Council but were not stopped from their activities for two reasons. First, the genetically altered people, awed by the brilliant technology of the Kultaki, willfully *asked* them for contact and second, the Council knows that both the genetically altered people and the Kultaki could learn many positive lessons from one another for the sake of mutual evolution. Of course, most of the Kultaki laugh at the idea that they could learn anything from such primitive beings. But not all of them laugh. The reptilian races are the oldest in the known universe. The old races have survived because there have always been some who learned the lessons. If the lessons are not learned, and learned soon on Miraba ... it will be no more."

"That's serious," said Wave. "Pheledra, what are we supposed to do?"

"Our specific mission, as imparted to me by Aramanda, is to help maintain the balance of power by offering a slight nudge to those who are overcoming self destructive attitudes and now stand on the brink of discovering hyperdimensional physics. Such knowledge will aid in the next step of Miraba's evolution: ascension into fifth density. This is a very unusual evolutionary leap. From third to fifth density in a short period of time. It is happening due to cosmic circumstances that are opening a window of opportunity for self-awakening. Our contact is a pioneering physicist named *Biltar ap Dyn*. He has invented a simple device that draws energy directly from the Universal Matrix. The application of this technology has been hindered by the control paradigm on Miraba."

"How far are we allowed to go?" asked Wave.

"Our goal is to intervene as little as possible and never under any circumstances violate the free will of another. If Miraba is to be saved, the inhabitants will do it themselves. Likewise, if she is destroyed it will be the natural consequences of their own actions. We're not here to save Miraba, only to serve and bless in accordance with the openness of the inhabitants ... and always demonstrate the Universal Laws through our actions."

"When did celestial contact begin on Miraba?" asked Fabby.

"Limited contact began ages ago," replied Pheledra. "Over the millenia it has sometimes been more, sometimes less. In the last 200 annoms, Miraba has undergone technological progress which far outstrips her spiritual progress. This increases the danger of self annihilation. However, the stress itself caused many to open up their consciousness rather than fall into despair. Gradually, the trickle became a stream, the stream became a river and it has now reached the point where the river may well become a torrent. The progress can be measured by those becoming telepathic, a sure indicator of fourth density unfolding - growing numbers longing for a new paradigm - coming to the realization that true freedom requires personal responsibility - calling out for understanding and direction. Among those, our contact, Biltar ap Dyn."

Nestingwave got up to stretch his legs and walk around a bit. "What more can you tell us about this Biltar fellow?"

"I am already in telepathic contact with him in his dreams. Some very advanced spiritual entities are there also and have been for some time. Biltar is a physicist, an electromagnetic engineer with vision and pure intention. His soul suffers because he does not yet fully understand what is happening to him. He experienced personal loss and a strong feeling of not belonging upon the planet of forgetfulness but he learned his truth and chose to act unselfishly for the highest good of all. It is hoped that his unique gift and understanding of hyperdimensional physics

will spread like many seeds ... seeds of healing ... seeds of reparation for Miraba."

Wave sat back down and began to stretch his arms. "What happens if the knowledge of hyperdimensional physics is improperly applied? How do we insure that it won't get into the wrong hands?"

Fabby answered. "Of course, improperly applied hyperdimensional physics would mean the quick end of Miraba and all its inhabitants. There's always great danger and risk on the frontiers of knowledge. However, I believe that the very discipline and focus of learning hyperdimensional physics carries with it an epiphany which changes the seeker. In order to learn the geometry of reality, one must first know the geometry of one's self. Self knowledge is the prerequisite for any knowledge whatsoever. Expanded consciousness of such a vast and overwhelming intimacy then precludes willful hurt of any kind."

"In theory that's correct," said Pheledra, "but in practice it's still possible for a toddler to stick his head into the barrel of a cannon and pull the trigger ... and that's why we must proceed with the utmost caution."

She looked intently at each of them in turn. "Even though we check it three ways we could still make a disasterous mistake. It would be a terrible and sorrowful price to pay but with teamwork the risk is minimal and well worth it, considering the great benefits for all concerned."

"I agree completely" said Wave.

Fabby nodded. "Likewise."

They sat in sober silence for a while contemplating the immense weight of the mission. Finally, Pheledra spoke up. "Well, now we need to decide what gift to bestow upon our Kultaki guests when they arrive."

"Here's one suggestion," Wave said. "Why don't I grow a large Galvernian crystal in the replicator, perhaps a pale blue one to help calm the psyche of our guests. Such an item of natural art ... ah, ... priceless in this end of the universe ... would be very impressive to them."

"Great idea, Wave!" said Fabby. Pheledra nodded in agreement. "I think you hit on just the right thing, Wave. That ought to thrill their consumer minds! We'll present it to them on a velvet pillow. I'll quickly clean and refurbish the one Boots used to sleep on. Lately, he prefers the comfort of a regular pillow to the stiff royalty of velvet."

As they got up to attend to their preparations, Fabby remarked, "We should remember that the Kultaki enjoy a lot of pomp and circumstance, formality, and ego stroking, so be prepared to endure it, so as not to be unnecessarily offensive to them."

"Oh, and another thing," said Pheledra, "although our purpose is no secret and they'll know about it anyway, let's keep our conversation concerning the mission to a minimum and do more listening than talking."

"Right," said Wave.

Fabby nodded and everyone went to prepare for the guests.

Five - His Pestilency

A little while later, on the observation deck, they received communication that the Ambassadorial Representative of the Kultaki wanted permission to make an appearance on board the Firefly. Looming before them was a huge silver triangle. It was slightly concave, no outside features at all and at least a hundred times bigger than the Firefly.

"It's a mother ship for smaller craft," Wave remarked.

"Permission granted to come aboard," Fabby said over the communicator.

A pulsating orb of energy appeared in the transfer station and out stepped two female Kultaki. They were bedecked in luxurious sheer gowns and fine jewelry. They were beautiful. Their soft iridescent blue green scales displayed streaks of changing color, reflecting flashes of emotion and light from the orb which continued to boil with wavering strings of energy. They had expressive red eyes with vertical slits and each held a peculiar musical instrument. They were shapely and moved gracefully.

The one on the left stepped forward and said in a very formal tone, "Hail, pilgrims. I am called Cobishandra ... this is Anadia." The other woman bowed slightly. "Welcome to our humble domain. At this time we'd like to introduce a man who is well known in this sector for his foresight and compassion, a man who, by his sheer strength of will, has brought civilization, order, justice, peace, and prosperity into a region originally

populated only with primitive savages barely up from the slime. This man has exercised the wisdom of the ages to tame the wilderness and develop vast resources both material and spiritual. He has proven magnanimous with power and gives everyone willing to walk in his footsteps a slice of the pie."

Cobishandra took a step back while Anadia stepped forward and continued. "This wonderful man loves all the little children of the universe."

Wave stifled a laugh and the urge to say "with ketchup or mustard?"

Pheledra squeezed his arm.

Anadia continued but gave Wave a dirty look having picked up his thought. "I speak of a man beyond all question or reproof because his overwhelming success and impeccable record speaks for itself. His wisdom and cleverness in adroitly adjusting the spectrum of reality has brought untold riches for all those willing to enter into the glorious mainstream of unbridled competition and unlimited expansion of upward mobility ... freedom. The very elements bow in awe before his presence."

Cobishandra then stepped forward to join Anadia and both declared in unison, "Dear Pilgrims of the outer lands, we present to you His Excellency, Ambassador Treprestas Blastahdus Shaleedas Felance." The two hit a high note on their instruments which reverberated with multiple overtones and feedback. Meanwhile the energy orb crackled and boiled and produced a cloud of smoke which quickly evaporated revealing

the Ambassador. He was tall and very saurian.

He looks like a blunt-nosed lizard on two legs, Wave thought.

Anadia scowled at him.

The Ambassador was bedecked in a titanium embroidered red silk robe and wore a laced gold headpiece adorned with a winged serpent in front. He held a thick wooden staff capped with a silver cylinder deeply threaded like a screw. He stepped forward, looked directly at Pheledra and said, "You may call me *Lance*." The rest of you will refer to me as *Your Excellency*."

" "We are honored to meet you, Lance." She bowed slightly. "My name is Pheledra. These are my companions, Nestingwave, Fabby, Inky, Ginger, and Boots."

"Hello there," he replied.

Wave brought forward the pale blue Galvernian crystal on the velvet pillow and said, "Your Excellency, we'd like to present you with this token of friendship to commemorate our historic encounter."

"Thanks," said the Ambassador and snapped his fingers. Anadia immediately took the gift and disappeared into the pulsating energy orb along with Cobishandra.

Boots, who was watching from the sidelines with Inky and Ginger, was facinated with the light pulsations from the energy orb. He hopped down, strolled right in front of the

Ambassador and began jumping and swatting at the amazing waves.

The Ambassador glared at him and let out a shrill primeval roar that sent all three cats flying down the hole in terror to the control deck below. Everyone was startled and taken aback. Pheledra regathered her energy, slowed her pounding heart and tried to think of something to say, but the Ambassador smiled as if nothing had happened and spoke in a calm friendly tone. "Pheledra, let's you and I kick off our shoes, sit down and chew the fat awhile. The metal man over there and Mr. Nestingwave may join us later for refreshments ... and keep those damned cats out of here! They make me sneeze."

Wave and Fabby exited gracefully while Pheledra and the Kultaki Ambassador sized each other up. Then, Pheledra motioned for him to sit at the head of the conference table while she sat to the side. The Ambassador made himself comfortable by kicking off his sandals, revealing scaly feet with sharp claws. He fiddled with his staff, tapping it lightly on the floor a few times.

"I assume you are planning to act lawfully concerning the limitations imposed by the Anadine Galactic Council."

"Of course."

"You know, Pheledra, it's actually impossible for any entity to thwart the laws of Creation. The Kultaki are so misunderstood. We are always accused of being 'outlaws' ... ha ... all we're really trying to do is learn more effective management techniques ... and so we experiment."

"At the expense of other beings?"

"Oh, it may appear that way for the short term, but in the long run you and I are trying to do the same thing."

"I must disagree, Ambassador Lance. Why do you promote the destructive wars, death machines, slavery and mental chaos on Miraba?"

"Pheledra, Pheledra ... the planet is highly overpopulated. It simply cannot sustain 10 billion hungry mouths. Many of Miraba's own leaders see things our way. Before any progress can be made, pruning must take place. Those who do not contribute anything toward the advancement of civilization are taking up space and clogging the machinery. The useless eaters must be thinned out to make way for the creative contributors to fulfill their destiny. To be a slave is a great blessing for the weak because the sacrifice and contribution they make toward good, better, best becomes a lasting legacy, even though they themselves are not sustainable."

"Yes, Lance, I'm familiar with your philosophy and I must say it appears to be highly deceptive since you yourselves helped the runaway population explosion by pushing your expansionist policies and encouraging big, bigger, biggest in every aspect of Miraban life."

"As I've already said, in order to develop top management techniques we must experiment and find what works. There will always be a few bench embryos, so to speak. It's a dog eat dog universe, Pheledra, only the strong survive, yet the weak make

their contribution too ... by becoming food for the strong. We all have a special part in the scheme of things. Through millenia of experience we've discovered the one right way to live. The tribal age is long past. The left over bush babies are on their way out by natural selection."

"Natural selection?"

"We are the masters of nature, Pheledra and we always welcome those who see the light into our ranks."

"And, if Miraba is destroyed?"

"So what. There are trillions of unclaimed worlds and, as you and your companions already know, we'll just take what we have learned here and apply it elsewhere, like we always do. Little by little we're getting the hang of it."

"Oh yes Lance ... I'm sure." Pheledra felt sick and needed to change the subject fast.

"Oh, Ambassador Lance, may I ask you a question?"

"Of course, Pheledra, I'm at your service."

"I was under the impression that there was to be an *exchange* of gifts."

The Ambassador chuckled. "Why, Pheledra, didn't you realize? You've already received your gift."

"What!? You mean ... that roach?"

"Oh, just a little joke! Everyone needs a problem from time to time to keep ones

muscles and wits in shape. You might call it a ... test ... to keep you on your toes, a priceless gift with lasting impact. I knew a smart girl like you couldn't be *bugged* that easily."

He broke up laughing. Pheledra didn't think it was funny. It was all she could do to keep from slapping him in the face. Her obvious anger made him laugh all the more.

"You're so much like us, Pheledra!" He wheezed and sneezed and coughed, laughing harder and harder to the point of almost rolling out of his chair.

"Cobishandra, bring me a tissue!" he cried between fits of hilarity.

"Darling, remember your heart condition," said Cobishandra as she sexily emerged from the energy orb. She kissed him on the cheek, handed him a handful of tissues, then disappeared back into the orb.

"Damn cats!" he said under his breath.

The Ambassador wiped his face, sneezed again and regained his composure, still having little laughing fits whenever he thought about it.

Pheledra did her best to center and remain cheerful. "Ambassador Lance, are you ready for some refreshments?"

"Oh yes, tea and cakes will be fine" he said, lightly tapping his staff on the floor.

Nestingwave rejoined them on the observation deck and Fabby brought up the refreshments and sat down.

"Would Cobishandra and Anadia care to join us?" Pheledra asked.

"Of course not," snapped the Ambassador, "it's not their place."

Pheledra smiled and nodded.

For what seemed like an intolerable length of time, Pheledra, Wave and Fabby made small talk with the Ambassador hoping he would get bored and leave but the Ambassador dominated the conversation with tale after tale of his cleverness and skill.

The three cats were huddled together below in an inconspicuous corner of the control room. Inky and Ginger were still rather upset and paced around. Boots was just plain bored. When no one was looking, he quietly ambled up to the observation deck and found a perch out of sight above the proceedings. The energy orb still crackled on the transfer pad. He wanted to catch one of those fascinating strings of light.

Finally, the Ambassador ran out of stories about his great accomplishments and began preparations to leave. As he slipped on his sandals he looked up with intense red eyes and said, "You know, there may be something unexpected on the horizon that you haven't even thought of. All of this, from both your perspective and mine, may make little difference in the long run."

"What do you mean, Your Excellency?" Fabby asked.

"Oh ... only that ... Mother Nature herself sometimes has the final laugh."

Pheledra knew he was taunting them and wouldn't come clean, so she didn't question him further.

They got up and formally bid the Ambassador farewell. He snapped his fingers and the two females reappeared and escorted him over to the energy orb while playing recessional music on their instruments. Before departing all three turned, smiled and nodded. The Ambassador and his entourage took one step backwards into the energy orb.

At the same time, Boots, who had been secretly planning his attack, made a mad dash from the rear and leaped toward the elusive strings of light, disappearing through the pulsating energy field. Pheledra just caught a glimpse of his tail flying in.

She gasped as the orb vanished.

"Pheledra, Pheledra, what's wrong?" asked Wave.

"What's the matter?" Fabby's scanners instantly fixed on the Kultaki ship in defensive reconnaissance mode.

Pheledra put both hands over her eyes and sighed. "Boots was trying to play with the lights from the orb and jumped into it."

"Oh no," said Wave. "Poor Boots. We've got to do something quick."

Pheledra took a deep breath. "Fabby, raise the Ambassador and tell him what's happened, if he doesn't already know, and use lots of diplomacy. Tell him I wish to confer with him."

"As good as done. I'll whistle him up a snaky tune" said Fabby who was already sliding down the ladder to the control deck.

"Wave, I want to play back our conversation with the Ambassador. There's something ... a hint or clue ... that we need to know."

"Righto," Wave replied as they slid down to the control deck to join Fabby.

Fabby tried and tried to get the Ambassador back on the monitor but only got a message: *Ambassador Felance is in a meeting and unavailable.*

They became more and more uneasy as they waited impatiently. Fabby whistled a soothing melody. Finally, the channel cleared and the Ambassador appeared on the screen. He was seated at the dining table. Cobishandra was draped across him offering sips of red wine from a glass chalice. He acted a little put out at being bothered but managed a political smile which was overtaken by a sneeze. Cobishandra immediately produced a tissue and held it for the Ambassador to blow his nose.

He resumed the political smile and said, "My, Fabby, that's a lovely tune you're whistling. What can I do for you?"

Fabby quickly finished the tune in a relaxed manner and said, "Your Excellency, I'm very sorry to bother you but it seems one of our companions, a cat named Boots, jumped into your energy orb and is now on board your ship. We would appreciate it if you would just beam him back to us so we can be on our way."

"Why, Fabby, I'd be glad to do that, but I haven't seen your companion and know absolutely nothing about him. He is not here. I'm sure you'll find him hiding somewhere on your own ship. Get a scan on him. He couldn't have gone far."

Anadia entered with a covered tray and placed it in front of the Ambassador, removing the lid. The Ambassador took a deep whiff of the steaming aroma and dug in. "Ahhh, how I love baked mammal with carrots, onions, and yams."

Pheledra was horrified at what was on the Ambassadors plate. Whatever it was, it had been beheaded, skinned, cooked, and four little legs stuck straight up in the air.

The Ambassador seeing her shock said, "Oh Pheledra, surely you don't think ... uh ..." He turned to Anadia. "Just to be absolutely sure we didn't miss anything, scan the ship to be ab-so-lute-ly sure the cat's not on board."

"Yes sir," Anadia answered and moved out of view.

"There, you see Pheledra, I'll do everything I can to help you."

"Lance, I'm sorry we bothered you" she said. "Perhaps we made a mistake. We'll scan our own ship more carefully."

At that moment Anadia came back and shrugged her shoulders.

"Sorry Pheledra. No kitty," said the Ambassador. "I've seen nothing of your companion and I'm very thankful for that."

Those beasts make me sneeze and cough until my eyes swell shut."

"Thanks" said Pheledra and Fabby almost at the same time. Fabby closed the communication.

"Boots is definitely not on board the Firefly," said Fabby.

Nestingwave, who had been looking over Pheledra's shoulder, could no longer restrain his outrage.

"I'll kill that murdering son-of-a-bitch! That bloodthirsty bastard! Boots, my sweet friend, you will be avenged! This heinous criminal will be brought to justice! I'll skin him! I'll cut him into little pieces! I'll burn him alive! If it takes the rest of my life!"

Pheledra, who had entered into meditation in spite of his tirade, opened her eyes and said, "Calm down Wave, your reptilian genes are showing. Boots is not dead and is definitely not on the Ambassador's dinner menu."

"Really!?" Wave said in disbelief.

"He's in a glass cage on board the Kultaki starship. I'm in telepathic communication with him. He is well, but very angry at being cooped up by strangers. The Ambassador wants to keep him hostage as leverage over us."

"You mean, all that was just a show?" Wave was somewhat relieved.

"Exactly" said Pheledra. "The Kultaki are subtle and very theatrical. Who knows,

maybe we can come up with a little theater of our own. In the meantime, we must get down to business. Come on Wave, let's review our conversation with the Ambassador."

They watched and listened carefully as Nestingwave played back the meeting.

"Stop right there!" said Pheledra. "The Ambassador says there may be something unexpected on the horizon and then says, 'Mother Nature herself sometimes has the final laugh'. I need to get back to the Akashic record of planet Miraba and make specific inquiry. Perhaps I've missed something."



A live mouse! That scaly girl tried to feed him a live mouse! He'd only seen a live mouse once or twice in his entire life. Dry food was his thing. That rodent seemed almost as big as he was. When Anadia tossed it into his glass cage, Boots panicked. Instinctively, he pounced with all the clawed fury he could muster but the mouse charged with a demented chitter and took a bite out of his leg. Anadia and Cobishandra roared with laughter. It was touch and go as predator and predatee went round and round in a blur of hissing snorting growling fur. It was hard to tell which was which.

Boots tried to scamper up the four sides of the slick glass cage to get away, as the mouse furiously snapped at his heels. Finally, Boots snagged a claw on the top edge of the glass, just under the lid, giving

him the advantage of height, then pushed off hard, zooming straight down into the enemy's face, all four claws spinning like a buzz saw. A protracted bite to the throat and the bloodied mouse went limp as a dish rag. Anadia and Cobishandra gave an enthusiastic round of applause. Boots was trembling and exhausted but rather proud of himself. Still, he could not bring himself to eat it. Dry food was his thing. He just curled up in the corner licking blood off his paws and applying tongue massage to his injured leg.

Cobishandra giggled, lifted up the glass lid, reached in and happily popped the dead mouse into her mouth.

Boots shuddered as the last bit of tail slid down her gullet.

Six - Brain Storm

Wave and Fabby sat at their consoles on the control deck, carefully monitoring the environmental systems for the gently pulsing tachyon tubes below them. After awhile, Pheledra came down from the observation deck and joined them. The three sat quietly for some time, carefully checking and rechecking the monitors.

Finally, Pheledra broke the silence. "There's no sign of anything unusual going on down there."

"Those nasty little devils are keeping well out of sight," Fabby said.

Nestingwave, whose patience was waning, got up from his seat and went over to the

weapons cabinet to ponder its contents. "There must be somethin' or some combination here that'll do the job."

Fabby whistled and smiled. "Forget the weapons, Wave, I'll whistle up a tune for 'em. I've cracked their neurological algorithms and can now produce some paralysis in those bugs, if I can get a clear energy vector." Wave nodded vigorously as if the battle had already been won.

"Okay," said Pheledra, turning away from the monitors to face them, "Green just checked in to say there hasn't been a peep. At this point we must totally trust the droids to be on top of the situation ... and I do."

Fabby turned to look at Pheledra and nodded in agreement. Wave took one more eye excursion through the various weaponry before he turned and nodded also.

Pheledra looked at Fabby, then at Wave, smiled slightly and spoke in a matter-of-fact voice. "Dear friends, we have much to do. We must take it as it comes and be very careful to maintain focus to stay alert in each present moment. But we also must not become overwhelmed with the intensity of all this. So, let's calm down as much as possible, clear our heads and go upstairs under the stars to talk."

Pheledra and Fabby ascended the ladder. Wave started to close up the weapons cabinet but suddenly froze, having spied something that momentarily caught his eye. He slipped it into his pocket and went on up. Each of them filled a large glass with cold geyser water and sat close together in silence around the small round table.

Inky and Ginger were napping nearby on their pillows.

Pheledra breathed deeply and looked up into the silent ocean of space. The profound beauty. Her eyes welled up with her thoughts. *Helaah ... so long ago we watched the stars ... tiny ice crystals upon velvet waves of color. Oceans, rivers ... streams of iridescence ... yellow moons like sparks from fire. And now, in the not-so-distance ... Avengarone and Tarsenay, two moons orbiting a blue ball of shimmering light ... Miraba ... the planet called forgetfulness ... longing to remember and journey on.*

They enjoyed the water and Pheledra spoke. "Now I must tell you some recent news that I have gathered from the Akashic Record of Miraba and confirmed through the scientific observations of our brothers, the Frahza. Planet Miraba is about to undergo a massive extinction event ... look..."

Pheledra pointed up to a segment of the dome which became a large view screen. She zoomed in on a faint blue dot which rapidly became recognizable as Miraba and its two moons, Avengarone and Tarsenay. "Now ... see Mother Nature's final word."

Wave and Fabby were astounded as a large red sphere came into view. It was only a few million statons from Miraba and was trailed by various debris and space trash. Smaller asteroids swirled like a magnetic mist.

"Oh my," said Fabby, "this must be the anomaly I detected when we first came into this solar system."

"What?" Pheledra exclaimed. "You already knew about this?"

"Not really ... uh ... all I knew was that there was some sort of magnetic disturbance. It could have been a solar discharge or ..."

"That's not good enough, Fabby." Pheledra was peeved. "I'm very disappointed in you. An intelligence failure of this magnitude could easily destroy the entire mission."

"I'm sorry, Pheledra, but there has been so much happening and I ..."

"He was keeping an eye on it, Pheledra," Wave interrupted. "We've been damn busy with that roach, the Ambassador and all ..."

"No excuses! Both you and Fabby need to tighten up!"

"Okay, I don't want to argue," Wave said.

Fabby nodded. "I'm so sorry Pheledra, it's inexcusable and ... I promise to be more diligent."

"Both of you had better see to that!"

Wave and Fabby glanced at each other.

"Now, let's focus ..." she started.

"Wait," Wave interrupted. "Let's take ten to meditate."

"Good idea," Fabby agreed.

"Always," nodded Pheledra.

After ten zeron they returned to normal consciousness somewhat refreshed.

Pheledra zoomed in a little closer on the overhead view screen. "Here's what I've learned. The main body of this incredibly dense planetoid will not hit Miraba, but a lot of those small asteroids and debris will. The near miss of the main body will push and pull Miraba like a huge magnet and trigger a devastating pole shift. The moons, Avengarone and Tarsenay, as well as other planets, will be affected to an unknown degree. The randomly falling space junk, like a rain of fire, will pound the surface of Miraba and turn areas of it into a living hell."

"Oh no," commented Wave. "A bad day in black tights."

"To say the least," added Fabby.

Pheledra nodded. "Of course, this is not the end of Miraba, only a continuance of its transformation which is already well underway. It is horrifying because of the massive destruction and death, but hope always exists as a possibility for all."

"On the positive side," Wave pondered, "the Kultaki control will probably end forever."

"Yes," said Pheledra. "Miraba is scheduled to become a home, an inheritance if you will, for those prepared to make the great ascension into fifth density."

Wave, who suddenly realized he'd been holding his breath, exhaled loudly and said, "Well, I guess old 'Yer Pestilency' and company will have to look for their pickin's elsewhere."

Wave's little bit of humor broke the tension and the three smiled momentarily as the

zoomed in sector returned to normal. They sat around the table just looking at one another.

"Well," Fabby began, "Yer Pestilency did speak some profound truth even if he wasn't humbled by it: 'Mother Nature herself sometimes has the final laugh.'"

"So true," said Wave.

Pheledra, who was gazing at Inky and Ginger asleep on their pillows, nodded and looked back at Wave and Fabby. "A great percentage of those souls now living on Miraba will be required to reincarnate elsewhere in order to continue their third density journey because they are not yet ready for ascension. The introduction of Frahza/Miraban hybrids will bring the overall population balance to about 950 million, comfortably sustainable for the new world which can be rapidly repaired through the introduction of advanced technologies already waiting in the wings."

"That's quite a population reduction," said Fabby as he got up to pour everyone another drink of geyser water.

"Yes," Pheledra replied. "The Frahza also disclosed that a unique coincidence of natural cycles is merging upon Miraba for the very first time. This entire solar system is already entering a new and highly energetic sector of space never before encountered. It is called a 'photon belt'. It is a massive torus shaped field of energy that physically raises the frequency of everything, expanding consciousness ready or not."

"Yeah, ready or not here it comes," Wave commented as Fabby returned to the table with the drinks.

"Ready or not." Pheledra said. "Although these cyclic events have happened many times in the past, there hasn't been one of this magnitude in the last 26 million annoms. Because of censorship, few people on Miraba even know about it. Biltar ap Dyn subconsciously knows. He has sensed a big change coming for quite a while."

Wave sighed. "A very heavy burden. Aside from a small number of awakening souls on Miraba, everyone else seems to be sleeping."

"Yeah," said Fabby, "willfully sleeping due to denial."

"Denial and failure to take personal responsibility for their misguided beliefs and actions," added Pheledra.

"Such apathy and blindness is suicidal," said Wave. "By far the best example is when they foolishly split open the atom and unwittingly sent out a message to every negative entity in the universe saying, 'come on in'. Then, in keeping with their mentality, used their new toys to incinerate each other by the tens of millions and assure a future full of hopelessness and fear for their children, while piously praising themselves."

"As I understand it," said Fabby, "it was around that same time when the nation of Shaluma elevated money to the full status of a god."

Wave nodded. "The result of these inverted values is a downward spiral into death."

"In fact," Pheledra added, "total annihilation by their own hand would have already taken place had it not been for the strong spiritual intervention of the awakening souls on Miraba, being encouraged by our many coworkers who long to midwife mother Miraba into fifth density. Therein lies the hope for a real turnaround."

"Okay," Wave said, changing the subject, "let's get down to the business at hand. What are we gonna do about them roaches? What are we gonna do about Boots?"

"Let's hear suggestions starting with the bugs," Pheledra said, switching to commander mode. "Fabby?"

"Bait them onto one of the tachyon tubes by leaving it apparently unprotected. Then, I'll whistle them motionless while you and the droids disintegrate them. If we lose one tachyon tube, so be it."

Wave grunted and shook his head. "What if they scatter too fast and we lose more than one tachyon tube? What if we lost two or one explodes? Fabby, I love the whistlin' but the disintegratin' is too open ended. I really don't care ta have me ass fried in a starbucket, thank you ... but ... I do have another idea that compliments the whistlin' part."

He got up from the table and dug into one of his pockets.

"When eyeballin' the contents of the weapons cabinet I spied this."

Nestingwave held up a quarter-moon shaped containment field generator and slapped it down on the table, sliding it forward to Pheledra and Fabby. Then, leaning in, Wave spoke rapidly, his eyes wide and his face very close to theirs. "Two of these to the droids. One tachyon tube apparently left unprotected. Roaches pop up to feed. Fabby whistles. Roaches immobilized. Two droids activate and hold containment field. Three more droids pick the filthy buggers up by the scruff of the neck and the whole package, containment field droids, carrying droids and frozen roaches, moves into the lower evacuation hatch. Outside filtermesh off. Inside hatch sealed. Outside hatch opened. Roaches forcibly evicted with enough gusto to send 'em quickly past the psychotronic filter shields. Outside filtermesh on. Outside hatch sealed. Inside hatch opened. Droids, Pheledra, Fabby, Wave, Inky and Ginger ... high five. Then, let's go find Boots."

With no further words, Pheledra, Fabby and Wave sprung into action.

Seven - Feline Processing

In his restless sleep, snorting, drooling Kultaki were running what appeared to be a feline processing plant. Bloody alligators in white aprons, wielding knives and axes, were busy doing unspeakable things.

Boots found himself on a long conveyor belt stretching like a winding highway into infinity. He went past Cobishandra who smiled sweetly and sprinkled him with a dash of salt and then past Anadia who did the same with pepper, then His Excellency

happily tossed handfuls of chopped garlic and parsley into the air and a loud electric fan blew the herbs directly on him. He sneezed and started to lick himself but was startled as he looked up to see the conveyor belt carrying him past a fiery oven being stoked with coal by two muscular armed rattlesnakes in loin cloths. Each time they tossed in a shovel of coal they rattled and laughed maniacally. The whole area was now a steaming inferno with shadows of dancing flames against the walls. He shuddered and tried again to lick his paws, but they were bound together with tape. He found a loose corner and ripped the tape off with his teeth.

On and on he traveled, no end in sight, carried along on the winding conveyor belt, past the valleys and over the mountains, across the seas to distant shores, into the land of mirrors where he was surprised to find he no longer looked like himself but had transformed into a huge yellow lion, flicking off flies with his tail in the mid-day sun. Then, he snapped back. Once again anxiety stabbed him and loneliness brought pangs of sorrow. Pheledra! Pheledra! Phele ...

He heard a sound, like something sliding, then a loud clunk.

"Here's some ground up mouse, you fuzzy ball of meat," a strange voice echoed from the void.

His eyes popped open. He was lying on his back with all four paws desperately clawing microbes out of the air. His heart was pounding like two Ehnala drums and he was soaked with sweat. He saw Cobishandra handing a bowl down into his glass cage.

**“You must have been having a nightmare.”
She hissed between pointy teeth as she replaced the heavy glass lid and left the room.**

In a micron, Boots was on his paws staring down at the bowl of ground mouse. *What a mushy mess.*

Dry food was his thing. He’d just lost his appetite. Nevertheless, he already felt better because even before he’d gotten up, he’d already made an important decision. The next redeyed snake that slid back that lid was in for a big nasty surprise.

He paced around the glass cage making his plans.

When he heard footsteps, he pretended to be asleep. This time it was Anadia who was coming in to retrieve his bowl. He waited for the sliding sound of the lid and the instant before she could set it back down, he sprung straight up, shrieking like an insane banshee and rototilled her face, launched himself off the top of her head, out the door, down a passageway, up a ladder, through an open hatch, up a pipe, through a hole, across a bundle of cables and into the upper bowels of the Kultaki starship. He came to rest panting furiously in a dimly lit crawl space behind numerous magical devices of highly advanced technology. He had escaped. Now, he would go find Pheledra.

Eight - Red Alert

Biltar ap Dyn finished the paper he’d been writing, collated and bound it, then opened the steel safe and put it in. Tomorrow, if the

red alert lifted, he would send out copies to his coworkers.

His most important scientific breakthroughs always came while he was sleeping. In dreams, he often found himself before a group of beautiful and highly advanced beings. They would never give information but only assist him to organize the knowledge already in his mind. At first the dreams were vague and he didn't remember much but after he quit Project Quant he began to discern and construct thoughts into solid forms and apply them in creative rather than destructive ways. Now, the dream council seemed to be gently encouraging him toward the fulfillment of his vision for world peace. Whoever these celestial beings were, he was grateful and longed to understand more. It was, perhaps, the biggest question of his life.

The dreams had started after his incredible experience with a mysterious flying craft. He and his friend, Edyn ap Tau, had gone through a weird encounter on Falu island when they were young science students. He tried so hard to understand the wonder and power of it, but it was still a mystery.

“Still totally unidentified,” he said to himself. “What happened to Edyn ap Tau? It's been thirty two annoms since he disappeared. Did they take him? Perhaps they wanted him for something special ... will I ever know?”

That evening long ago when the varying frequencies of light from the hovering craft fell upon them, various areas of his brain, or mind, seemed to be stimulated. For the entire night, which seemed like an eternity, he and Edyn were probed by powerful lights

of every color which released, and meaningfully organized into their conscious minds, experiential and subconscious knowledge - geometry, chemistry, mathematics, music, electromagnetics, acoustics, biology and physics. Also, the highly charged emotions of human relationships - love, sex, friendship, spirituality, metaphysics and deep feelings beyond words or description in human language.

Then, there was the missing time. Before the “big gap”, as they later referred to it, the last thing he remembered were the lights coming in much closer and Edyn saying, “they want to pick us up.” It was as if Edyn was already familiar with their intentions. Biltar was not afraid as he and Edyn walked toward the glowing ship. The next thing they remembered was standing back on the beach, sometime much later. The bright craft was up there still - hovering above the beach - and the sunrise was only moments away. When the ship faded out as the sun rose, he began to wonder if the experience had been real or an hallucination or a dream but he was left with a strange inner certainty that soon coming events would open a new way for Miraba. They had both come out of the experience changed forever yet hardly able to even describe, much less explain what had happened to them.

A short time later, his friend Edyn ap Tau vanished. There was a police investigation but no results. Biltar never told anyone except Sinya about his strange experience on Falu island. For many annoms he did his own investigation about such encounters. Surprisingly, they seemed rather common

but the known details were bizzar. A confused mish mash of information, misinformation and disinformation from many sources. Eventually, he put it all on the shelf and focused on work yielding practical results. Unfortunately, he made a terrible moral misjudgement and went to work for the government on Project Quant.

“Damn this pain in my spine! That bastard Hersh ap Zet took away my herbs and my pipe too. Paraphenalia!”

He went into the living room and settled down in his big chair by the fireplace and continued talking to himself. **“I paid dearly for my early stupidity ... family ... my life withering away. Oh well. Resentment is a downer. I choose a better way ... an easy choice because the very matrix of creation has opened her secrets before me and I bow thankfully in awed admiration.”**

Biltar stretched his back and groaned, then shifted around trying to get comfortable. Memories flooded him. *Sinya, love of my youth, it was a new paradigm that filled our souls and quickened us. The real possibility of our world in harmony with nature at last. Finally taking our place along side those who journey to and from the stars ... our relatives ... perhaps ... perhaps ...*

He had almost fallen asleep, when the audicom chimed. A sudden rush of anxiety brought him to his feet. The pain almost knocked him down. **“Uh ... hello?”**

“Biltar, this is Fryd. Are you watching the monitor?”

“No, what’s up?”

“Red alert is on indefinitely. They say they’re expecting several major fanatic attacks within the next few days and everyone should remain exactly where they are and stay tuned to the media.”

“Oh, yeah ... by all means stay tuned to the propaganda network.”

“How are we going to proceed now?”

“I don’t know Fryd ... but ... there’s going to be a way. Don’t ask me how. The best thing for us to do is just sit tight and see what happens. It could be that some of the early trash from the planetoid is about to reach Miraba and they want to immobilize the nation so they can quietly escape to their underground bunkers, space station, or wherever ... or, the whole thing might be another dry run.”

“Yes, they actually put their trust in those mega facilities but they may turn out to be nothing but expensive tombs.”

“Listen, Fryd, if and when this alert loosens up, we’ll go immediately.”

“Okay.”

“Peace.”

He muted the audicom and settled back into his chair. No doubt every word of their conversation had been recorded by the NSS but he didn’t care. *When those big chunks of sky start to fall, he thought, everyone will leave their jobs immediately to be with their families.*

When he thought of “families”, grief and loneliness returned. He felt tears welling up, so he quickly changed focus and went into the kitchen to make some tea.

He returned with a steaming cup and sat in his chair. The audicom chimed again.

“Hello.”

“Biltar ... Rysen here ... My family and I are out in the country. I guess you’ve heard the news?”

“You mean the red alert?”

“No, no ... Urbantia 9 was just wiped out by a meteorite and more are on the way. Millions are already dead.”

Although Biltar expected something like this, the shock immobilized him momentarily. Then he let out a long sigh, “I guess it’s beginning ... the hand of the One bless you and your family.”

“I just wanted you to know again how much I respect you and how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to work with you on this most important project.”

“Thanks, Rysen, I enjoyed working with you too. Now we’ll see if it really pays off, huh?”

“It will Biltar, it will ... goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

Biltar ap Dyn muted the audicom. He didn’t know it then, but this was Rysen’s last farewell.

He walked out on his balcony and looked at the sky. The wind was picking up and dry clouds of dark yellow dust were rolling in.

Should I run? Where to? "Not a good day to fly," he said in a whisper.

He went back inside, put supplies into a big rucksack and headed for the basement. There would be some protection there. He propped up a mattress, sat down in the middle and declared to the four walls, "the days of days have now begun."



The skies of Miraba grew dark. The planet began to shudder in its competitive struggle with the planetoid. Meteorites rained fire from the sky. The larger ones hit like nuclear explosions. Volcanos exploded with increasing ferocity, sending plumes of ash and thick smoke high into the atmosphere. Rivers of lava flowed through cities burning everyone and everything in hellish firestorms. In some mountainous countries, pyroclastic flows smothered whole populations with choking blankets of boiling gas. Severe quakes split continents apart. Huge tidal waves inundated coastal regions. Tanks filled with poisonous chemicals ruptured, splashing their contents across the landscape into churning rivers and seas. Nuclear power plants were torn and crushed, spewing forth deadly radiation.

Rysen, his wife and two daughters took refuge in a square shipping bottle which he had secured with cables. The cables snapped like strings during a quake and

Rysen lashed his wife and two daughters to the inside just before the undulating ground caused it to buck like a wild horse. A mudslide took it down the hill. After flipping over several times, it came to rest upside down in a tangle of burning trees. The door was badly damaged and could no longer be opened. Rysen was prepared and used his cutting torch to slice a hole in the side. His shaken family crawled out, escaping the fire. A rumbling jolt sent them sprawling. Suddenly, several pods of machines swooped down in aerocars and surrounded them.

A loudspeaker boomed. “Stay where you are. You are under arrest!”

“Arrest? For what?” Rysen objected. “Are you insane! Can’t you see what’s happening?”

“National Security violations!” came the reply.

“The ‘chines must be on auto,” Rysen said to his terrified wife.

They were handcuffed and flown with ten other hapless prisoners to an internment camp by a large transport VTL which barely made it around the thick clouds of ash from a sudden volcanic eruption.

Rysen, his wife and two daughters were incarcerated with several hundred others behind a tall fence out in the open. They endured twelve more quakes throughout the night. In the morning, the intensity of the cataclysm temporarily diminished and Rysen was interrogated. They only wanted

to know one thing - where were the PSGs?
He never told them.

Nine - The Day of Days

The operation to get rid of the roaches was completely bogged down. Pheledra was growing more anxious by the moment. She needed to solve these problems and refocus back onto the mission. She knew the cataclysm was well underway and needed to check on Biltar. Without a doubt, the roaches were a planned obstruction. It was proving much harder to lure them out of their microscopic state than anyone had imagined.

Pheledra, Wave, Fabby and the droids took up positions on the power deck and the droids put up electromagnetic cloaking to disguise their presence. Pheledra wanted to be close at hand when the roaches came back to feed, but nothing was happening. She was losing patience.

Wave shook his head as he looked over at Pheledra and communicated telepathically.

Apparently the roaches are smart enough to know they're being tricked.

Pheledra nodded in agreement. *You're right. I want everyone, including the droids to evacuate the power deck. Maybe that will lure them out.*

Yes, Fabby agreed. *We'll keep an eye on this area by remote monitoring.*

Fabby, Wave and Pheledra quickly ascended the ladder to the control deck followed by

the five droids. They watched carefully for a long time.

Suddenly, the roaches appeared right at the base of the array. The droids shot down and everyone was right behind them, but Fabby was barely able to whistle a few notes before the three bugs merged into one gigantic roach and completely devoured one of the tachyon tubes. Immediately, stray energy bounced and crackled all over the power deck forcing Pheledra and Wave to scramble back up just in time to avoid the deadly tachyon bolts. The droids instantly put up their shields. Fabby, being a Frequency Adjusting Bioborg B, generated a protective field around his body. His whistling, which was a multi-layered cacophony of piercing warbles and overtones, managed to immobilize the enormous thing, but not before it began chomping into another tachyon tube. He quickly shut it down. If the roach was removed, he could repair the tube and they'd have five -- ample power. Until then, they could still run on four but it was doubtful if they could make it back through the wormhole without that fifth tube.

Red, Blue and Green moved in and activated a broader three-way containment field, then froze in place wondering what to do next. Orange and Violet clamped onto the thing but would not try to move it until they received further instructions from Pheledra. Even if they pried the roach loose, they would then have the major problem of getting it through the evacuation hatch because the bug had now grown so large.

The droids soon discovered that they could not maintain the containment field for very

long. They were in dire straits and Pheledra could feel their distress.

"Green, what's the problem?"

"Energy depletion," he said. "The roach sends out tendrils which lash around us and suck out our energy. Periodically, each one of us must disengage to recharge. Our capacity is severely taxed. When we take the recharging breaks, the field is weakened and the roach starts to wake up and move. Fabby intervenes with his whistle to put it back down, but the whole process is less than satisfactory. It's like holding onto a wild animal and having to constantly readjust your grip."

Fabby was continually whistling, trying to find a frequency which would kill the thing.

"No dice," he said, "anything I could do now to kill it would shatter the tube and put the whole ship in peril. We must keep up that containment field."

"Okay," said Pheledra. "See if you can figure out a way to tap into one of the other tubes and transfer energy to the droids."

"That's going to be touchy, the tachyon tubes don't like imbalance and the droids have no input receptacles, but I'll do my very best to come up with something."

"Thanks Fabby."

Pheledra and Wave watched him on the monitor as he moved over to one of the tubes and began to examine it carefully. "Pheledra, we'll need to shut the power down completely in order for me to get up

inside and look for the best way to put a tap on it. The Firefly will be extremely vulnerable during that shut down period. You and Wave must decide if it's worth the risk. If anyone is monitoring us during that period, such as the Kultaki starship, they will know immediately we are dead in the water and might come calling while they have us at a disadvantage."

"You're right," she said thoughtfully, "they'd probably rush here under the guise of coming to our aid. I don't like the idea of being dead in the water. Are there any better ideas?"

"Perhaps," said Fabby, searching through his computer files. "Wave, the information I have on Galvernian crystals reveals they have the capability of focusing and transferring energy in the physical, etheric and thought planes. Is that correct?"

"Yep," replied Wave. "Also, the Galvernian crystals can blend energy and resonate it with other Galvernian crystals which are in near physical proximity and aligned correctly."

Pheledra took a deep breath. "What do you have in mind, Fabby?"

"Wave could grow crystals in the replicator. I surround the four remaining tachyon tubes with the crystals by placing them around the magnetic base with the points facing the three field-maintaining droids. Then, one at a time, the droids shut down while I install crystals inside their sensor rings with the points facing the ones at the base of the array. When the first droid is outfitted, I open a bleed-off circuit at the base of the

array just a crack to power the droid. Each time a droid is outfitted with crystals, I open another bleed off circuit. Finally, all three droids have crystals and can receive power directly from the ships tachyon system. The energy is distributed evenly, keeping the ship's four remaining tachyon tubes happy and balanced. Thus, the droids are well able to maintain the containment field and secure the roach and we don't have to shut down the whole ship."

"What do we do then?" asked Pheledra.

"I don't know ... yet," replied Fabby, "we'll have to plan as we go. When we find a way to get rid of that roach, I'll repair the damaged tube immediately so we'll have ample power to make it back through the worm hole when the time comes for us to leave."

Pheledra put her hands on her head. "Did you understand that, Wave?"

"It'll work, Pheledra," he answered, "I'll stay in tune with the Firefly and she will indicate to us when her systems are running optimally."

Pheledra paused. An idea was coming to her. "You know, this might be an opportunity to perform a little theater of our own and not only work on the roach problem, but get Boots back at the same time."

"How's that?" Wave asked.

"Well, if we can lure His Pestilency's ship, we might find a way to grab Boots. I certainly don't relish pursuing the

Ambassador half way across the universe while wasting precious time for the mission. I've been receiving telepathic communication concerning some very important recent happenings. Meteorites have already reached Miraba and destroyed several major cities. There are more on the way and severe volcanic and quake activity is taking place at this very moment. We have little time, so we must gather all our wits, courage and strength to solve this roach problem quickly."

"We'll do it," said Wave. "While Fabby is preparing the droids, I'll be thinking about what to do with the roach and a possible theatrical production for the Kultaki."

"Great," said Pheledra. "I'll be up on the observation deck. Biltar and so many others, are desperately crying out and I must offer prayers of hope and encouragement."

The three went their separate ways to do their jobs.

Ten - Empathic Agony

From the observation dome, Pheledra moved the Firefly into Miraba's upper atmosphere. She donned the headpiece for the Psychotronic Adjuvant. She would be highly empathic. Also, she would be able to connect closely with the other lightworkers and beings of light who were also engaged during this turmoil of turmoils.

She gazed out over the distress of Miraba - the quakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves and fires. Many explosions and cries

resounded as great chunks of land split and fell into the sea, cities collapsed, whole species of animals perished and millions of humans died suddenly, passing in confused horror into astral zones - many lingered and suffered. The emotions of fear, terror and uncontrolled panic, as well as bitterness, rage, murder and suicide pierced her soul like nails. It was as if all the pressure was being released at once.

Oh, the pain, the pain ... the utter despair of those who are unenlightened - destined to repeat their life experiences of suffering, until they awaken and move on. She pulsed forth all the healing energy her being could muster and gradually became exhausted.

I pour out my life for you, Miraba ... I pour myself

Suddenly, waves of photons filled the observation deck. Inky and Ginger ran away to hide. Pheledra quickly removed the headpiece.

“What’s happening?”

Aramanda’s voice warbled loudly in her head. The sound was frightening and terrible.

Pheledra covered her face with her arms, her hands over her head.

“Cease!”

“Why Mandhi? Why?”

“Examine yourself!”

“But, Mandhi, my intentions are for the highest good!”

“Not true!”

“Yes, it is true!”

“Your self-sacrifice is useless abomination!”

“No! How can you say that, Mandhi?”

“You are deceived!”

“No, Mandhi! No!”

“Purify yourself, liar!”

“I only care for the people of Miraba and my mission!”

“Soul on fire with self-desire!”

Aramanda cracked like an egg and broke apart into a million fragments as she dissolved into a violet haze.

Pheledra was crushed and confused. “That’s not fair! I must not lose focus. I cannot weaken at this crucial moment. What’s going on? Perhaps she’s testing me ... or ... I don’t know. But I must not lose focus!”

Pheledra put the headpiece back on but her distress made the previous engagement impossible. “Examine and purify myself,” she repeated over and over again in a whisper.

“Why? What does it mean? Am I doing something wrong? I care about this! It is my life! It is who and what I am! Since when is self-sacrifice an abomination? Is it not the

way of all truly spiritual beings?... Maybe it wasn't Mandhi at all! Maybe it was a deception induced by the Kultaki! No ... they can't do that! Can they? Meditate ... I must meditate now!"

Pheledra took the headpiece off again and closed her eyes. Thoughts raced in competition. A nagging within her wouldn't go away.

"This is robbing me! I refuse to let it rob me! I will not cease!"

She redonned the headpiece and momentarily raised her consciousness to perceive the countless beings of light, radiating forth every conceivable form of energetic grace.

Once more the photons danced around her.

"Aramanda?"

"Yes ... none but I! You are deceived!" The warbling voice made Pheledra cringe.

"No! I am not deceived! Whoever you are, you cannot be Mandhi! I will not cease!"

"Perception of spirit overridden by soul"

"What does that mean?"

"You are self deceived!"

"No! It is you who lies!"

"Soul on fire with self-desire!"

"Self-desire? Only the deepest desire and intention of the highest source!"

Once again, Aramanda shattered into a violet light and faded away.

“I trust in my inner intention. How can I do otherwise?” Pheledra continued on.

Her mind moved over Miraba but the disturbing incident had effected her perception. Now, less empathic with the horrors below, she kept reminding herself of the importance of the mission and found Biltar ap Dyn. He was in deep trouble. His dome had collapsed upon him. Fires burned all around him. She connected strongly with the receptivity of his mind. *Biltar ... Biltar ... don't give up ... don't give up ... don't give up ...*

He stirred beneath the beam that pinned him.

At that moment, all her senses throbbed for Biltar ap Dyn. It was strong and very disturbing. She shook it off realizing the danger of getting personally involved during this critical moment. Then, once again, she witnessed the shards of illumination issuing forth from the boiling darkness of Miraba. The beings of light were fully engaged. Her fellow lightworkers conveyed hope and spoke encouragement. Many souls on Miraba now faced their final exams.

Countless acts of bravery and self-sacrifice pierced the hellish blackness of despair. Old enemies suddenly dropped their differences.

Biltar ap Dyn came to and found the strength to lift the heavy beam off his chest. On his way to safety, he picked up a sobbing child and carried her on his back. Another quake knocked him off his feet and

they rolled down an undulating ravine into the shallow creek below.

Pheledra fought the icicle that stabbed her solar plexus.

Eleven - Oldtime Melodrama

"How's it going, Fabby?" Nestingwave's voice was tense as he spoke over the communicator. He had come up with a bit of theater and wanted to contact Ambassador Lance as soon as possible but needed to check on Fabby's progress first.

"You know, Wave," Fabby replied, "this is going much faster than I ever expected. In thirty zeronos or so, I'll have this whole power supply problem solved. Then we must decide what to do with our captive astral roach."

"Don't worry about it Fabby. I've got a plan for that too. But we've got to move fast. Miraba is in the middle of the cataclysm and our entire mission may be in jeopardy. Just see that the damn monster doesn't wake up and eat another tachyon tube."

"I hear you, friend."

Wave quickly began a scan to locate the Kultaki starship. A soft chime let him know when he was zeroed in and he immediately hailed the Ambassador with an S.O.S.

The Kultaki starship wasn't very far away, only a million statons or so. Ambassador Lance, Cobishandra and Anadia were completely naked in the sauna except for Anadia who was wearing a black party mask

to hide the deep scratches on her face put there by Boots. They were playfully fondling each other in the hot bath while cheerfully watching the destruction of Miraba on the monitor. Ambassador Lance had just downed another goblet of wine when the distress call came in on the overhead.

"Hello, Mr. Nestingwave. It seems that you've caught us here in the alltogether. What's the problem?" His Excellency gave a quick wink to Anadia who was kissing his clawed toes sticking up out of the water.

"Oh, Your Excellency," Wave said, "your astral roach is eating our tachyon tubes ... we're all going to die ... like the people on Miraba ... horrible, horrible. Fabby is almost out of commission and Pheledra is so distraught she's sitting upstairs in a catatonic state."

"Oh no," the Ambassador said in a slightly distressed tone, "I never intended for such a thing to happen. I only wanted to give you a little adrenaline rush. I thought that surely you'd be able to quickly overcome that little challenge ... and thank me for offering you the sport of it."

The Ambassador's tone changed to friendly warmth. "Wave, we'll be there right away. Don't despair. We'll gladly take you back home. Your mission here is useless now. Just look at all that chaos and destruction. Why, I'd be surprised if anything at all remains on Miraba after this. We ourselves have lost so many good folks. Oh my, their screams are horrible ... but ... they should have foreseen it and gotten out. Too bad. Both our missions are terminated. Once we lose our grip and the people wake up, it's all

over for us. We'll just have to move on to greener pastures ... and you ... well, Wave, it may take eons for you to recover your strength after this terrible trauma but I'm sure you'll be okay."

Cobishandra, who was licking the Ambassadors leathery ear, almost burst out laughing and the Ambassador gave her a swift kick across her scaly buttocks.

"Oh, thank you Your Excellency, thank you." Wave said. "We'll hang on somehow 'til you arrive. Please hurry."

The communication ended and simultaneously the Ambassador and his two girl friends roared with hilarity, wildly splashing in the steaming sauna trying to dunk each other. The Ambassador laughed so hard he got a severe pain in his chest.

"Remember your heart condition dear," said Cobishandra.

He regained his composure and they reclined into the water as before but giggled occasionally.

"I guess they want their cat back," the Ambassador wheezed between giggles, "one of the best performances I've ever seen. Where is that fuzzy ball of meat anyway?"

"He ran away after scratching the hell out of my face," Anadia said between toe nibbles.

"Well, if anyone sees him, get him back into his glass cage right away."

With that, Ambassador Lance reached down and slowly slipped off Anadia's mask exposing the bloody scratches.

"Oh my ... darling, I just love you in stripes."

Twelve - Orange Flies

Through the Psychotronic Adjuvant, Pheledra saw Biltar and the little girl lying unconscious in the shallow stream. To save the mission, she would fully materialize into third density and go get them. It was dangerous to suddenly leap into an environment where so many inverted values were constantly fed into astral space. The present chaos doubled the risk. Nonetheless, she ached to go immediately, but couldn't because other problems needed to be solved first. The roach had to be dealt with and Boots returned. Then she would go. She adjusted the psychotronic adjuvant to allow her mind to examine Biltar's condition. He was injured and unconscious, unable to receive telepathy. In addition, although the quakes were subsiding, there was a dam directly upstream from where Biltar and the child had fallen. It was leaking badly and ready to break at any moment.

I need some help quick.

"Orange, what are you doing right now?"

"I'm still latched onto this roach waiting for Fabby to finish with the crystals so we can dump it down the drain, or whatever."

"Fabby, how long until you're finished?"

"Twenty zeronos or so."

"Not enough time."

Wave chimed in, "Wait, I've got another way to dispose of the roach. We'll give it back to the Kultaki. No time to explain now. I'm over in the workshop fabricating something. What did you need, Pheledra?"

"I need one of the droids for a highly dangerous mission right now. It may take up to 60 or 80 zeronos."

"Go do it Orange," Wave said quickly, "I won't be needing you 'til the Kultaki ship arrives."

"Aye, aye," Orange said as he received Pheledra's telepathic instructions and zipped downward and out the evacuation hatch into the atmosphere of Miraba.

"Wave, what do you need?" Pheledra was curious but trusted Wave's judgement.

"I need the Galvernian crystal on board the Kultaki ship aligned properly. It's a long shot but that damn spookbug will not fit into the evacuation chamber and you saw what happened the last time we chopped it up."

"Okay, I'll do what I can. Stay in touch."

Thirteen - A Boots Assist

***Pheledra!, Pheledra!* Boots cried as he made his way along the upper maintainance crawl spaces of the huge starship. He was thoroughly lost and only wanted one thing - out. Every place he went looked the same so**

he marked randomly as he went. His nose told him he was back where he'd been before. *Pheledra!, Pheledra!, Pheledra!*

Boots, my love, I'm here, he finally heard Pheledra's voice in his head. Peace, my kitten, we'll get out of this together now, okay?

Boots meowed in distress but felt somewhat comforted by her voice. He paused and listened intently.

Boots, I can see through your eyes now and hear with your ears. I'll nudge you which way to go. Go on and pay attention to my nudge, okay sweetheart?

Pheledra had boosted up the psychotronic adjuvant to include her physical senses and locked firmly into Boots.

Go that way Boots. Pheledra gently nudged his fluffed up tail and he took off trotting. After they'd gone along for awhile, she nudged him again to turn left. It was just a feather tap on his shoulder. Immediately, he turned left.

As they carefully moved down the corridors and passageways inside the huge starship, Pheledra was surprised they didn't encounter the Kultaki. She had already decided that if it did happen, Boots would run as fast as he could and locate a place where they couldn't follow him. As insurance, she was constantly looking for places for Boots to hide. The best bet were the maintenance crawl spaces accessible through hatches where the outside panels had been left open. She had already spotted a couple of possibilities and made a mental

note but didn't know how much good her nudging would do if Boots was running away in a panic. Then they heard music and the sound of a loud party going on somewhere below.

No wonder we haven't seen any Kultaki. They're distracted downstairs having some kind of celebration, probably enjoying their astral feast from the recent horrors on Miraba.

Pheledra was going after the crystal. Boots was going wherever Pheledra nudged him and they soon found themselves directly in front of a display pedestal bearing the blue velvet pillow with the Galvernian crystal nestled on top. It was displayed with some prominence in the very center of His Excellency's trophy and awards room. The room was filled with floating platforms at various heights upholding all the trophies and awards and certificates and licenses and deeds and stocks and bonds and bars of gold, coins of silver, pyramids of platinum and numerous bricks of happy powder - all the gifts, praises and affirmations that His Excellency had ever acquired from the time he was a baby lizard. The whole place was uncomfortably surreal to Pheledra who simply blocked out the environment and focused upon getting the crystal aligned as Wave was indicating to her telepathically.

Aim the point of the crystal toward the center of the back wall, Wave was saying in her head, the Kultaki craft is coming in close now. They're hailing us, but I'm going to wait awhile to answer.

Pheledra didn't know how she would get Boots to manipulate the crystal but she nudged him under the chin.

Boots hopped up on his old blue velvet pillow. He was thrilled to see and smell something familiar. He happily curled up but couldn't get comfortable because the crystal was crowding him out. So, he tried to move it over. It didn't budge so he pushed hard on it with his full body weight. The crystal toppled over on its side. Pheledra tried to nudge Boots into turning the point of the crystal toward the back wall but Boots simply would not pay any more attention to the crystal. All he wanted to do now was curl up and claim his old blue velvet pillow.

"This is not going to work," Pheledra said out loud, "I need a droid to do the job."

Okay Boots. We must locate a transfer station. Come on.

Boots reluctantly hopped down, responding to her psychic nudge. Although Pheledra could see, hear, feel, taste and smell through Boots, he didn't always look around. She had to get him to turn his head to the right or left so she could view the surroundings and get her bearings.

Boots trotted out of the trophy room and down a corridor. Every now and then, they'd pick up sounds of the Kultaki party somewhere on the decks below. Pheledra was thankful the Kultaki were so distracted. It would be devastating if Boots was discovered and recaptured.

Pheledra guided him into several open rooms but there were no transfer stations.

On one occasion, Boots blundered into a room full of Kultaki hard at work. Before they could spot him, he crouched behind a cart full of odd looking tools. Some of the Kultaki were adjusting controls on various devices which were so advanced even Pheledra had no idea what they were. Others had face panels off their equipment and were making adjustments or repairs. She urged Boots to look around and was amazed to see adult and children Kultaki of all ages working side by side. Although the Kultaki culture always functioned by means of a strict pecking order, in this case, adults were showing the children by hands-on experience how to do things and they were being quite patient. The children were eagerly following every nuance of their elders. Pheledra mused. *Those of negative polarity love their children too ... the future of life itself demands it.*

Fabby, who was finishing up installation of the crystals into the last droid, began monitoring Pheledra's telepathic merge with Boots.

"Pheledra, Kultaki technology always places transfer stations in the middle of their larger ships for the sake of clear transmission through the axis."

"Thanks, Fabby."

She got Boots out of the room with the Kultaki and began coaxing him toward the hub of the starship. Soon, she spied an open area with transfer platforms. No Kultaki were anywhere to be seen. She nudged Boots to jump up onto a control panel and, after some gentle psychic

stroking under his chin and tapping of his right forepaw, he turned on the power.

Well done Boots!

The transfer station lit up and began a soft low frequency hum.

"Wave, I need a droid to transfer over, what can we do?"

"I'm almost finished with this fabrication. Red, Blue and Green are holding the roach securely. Orange has not yet returned from his mission. Violet can give you a hand. Where should I send her?"

"Just a moment."

Pheledra nudged Boots over to a control panel where she could see the screen.

"Quad 3, sector 14. The coordinates are 145985."

"I'll get her right over," said Wave, "Is the power on and locked?"

"Sure is."

"Comin' right up."

Fourteen - Vision Delivery

Nahvar huddled in a hole. "Damn! Caught out in the open!"

The hurricane force winds tried to rip away the piece of metal roof he clutched over his body. The liquor flask inside his pocket

shattered and ran all over him. Reeking of alcohol, he shrank down inside his torn robe and prepared to die, fingering his beads.

"Mother Miraba!"

The terrible wind quit for a moment. Branches and debris rained down upon the metal above his head. It was deafening. A log fell across the hole, barely missing him. The wind resumed but not as strong. At eventime, the roar subsided and Nahvar ventured a look. Devastation greeted his eyes. Nothing. Nothing. Garden, fishtanks, stable, animals all gone. The sky was ablaze with eerie fire. His head swam like a manatee across the moon.

Then, a vision. A glowing orange diamond floating out of the sky and hovering above him. He stood up trying to see around his hands. The brightness was unbearable. His pulse raced as the creature loomed before him. He grabbed the axe at his feet.

"Turn that goddamn light off or I'll chop your ass into sparks!"

The light went down to low. Nahvar could now see two human figures in harnesses.

A voice spoke in his head. Nahvar, Nahvar, this is not a spiritual vision, nor a predator about to eat you. I am a machine, an extension of those who come from afar. These two humans need your help. I leave them in your care until we shortly return.

The light intensified and Nahvar flinched away, dropping the axe. When he looked up, the diamond shot away into the sky. Before

him lay two motionless bodies in their harnesses.

"Mother Miraba!"

He hopped out of his hole and dragged them a short distance to his cave.

Fifteen - Sudden Capture!

Violet materialized right in front of Boots who was surprised but happy to see someone familiar.

Go with Violet, Boots, Pheledra spoke in his head.

Violet gently tucked Boots under her arm and headed for His Excellency's trophy room. She was fully alert to the possibility of encountering the Kultaki and had her stun weapons ready just in case.

It was a simple matter to align the Galvernian crystal and she started back to the transfer station with Boots peering out from under her arm. Pheledra was just about to give a sigh of relief when all hell broke loose.

Violet screamed, "Shut down! Shut down! Shut do ..."

A net dropped on top of them and Kultaki seem to come from everywhere. Boots tried to run, but the net had completely covered them. Violet's power was shorted out and they were both caught and being dragged somewhere by gleeful Kultaki who seemed more than a little inebriated.

Pheledra was distraught. Less so was Boots, who, in spite of the situation, was rather enjoying being dragged along. Since Pheledra was near, it would be okay.

Pheledra began to cry, so she immediately disconnected herself from the psychotronic adjuvant in order not to upset Boots. She was sobbing and tears rolled down her cheeks but she could not, would not allow that to keep her from functioning.

"Wave, Wave, Violet and Boots have been captured."

"Oh no," said Wave, "I'll go get 'em."

"No, Wave, no. Let's think first and work out something reasonable."

Pheledra rushed down to the control deck. When Wave saw how upset she was, he put his arms around her and let her cry for a few moments, then sat her down in her commander's seat. She pulled herself together and rubbed her hands up and down the arms of the chair as if to determine what it was made of.

"Orange just returned from his mission," said Fabby. "Shall we proceed?"

"We gotta proceed!" Wave said. "Look at this, Pheledra."

He turned to a work table and picked up a three pronged copper instrument.

"What is that?" she asked.

"This will dissipate the roach back into the Kultaki ship." He handed it to her and she

began to examine it. On each of the three prongs a different symbol was inscribed: an infinity sign, a circle and an equilateral cross. She looked at it for a moment and gave it back to Wave who immediately gave it to Fabby. "I don't understand this," she said.

"Orange will go EV and be on his way to the Kultaki ship in a few microns," Fabby said, as he slid back down to the power deck with the copper instrument.

Wave continued. "Those symbolic archetypes have precise meanings within the collective consciousness of Miraba. The infinity sign is the eternal, the circle is the limited field of manifestation and the cross is a negation of inverted thought forms. When I pierce the roach with that instrument, the energy conglomerate of thought forms will try to escape the 'crossing out' and travel up through the window of manifestation in the direction of the eternal. The prong with that infinity sign will be connected to the cable with our Galvernian crystal on the end. The energy will travel down the copper cable to our crystal and jump the gap over to the crystal on board the Kultaki starship. That's why we hafta be close and align 'em properly. Orange's resonance sensor will facilitate that. After we've gotten rid of the roach, Fabby will repair the disabled tachyon tube and we'll run on five. There will be little or no loss of power but we may have to do quite a bit of balancing to get everything running smoothly."

"I don't understand this but it better work. I'm really getting burned out from all this incompetence."

"Relax, Pheledra, everything's okay. It'll work."

Sixteen - Cat Torment

On a lower deck of the Kultaki starship, Anadia strolled into the ladies retiring room.

Cobishandra was already admiring herself in the mirror and applying glitter to her face scales.

Anadia stopped beside Cobishandra and looked at herself. She was wearing her finest gown and the black party mask. She removed the mask and began to examine the scratches across her face.

"The ball of meat had thorns huh?" said Cobishandra.

"Suck your mother's tail!" A multicolored flush pulsed across Anadia's soft scales.

"No need to get pissy, Ana! I know what you've been up to."

"I have no idea what you mean." Anadia moved her face closer to the mirror.

"Yes you do. You know it's forbidden."

"What ... what's forbidden?"

"Empathic telepathy, dear."

"Situation suspensefully sizzling," said Anadia.

"Well, I won't tell Lance, if that's what you're worried about."

"If you do, I'll squeeze you till your sex organs pop out."

"Uuuuh. Sounds like fun, Ana."

Cobishandra swished out of the retiring room.

Anadia stared into the mirror. She was having bad thoughts so she spoke them out loud to try them on for size. "Forbidden! Oh yes ... forbidden! Like so many other fun things. Just because everyone is so afraid of having someone know what's really in their mind ... so ... use a machine to communicate thought. Lots of security features on a machine. Yet it's so easy to just tune in .. but ... one risks breaking a big rule which is part of our cultural ignorance."

Anadia had already broken the rule several times. She was curious to know the thoughts of those in positive polarity. She respected Boots, even though he had scratched her. What a spunky beast he was. So committed. Pheledra was committed too.

Anadia was a little afraid of Pheledra's thoughts and was apprehensive about tuning into her. But, she had picked up a few things. Strange things that bewildered her. Why would Pheledra have such a strong bond with creatures of lesser consciousness? Where was her pride? How could she travel across the Universe with Nestingwave and not have sex with him? How could she have such strong feelings about a mate who was dead and gone?

Silly, she thought, I'll find out more. Damn the rules!

"Ana darling," Cobishandra called from the hallway, "Lance is asking for you. Better come along."

"Okay, Cobi, I'll be right there."

She put on her black party mask and left the retiring room.

When Anadia entered the feasting hall, she saw several revellers passed out and more well on their way. Lance, Cobishandra and a few of their cohorts were preoccupied at one end of the hall. On one of the big tables, she saw a net tied at the top. A violet diamond lay inside. As she looked more carefully, she could see something huddled underneath an arm which protruded from the diamond. It was Boots. Several Kultaki were jabbing forks and knives at him laughing and mocking. Lance was leading the torment. Poor Boots was beside himself. He swatted at the jabs and tried to make himself small. He wanted to disappear.

Ambassador Lance saw Anadia and turned to her. "Where have you been? You're missing out on the fun. Look at this fuzzy little shit. Thought he was so damn smart. Ha. We've got him now! We're going to play with him for awhile and then drop him into the grinder feet first ... but I want Pheledra to see it."

"Wait a minute, darling," said Anadia, "if we dispose of him, Pheledra will have no reason to stick around. I'm sure she hasn't given up on her mission. She'll just plow on through. As long as we have that fuzzy ball of meat, we can negotiate."

**"Ah yes," Lance said thoughtfully,
"negotiate, delay and perhaps ... persuade."**

"Exactly."

**"Okay, I'll tell you what. Bring me a large jar.
I'm going to contact Pheledra and have a
little talk with her."**

**Anadia went out for a moment to fetch a jar.
When she returned, the Kultaki revelers had
Boots out of the net and were passing him
around.**

"What's for dinner?"

"What's for dinner?"

"A little ground meat?"

"A blood mush treat?"

"Pour in the sugar and make him sweet!"

They roared with laughter.

**Two Kultaki had taken Violet out of the net
and were disassembling her piece by piece
and throwing the parts into a container.**

**"We'll see how she ticks!" said a tall
leathery technician.**

Seventeen - The Horror

**Pheledra, Wave and Fabby were on the
lower deck watching Orange's EV progress
on the monitor when the hail from the
Kultaki ship became very insistent.**

**"We've got to answer them now," said
Pheledra.**

"Okay," said Fabby. "Orange has almost gotten into position. Let me know when the roach dissipates."

Fabby climbed up to the control deck to answer the call.

Pheledra and Wave continued to watch Orange. He looked awfully small. A tiny light moving above the Kultaki starship. The cable leading to him from the Firefly occasionally gleamed from reflected light. It looked like a thin filament in the vastness of space.

The Kultaki Ambassador was growing impatient. He hammered on the call button.

Finally, Fabby appeared on the screen. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Your Excellency. We're in a terrible mess here. We've all been swamped trying to solve these problems."

"Hello, Fabby. Not whistling today, I see. What is your situation?"

"Your Excellency, we must return your present. You see, that astral roach is about to destroy our ship. We simply don't have the high technology you possess and we cannot deal with it."

"Return my gift? Normally, I'd consider that a great insult. However, in view of the stress it's causing you, I'll be glad to take it back and deal with it. I suppose I overestimated your abilities. We have the way to pop it instantly. Just how did you plan to return it? Apparently it's totally out of your control."

"We're working on it, Your Excellency. It may take a little time though."

"Perhaps I can send some of my boys over to suck it up?"

"No, no. I hope to have it over to you in just a few microns."

"That fast huh? ... Fabby, you've managed to arouse my curiosity. How are you going to do this?"

"Well, your Excellency ..." Fabby was stalling for time. **"Wave figured it out, I think. I really don't understand the logic of it but ... uh ... I tell you what, I'll get Pheledra. She can explain it better than I can."**

"Good," said the Ambassador.

Pheledra and Wave watched Orange on the monitor. He had become entangled in the cable and was trying to free himself and hang onto it at the same time.

"Come on Orange, come on, you can do it," Wave said.

Orange had to let go of the cable, fold in his arms and backtrack slightly to straighten it out. He had just picked it up again when a blast of red and white light zipped past.

"Energy cannon!" he yelled.

The first shot narrowly missed. He was out in the open and knew the second shot wouldn't.

"Need backup! Need backup!"

Pheledra threw up her hands in frustration just as Fabby came down.

"Pheledra, talk to the Ambassador, I'll take care of Orange."

She quickly went up to the control deck. In the four microns it took, she settled upon what to say and how to say it.

"Lance, would you please cease fire so we can talk like civilized people?"

The Ambassador gave a quick nod to someone off screen.

"Pheledra, I'm glad to see you have come out of your ... catatonic state.

Civilized people? Pheledra, you're beginning to sound like us ... and you did say 'please'. What in hell is that orange gadget doing out there fiddling around?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out, Lance."

"Fair enough."

The Ambassador snapped his fingers and Cobishandra handed him an odd looking head piece with hundreds of wires merging into an overhead cable. He put it on and closed his eyes. Pheledra felt him accessing her thoughts and gave them freely.

"Oh, I see. Why, Pheledra, I had no idea that Galvernian crystals had such properties. Learn something every day. You know, we can pop that roach in a micron."

"Yes, I know, Lance but it may give you a run for your money first."

"We love good sport, Pheledra."

"I know you have Boots and Violet. I want them back now."

"Wait just a micron. We didn't invite them aboard our ship. They are spies ... up to no good and we're not about to let them go without questioning them."

Connection made! Fabby and Wave's telepathic communication resounded in Pheledra's mind.

The Ambassador also perceived it and turned quickly to his instruments which were already announcing the breach in sector 14. Then, he turned back to the monitor.

"Good show, Pheledra! Brilliantly conceived and executed!"

"I want Boots and Violet back right now," she demanded.

"Anadia, bring Boots over here," he said with a grin.

She appeared with Boots and sat down next to the Ambassador. Boots looked absolutely terrified and was struggling to get another good shot at Anadia's face, but her grip on his front and back paws was too strong. He tried to bite her but seeing Pheledra's face on the monitor, relaxed a little. Pheledra gave Boots the hint of a kiss and he quit struggling. Pheledra would make everything all right. He was sure of it.

"Where's Violet?" she asked.

The Ambassador snapped his fingers and two tough looking Kultaki brought the big

container with Violet's parts and dumped a few of them out on the table.

"Cobishandra dear, please bring me that jar." The Ambassador sounded confident, even cheerful.

She sat the jar down in front of the Ambassador and seated herself next to him on the other side. The Ambassador looked up at Pheledra and smiled. He began unscrewing the lid.

"When we finish this conversation, Pheledra, you'll have 60 microns to be headed out of this vicinity at full speed. If not ..."

The Ambassador reached under the table and produced a large machine that looked like a food processor. He turned it on and its blades whirred. He looked up at Pheledra again. Then he slowly removed Boots from Anadia's grip and dangled him over the machine.

"No, Lance, no" Pheledra frowned as she shook her head.

"If not, Pheledra ..." He passed Boots on over to Cobishandra who put him in the jar and began screwing on the lid. "If not, Pheledra, this will be his fate." The Ambassador leaped to his feet, grabbed Anadia's hand and thrust it into the machine. She screamed and screamed, then fainted as he fed it in slowly up to the elbow.

The two tough looking Kultaki caught her and dragged her away as the blood spattered Ambassador looked into the

monitor and said, "Our conversation is now at an end." The screen went blank.

"Orange reporting back in, mission completed!"

Pheledra was sick, sick unto death. Wave and Fabby rushed to her side. They had seen it too. All they could think about was comforting each other in this moment of shock and horror. Between gasps and sobs, Pheledra hit the throttle and the Firefly sped out toward the edge of Miraba's solar system.

Eighteen - Cobi and Ana

Cobishandra ran. She wasn't sure why and had no idea where she wanted to go. She found herself in the apartment, tore off her clothes and plunged into the steaming pool. It was suddenly strange. The fright made her dive to the bottom. She swam through the underwater opening and surfaced in the grotto behind the water fall. Her skin crawled with uncertain colors as if she was being scrutinized by countless critical eyes. Vivid images of Ana's horror assaulted her. She pulled herself out of the water and slid over into the surrounding vines, covering herself. She felt hopelessly trapped, as if pinioned by a spike through her heart. All she wanted was to pull it out, but couldn't.



On the power deck several levels down, in a magnetically sealed room, a technician tried frantically to raise the Ambassador.

"Your Excellency! Your Excellency! Answer please! Emergency! Emergency! Intrusion into power system! Breach of Quantum Fission plant! Your Excellency! Anyone! Please answer!"

Finally, the Ambassadors voice came on line. "What's wrong?"

"We're holed up in a control room next to the power plant. The bug has gone wild. It moved so fast we couldn't do anything. Soldiers and technicians inside the plant are all dead. We barely escaped! The thing bored right into the center of the Quantum Fission reactor and is whipping tendrils out into the whole surrounding area. It's sucking us dry! We must shut down now!"

"What? You fools will pay for this! All you had to do was cross scan it with the frequencies I gave you!

"Please, sir, we couldn't help it. It must have changed, or something. It was too fast I tell you!"

"How long before it goes critical?"

"We've got about 80 zeron. Then it will be too late to restart! We should shut down now!"

"No! Get a cross scan on one of those tendrils!"

"But, sir, it's too dangerous. I don't want to die!"

"Well, I'll bring some real men and take care of it myself!"

The Ambassador summoned 21 of his elite guard and headed for the power plant.

When Anadia came to, she was strapped to a table in the Physical Healing Center. The stump, which used to be her left forearm and hand, oozed through the bandage. She writhed and cried as the unspeakable agony returned. She was too weak to scream. Two Kultaki doctors, Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken, appeared over her and spoke alternately through sterile masks.

"His Excellency has ordered no pain relief to be given."

"We are to keep you alive only."

"This is your punishment for collaborating with the enemy."

"His Excellency has no use for one-handed girls."

"Now, you will be entertainment ... for horny soldiers."

"Those who can stomach such a freak."

They both laughed heartily and disappeared. She was alone. The pain grew unbearable and she left her body.

She was in a misty room with many other girls. Cobishandra was there. The conversations were all small talk; the little, nasty, vicious things that Kultaki girls normally talk about behind closed doors.

"I am going to touch the soul of another," Anadia said.

She could hardly believe what she heard coming out of her own mouth. Every girl in the room stopped and stared in disbelief.

"I am going to touch the soul of another," she said again.

Suddenly, they all got up and came toward her.

"No, no Ana, you mustn't do that!"

"You will destroy yourself!"

"Think of your reputation!"

"You'll be an insult to your heritage!"

"What would your mother think!"

"You'll be arrested!"

Just then, some of them noticed the stump of her left arm. They gasped and fell back.

"She's a freak!"

"A damned cripple!"

"An assault to the senses!"

"A useless piece of shit!"

"Let's have some fun with her, then kill her!"

"Yeah, we'd be doing her a favor!"

"I am going to touch the soul of another," she said as they descended upon her.

They pulled her ears, bit her, threw her into the air, stomped on her and passed her around the room, scratching her with

painted claws. Her head spun round and round.

Then, all was quiet. Cobishandra's face was in front of her.

"I've given you an injection for pain."

"Cobi, why did you tell Lance, why?"

"I didn't tell him, Ana, I swear. He must have picked it up from you while using the thought machine. I love you Ana, don't die, don't go away, don't leave me alone with him, please Ana, please."

"I'm sorry Cobi, I love you too."

"What are you going to do Ana?"
Cobishandra was crying and kissing Anadia's right hand.

"I don't know Cobi. All I know is ... I have a very strange destiny to fulfill. I don't belong here and never have. There is somewhere I do belong ... and I must find it, Cobi. I must touch the soul of another."

"No, Ana, no, it's not our way, it's not our way!"

"That's why I don't belong here, Cobi."

"Oh, Ana ..."

Cobishandra buried her face into Anadia's neck and shoulder. Then, they heard voices coming from the hall.

"I have to get out of here now," Cobishandra said, "If they catch me, it's the grinder for me too, or worse." Cobishandra embraced

her and kissed her on the lips. Choking back tears, she quickly left the room by the back door.

"Goodby love," Anadia whispered.

The two doctors entered the room. Anadia pretended to still be in pain. It would be a while before the pain killer wore off but she had to move fast because when the pain returned, she'd be immobilized once again. Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken in their sterile masks stood over her as before. She writhed and moaned and cried.

"Thinking about things?"

"Wishing you hadn't become a traitor?"

"Want to die?"

"Sorry, you must experience all of it."

"Every twinge."

"Every nuance."

They had a good laugh, turned and went out.

Even before they had gone all the way down the hall, Anadia managed to undo the straps that held her. She crouched weakly on the floor. A few microns later, she was in an unoccupied retiring room splashing water on her face with her hand. She looked at herself in the mirror above the sink. She looked drawn and pale.

Leaning upon the sink for support, she closed her eyes and called from the depths of her being, *Pheledra, Pheledra, Pheledra the outlander ... my soul longs for you.*

Nineteen - Playing Doctor

As the Firefly sped further and further away, Pheledra began to recollect her energy.

Mandhi, oh Mandhi!

Aramanda appeared amidst a blaze of photons. Wave, Fabby and the two cats were stunned in awe. They were afraid. Aramanda's eyes were two tunnels of white light which seemed to pull them into another dimension.

"Mandhi, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"First, calm down."

"Why did you rebuke me? Was it really you? What did I do wrong?"

"There is no time to discuss it now. You must transfer temporarily into fifth density, so you can go back without being seen by the Kultaki. I see a big conflict taking place on board the Kultaki starship. You must materialize back into fourth density right where you were. But, don't worry, by that time they'll be too busy to harm you. Pheledra, listen ... something rare and unique is occurring ... an anomaly. I see constructive interaction taking place between opposite polarities. Even now, someone is calling upon you. Listen! Do not allow old concepts to hinder!"

"What do you mean?"

"Perceive! Perceive beyond what you think you know! See to it!"

Even before Aramanda had completely departed into the void, Pheledra was beginning an arc to turn the Firefly around, and at the same time, boosting their energy level to the normal fifth density frequencies.

Nestingwave could look right through his hand. It had been a long time since they had been in fifth density. Experiencing it now, he recalled the bliss he had willingly left in order to serve as an evolutionary lightworker in lower densities. The whole ship swam in ambient light. Even outside space was no longer black but full of pulsating waves that were not only visible but fully tangible even beyond confined senses. With every thought, geometrical patterns of color coalesced. Speech was no longer necessary. He fully knew the mind and soul of his companions at every moment. The long periods spent in fourth density had caused him to become accustomed to strife and struggles totally alien to his normal higher state. When he attempted to use fourth density techniques of focus and control over his thoughts, the effort itself tended to lower the frequency. In fifth, every thought materialized rapidly, unless the energy of it was gently withdrawn or redirected. In the lower densities there was more opportunity for self expression and experimentation, and that held a certain appeal for him, but he quickly put those thoughts out of his mind and settled down to focus on a good outcome for the problems at hand.

Fabby enjoyed the temporary integrated blend of his machine and human parts while Inky and Ginger simply took for granted their enhanced felinity and basked in

awareness of their profound ancestral wisdom.

For Pheledra, it was effortless to know Anadia's soul and intentions completely.

Anadia, Anadia, here I am ...

Anadia, leaning on the sink in the retiring room, lost all fear and opened her soul like a flower. She saw Pheledra's intentions. She saw her own destiny. It was clear and deep like a quiet pool in the moonlight. She was a child returned home to mother. She knew what she would do and how she would do it. She walked out of the retiring room and headed back to the Physical Healing Center. There were no other Kultaki in the hall.

Most, who were not engaging the astral roach, were already sleeping off the party. She strolled right past the on-duty nurse who was hungrily watching re-runs of the destruction of Miraba. As she passed one of the rooms, she saw a white coat hanging on a hook. She went in and put it on, then rummaged through a couple of drawers until she found a sterile mask. She put that on too.

"I'm going to play doctor," she said.

The lift took her up to the deck where Boots was languishing inside the jar within the glass cage. With her one good hand and arm, she removed the heavy lid, took out the jar and saw Boots gasping for air. She remembered the scratches on her face so instead of removing Boots from the jar, she merely picked up a sharp key hanging from a hook and jabbed holes into the lid.

"This is better for the transport, little one."

Boots was about dead from lack of air and he was so grateful to feel the cool breeze in his lungs. He panted and panted until his color returned.

The down lift took them to the lower deck and into the feasting hall. All was quiet. There, still on the table, was the container with Violet's parts. She set the jar down and put the few parts that had been dumped out back into the container and looked around.

The two tough looking Kultaki were lying passed out in their own puke. Evidently, they had come back after dragging her to the Physical Healing Center and finished off a few more flagons. She kicked one of them with her foot.

"Hey!"

There was no response.

"Hey asshole!" She kicked him again.

"Huuuh?"

"Hey asshole, get up right now and get your buddy up. You're going to haul this container over to the transport station.

"Whuuu ... Why?"

"These two spies are being sent out for further study and interrogation."

"Huuuh? ... okay."

The tough looking Kultaki stumbled around trying to get himself together.

"Hurry up!" she said.

"Okay, okay."

He managed to rouse the other one who was equally disoriented.

"Grab that container and follow me," she ordered.

With the jar safely in her good arm, the sterile mask hiding her face and her stump hidden by the white coat, Anadia set off with the two half stoned Kultaki carrying the container. They were right behind her. She headed for the hub of the starship but something was not right.

"Halt!" she said. She closed her eyes for a moment.

Boots was fully alert and amazed that Anadia was walking around inside his head. She seemed to actually care about him.

"Take the lift up a level!"

"Uhhh ... why?" one of the toughies asked.

"Shut up and do as you're told!" she barked.

He grunted as they walked to the lift. They got off at the next level.

"Turn left!"

"Where are we going?"

"Shut up!"

Anadia led the way directly into His Excellency's trophy and awards room. She went right to the center of the room where

the Galvernian crystal was still over on its side at the edge of the blue velvet pillow.

Boots was thrilled to see his old blue velvet pillow once again. It reminded him of home and better times.

"Get that!" she nodded in the direction of the pillow.

The toughies set the container down and one of them scratched his head. "... the crystal?"

"No, you dunderhead! The pillow!"

"Uuuh, okay. Why do you want that pillow?" he asked, as he tossed the blue velvet pillow into the container with Violet's parts.

"I am a doctor! If I say I want a blue velvet pillow, I have good reason!"

"Yes sir."

They started out again toward the hub. Again, Anadia felt uneasy. Something was just not right.

... unfinished!

"Stop!" she barked. "Go back!"

The two toughies looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders and followed her back the way they had come.

"Halt!"

They were in front of the ladies retiring room.

"Set that container down!" She pointed to one of the toughies. "You ... come with me!"

She started into the retiring room but he hesitated and said, "uh .. but ... that's the ladies room. I can't go in there."

"What! Do you see this white coat?"

"Ye ... yes sir."

"I am a doctor! If I tell you to go into the ladies room, you go into the ladies room. Follow me!"

She angrily pushed through the door with the toughie right behind her.

"See that cushion?" She pointed to a red couch with yellow stripes.

"Huh? You mean that one?"

"That one, asshole! Bring it!"

He picked up one of the striped cushions off the couch and followed her back out into the hall tossing it into the container, shaking his head.

"Follow me!"

"Where are we going now?" the other one asked.

"Wherever I say!" she snapped.

She led them right back into His Excellency's trophy and awards room, right over to the Galvernian crystal.

"Set the container down! You! Put that red and yellow cushion on that pedestal!"

Carefully, and I mean carefully, place that crystal on top ... and be sure it's straight!"

While one of the toughies complied, the other looked puzzled.

"I don't understand. Why are you doing this?"

"Do you have a medical degree!?"

"N ... no sir."

"Well you slug, there are mysteries you will never be able to understand!"

"Yes sir ... I mean, no sir ... I mean ..."

"Follow me to the hub!"

Lance will never notice, she thought.

When they arrived at the transfer station, fortunately, there was no one else in sight.

"Put that container on the transfer pad and get out of here!"

"Should we write up a report?" one of them asked.

"Write up a report? I'm going to write both of you up for insubordination!"

"No ... please ... no," the toughie whined.

"We'll see. Now get out of here!"

The two tough looking Kultaki quickly scurried away. Anadia took a deep breath.

She was very weak from the exertion. She placed the jar containing Boots along side

the container and stumbled over to the control panel. The horrible pain was burning up her arm. She could barely see the monitor to set the controls. She almost passed out.

Anadia, Anadia ... tell me the coordinates.
Pheledra's thought was a distant echo.

Anadia summoned her last strength. She rubbed her eyes and was finally able to focus on the screen.

Quad ... 9 sector 1 ... 4 ... coordinates are ... 1 ... 459 ... 91

Thanks Anadia ... transfer in 10 microns.

She collapsed to the floor and slowly crawled toward the transfer pad. It seemed a billion matons away.

I must go ... I must go ... goodbye Cobi ... my love ...

She drug herself onto the pad next to Boots and lost consciousness.



The lights flickered, then dimmed on the Kultaki starship as it began to wobble slightly. Cobishandra was startled.

"What now?"

She had tried to go back and visit Ana but she was gone. Where could she be? She had her suspicions, so she went to check on Boots. When she saw that Boots and the jar were missing, she headed for the hub.

On the way, two soldiers rushed past her toward a down lift.

"Hurry, they desperately need reinforcements!" one said to the other. "He wants us at the power station immediately!"

"What's going on down there?" the other one asked as they went past Cobishandra.

"That bug is out of control and His Excellency wants us to pop it. Be sure your blaster is set to the correct frequencies."

"Check!"

The lights dimmed once again. Cobishandra paused and looked around. There was a lot of scurrying in the adjacent hallways. Everyone seemed to be very excited. Some were in a big rush. The starship had always been her home. This had never happened before.

She reached the hub and saw the power on in one of the transfer stations. As she drew closer, she saw Anadia, the jar with Boots and the container with Violet's parts waiting on a transfer pad.

"No!"

She rushed to the pad. Alarms were flashing on the instrument panel. Cobishandra quickly grabbed Anadia and hoisted her up. Without a look back, she went out of the transfer area carrying her across her shoulders.

On the Firefly, Pheledra was pacing. "Something's wrong! Something's gone terribly wrong. The coordinates are correct.

The power is on. No transfer! Fabby, are you getting any new information?"

"Yes, I've got it now! The Kultaki ship is wobbling. His Pestilency was a bit over confident. The astral roach is causing havoc in their power system. When they swing back to the coordinates this time, I'll be able to follow the undulations and the transfer should occur safely."

A few microns later, the jar with Boots and the container materialized aboard the Firefly. Pheledra immediately grabbed Boots out of the jar and cradled him in her arms, giving him little kisses on his forehead. Boots purred and licked her hand.

"Where's Anadia?" asked Fabby.

"I don't know," said Pheledra, "for some reason, she didn't make it. Could she have gotten scrambled in the transfer?"

"No, not a chance," said Fabby, "alarms would be going off."

Pheledra closed her eyes and concentrated for a few moments. "I can't pick up her thoughts any longer. Perhaps our shift back to fourth density ... maybe she passed out ... or ... died. I'm so sorry we lost her. She wanted to come over so bad. She was very brave. I don't know what happened. It would have been a tremendous adventure for her ... and for us. I've never heard of any entity in fourth density crossing polarities. It was an incredible anomaly. Fabby, have you ever heard of such a thing?"

"No, Pheledra. Choice for negative or positive spiritual polarity always occurs in

third density. It's the very purpose and meaning of third density existence. There is no record of such a thing ever happening before."

"Ohh," Wave sighed, "will I never ceased to be amazed!" He looked down at the container and shook his head. "Fabby, store this. We don't have time right now to reassemble Violet."

While Fabby slid the container into a locker, Pheledra retrieved the blue velvet pillow and stared at it. She placed it next to the other cats. Boots meowed and treaded on it to get it just right, then curled up and sighed. It was so good to be home.

Twenty - Open To My Soul

On the Kultaki starship, Cobishandra stepped off the down lift carrying Anadia. She found an inconspicuous spot. Looking around cautiously, she carefully laid Anadia down to catch her breath. She was on the periphery of the huge hangar area where the scout craft were berthed. Anadia was stirring a little and starting to moan, so she put her hand over her mouth.

"Shhhh, my love."

I should have picked up another pain shot, she thought, but we won't be here long anyway.

She carefully peered around a corner. Down at the other end of the hangar, several technicians and soldiers were watching a

large monitor, trying to stay abreast of the progress with the astral roach.

Cobishandra hoisted up Anadia again and quickly moved up a ramp to the platform alongside the nearest scout craft. She opened the front and put Anadia in the right seat.

She fastened the harness and climbed into the left seat. In a few microns, the scout craft was levitating and moving toward the disembarking module. As Cobishandra looked down, she could see soldiers and technicians rushing to their instruments in an attempt to keep the doors to the disembarking module from opening. They were too late. She had already set the doors in motion by remote control and was picking up speed. The scout craft went through the open doors and slowed. The doors shut behind her. Then the outer doors opened and the scout craft shot out into space.

She had no idea where to go. Behind her was the great silver triangle, the starship of her people, the only home she had ever known ... gone from her life forever.

Below them, Miraba was staggering from the near miss with the angry planetoid which had passed and was now streaking toward Miraba's sun. The magnetic encounter had caused the planetoid to break into three pieces. A cloud of debris swirled behind the broken parts. And out there somewhere above them, a tiny star ... to Cobishandra, a mysterious and frightening stranger of opposite polarity with a completely unknown perspective.

Her only thought was to escape but she couldn't bear the thought of being without Anadia. *The trauma and pain must have effected her reasoning. How could she possibly think about transferring onto Pheledra's lightship? It's insane ... or more likely, the result of muddled thinking. Perhaps we'll go to the alien base on the darkside of Tarsenay. Or, maybe even Miraba herself. The cataclysm is subsiding and there is enough technology on board this ship to survive and survive well.*

Anadia began to moan again. Cobishandra unbuckled and floated to the back of the scout craft to get medical supplies. She gave Anadia another pain shot and an intravenous bottle of fluids to bring her around. She regained consciousness.

"Where am I?"

"Ana, we've left the starship. We're in a scout craft."

"What do you plan to do, Cobi?"

"As I see it, there are two choices: the alien base on the darkside of Tarsenay, if they haven't already packed up and left ... or ... Miraba herself. The cataclysm is subsiding. We could live well there, Ana."

"Cobi, we would be alone forever."

"But we have each other."

"Yes, my love, but we have a destiny to fulfill."

"A destiny?"

"Yes."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Ana."

"Cobi, I've discovered something about myself."

"What do you mean?"

"I no longer need to fear and be ashamed of who and what I am. There is a whole new universe waiting and it's more fulfilling and exciting than anything we've ever imagined."

"Oh, Ana, you are obsessed with this."

"Perhaps, but my course is set. Like you, I can never go back but, in my case, it's not only because I'm afraid. I simply must pursue the bliss I've experienced."

"No, Ana, no! You are not thinking rationally! Pheledra and her people are not our kind. They are completely alien, a totally different perspective, an opposite polarity. They never think about what's good for themselves. They only think about being do-gooders. They don't understand that it all takes place inside our head ... my head, your head. That's what's important. Me, first and foremost. That's the only reality, the only truth."

"But, Cobi, do you love me?"

"Oh yes, Ana."

"Touch my soul, Cobi. Feel what's deep inside me. Let's find something of value that lasts forever."

"Forever? You're born, you die, you're born, you die. It goes on and on. Each time you grab a few more toys to help out the next time round."

"Do you love me?"

"You know I do, Ana. I love you more than anything."

"Then open to my soul."

Cobishandra began to cry. They kissed, intertwined and fell asleep.

Twenty One - Self Sufficient Monkey

Biltar ap Dyn looked across the fire at Nahvar. Shadows danced behind him on the walls of the cave. The old monk was well into his cups but still quite rational.

"How about a pull off that bottle?" said Biltar.

"Not on your life! You need to be drinkin' that herbal tea and lots of it."

"Nahvar, I want to thank you for your kindness. I appreciate your healing skills. I'm feeling a whole lot better."

"Don't mention it, Bil. It's not like I had much of a choice. What's one going to do when a strange light out of the sky dumps two strangers at your feet and says 'take it from here, I'll be right back?'"

"That's the weirdest thing I've ever heard. I was out cold, missed it all, but I'm sure there's more to come."

"Where are you from anyway?"

"A little way outside Urbantia 7."

"That's on the other side of the mountains! Amazing!"

Biltar looked over at the little girl who was still unconscious.

"What about her? She's been out for a long time."

Nahvar squinted his eyes and peered over at the child, who was lying next to them covered up with a blanket.

"I dunno. She's breathin' okay and her vitals aren't too bad. No apparent broken bones nor internal injuries. No head injury. Just out. Maybe it was the trauma and shock of it. If she doesn't come around soon, I'll try my special smelling concoction. I use it sparingly 'cause its so damn strong. It'll make every hair on your head stand up and say *howdy*."

"Well, maybe for the time being, we should just let her rest. I think you may be right ... shock. Who knows the horror she witnessed."

"Yeah, that's what I figure."

Nahvar got to his feet, staggering a bit, and retrieved a blanket out of the shadows. He tossed it over to Biltar.

"Here. Wrap up. It's gettin' a bit chilly. After what you've been through, I don't want you dyin' from a virus. Drink more of that tea. It'll boost your immune system."

Biltar reached for the teapot sizzling on the edge of the fire and poured another cup.

"Where is this place anyway?"

"We're in a valley next to the northern mountains of Havay."

"Nahvar, how did you come to be here in this cave?"

"Well, Bil, it's a long story ... but, let it suffice to say ... my order, The Renunciates, considers me to be a heretic"

"Why?"

"Because, after carefully studying our history, I said 'You put the prophets on pedestals of stardom to get them out of the way.' Then I pointed out to them the fallacy of focusing upon outward personalities and ignoring the inward source of all. And, what made matters worse, I began to see that the distorted religion they preached had a secret agenda behind it."

"Secret agenda? What was it?"

"Simply put ... control over the minds and souls of men."

Biltar sighed. "Same story in the doctrines and agendas of science, Nahvar."

"Well ... all that's changing now, I suspect."

"We're lucky to be alive."

"It's not all luck. You see, Bil, I've known that geological upheavals were approaching for a long time and I prepared. For example, I selected this cave because it rests on a solid plate of granite that slides and shifts on the loose clay beneath it. But, when the cataclysm happened, I got caught out in the open and had to hide in a hole. You've only seen this one dark corner of my world here. When you're up to it, I'll show you around."

"I look forward to it, Nahvar. Maybe we should try to rouse the girl. I'm getting worried about her."

"All right. Pour another cup of that tea and I'll use the smelling concoction."

Nahvar fetched a couple of pillows to put under her head and opened a little vial.

"Wow! That stuff is potent!" said Biltar.

"I told you."

Nahvar carefully passed it under her nose while Biltar cradled her head.

Suddenly, she coughed and gasped. Nahvar quickly removed the vial and recapped it.

"Mama, mama," she cried.

"There, there, you're going to be all right child," said Nahvar.

She moaned and finally opened her eyes.

"I want my mother!"

"There, there child, you're safe," said Biltar, "we'll find your mother but she's not here right now."

"Where is she? Where is she?"

"I don't know child," said Nahvar. "Do you have a papa too?"

"No, he died when I was just a baby. I need my mother!"

"We'll do the best we can, little one. Here, drink a sip of this."

Biltar pulled her up a little higher on the pillows while Nahvar held the cup to her lips. She took a couple of sips.

"Drink as much as you can, dear," Biltar said.

Biltar sat her up and she finished the tea with big slurps. Nahvar poured her another cup and she drank that too.

"Thirsty, huh?" said Nahvar. "Let's see if you can stand up."

They helped her up. She was weak but soon able to stand on her own.

"Do you need to use the potty?" Nahvar asked.

"Yeah," she said.

"Okay, it's right in the next room. Take my hand." Nahvar offered his hand and she took it.

Nahvar picked up a lantern and turned it on. Biltar followed as Nahvar led them through

an opening into another chamber of the cave.

"My retiring room is right over there behind that curtain," Nahvar said, "just pull the cord hanging in the middle so you can see. Will you be okay?"

"Yeah," she said.

She went behind the curtain and the light came on. Biltar looked as Nahvar shined his light around without saying a word.

The chamber was large. At one end, wooden cabinets lined the walls. At the other, all manner of tools and implements were well secured, each in their own clamps. To the side were several locked tool chests. In the middle stood a large multipurpose work table. It had a beautiful wood surface with stops and a big wooden vise. On the table stood a tall wood carving under construction. Shavings were everywhere. The unfinished sculpture was a beautiful woman with long hair dressed in a one piece garment. She had a wide belt around her waist. Her hands were extended out in front with palms up.

"That is beautiful work," said Biltar. "What is it?"

"Come on Biltar, you're not that old are ya? Don't you know a lovely woman when ya see one?"

"Sure do," said Biltar. "I once had my other half."

"I've got power tools too," said Nahvar, changing the subject, "but I have them

packed and stored downstairs to ride out the big quakes. Besides, I have limited fuel for my generator so I conserve power. I use it mostly for recharging batteries."

"Thank you sir," said the little girl returning from the retiring room.

"You're welcome, sweetheart," said Nahvar.
"Hey, we need to introduce ourselves."

Nahvar put his hand on Biltar's shoulder.
"This is Biltar, I call him Bil, my name is Nahvar."

"Hi, I'm Nelyani. I'm twelve. What's that funny old robe you're wearing?"

Nahvar laughed and said, "That's called a 'monks habit' dear. Don't ask me why it's called a 'habit'. I guess its because my religion teaches that its a good habit to put on clothes everyday and not run around stark naked."

"Why does it smell so funny?"

"Uh ... a little ... accident dear ... I had a small bottle in my pocket that broke."

"What's a monk?"

"Well ... a monk is a kind of ... spiritual monkey ... monkey see, monkey do."

Nelyani laughed. "You don't look like a monkey to me."

"Looks can be deceiving, child."

Biltar laughed. "You're a pretty self-sufficient monkey, Nahvar!"

Twenty Two - Total Destruction

Ambassador Lance sat at his console in Central Control. "Situation report!"

"Not good, sir," said the Kultaki Major. "The frequencies you gave us no longer work! The thing has mutated from contact with tachyon energy and we need to come up with something fast. We are in terrible trouble! The monster is out of control and finishing off the Quantum Fission Reactor. Only a dozen soldiers are left. We have set up a containment field but we can't even enter the control area now. Hundreds have been sent to the Physical Healing Center. They are overcrowded. What should we do?"

"Take all casualties and eject them into space. Go to auxiliary power and shut the reactor down completely."

A low pitched hum set everything vibrating>

"Too late, sir!"

A loud explosion ripped through the Kultaki starship. The Ambassador tumbled to the floor. A glowing tendril whipped up through the floor spraying yellow goo.

The Ambassador barely rolled out of the way in time. A calm computer voice announced again and again. "Abandon ship. Abandon ship. Abandon ship." All systems were flashing alarms. The Ambassador scrambled to his feet and ran into the corridor.

"Where is Cobishandra?" he demanded.

No one paid any attention because panic had taken over. Everyone was running toward the hangar to escape. The Ambassador was no exception. He rushed to his command carrier. More explosions shook the starship as the small craft began crowding into the disembarking module and shooting out into space.

The Ambassador's command carrier was the last to make it out before the entire hangar area ripped apart from crackling tendrils stabbing through the floor.

Those craft able to escape regrouped in space and looked back just as the huge silver triangle exploded in silence. The concussion waves buffeted the small ships. Those that were too close were crushed to bits by the pressure.

On the Firefly, Pheledra, Wave and Fabby stared in horror through the observation dome. The energies passed around them with no effect. Fabby had already activated all shields.

"Whew!" said Wave. "I sure didn't expect that to happen."

Pheledra nodded her head. "Your arrogance did you in this time, Lance!"

"Whose arrogance?" Aramanda's warbling voice reverberated in her head.

"Aramanda?"

"What!?" exclaimed Wave.

"It's nothing, Wave. I ... I thought Mandhi was here."

"I doubt it. You ignored her and acted like a fool."

Pheledra shut her eyes and held her tongue.

"I haven't completely reviewed this incident," said Fabby, "but I think there's a good chance the Ambassador is still alive ... just a micron."

Fabby went to the central console and zoomed into the sector of space where the escapees in their small craft were assembling. They were forming an energy linkup surrounding a larger craft in the middle.

"You see that big one in the center ... the round craft? If that's not the Ambassador, it's certainly someone very important. A leader. Pheledra, can you get anything telepathically?"

"I'm trying, Fabby ... no ... nothing."

"He could be blocking your thought with his machine," said Wave.

"Not likely," said Pheledra. "That technology is very limited compared to the real thing. It's probably someone else. The survivors will be leaving now, heading on out to the edge of the solar system to be picked up by another Kultaki starship."

Fabby zoomed in a little, but couldn't pick up any more detail.

"Oh, Pheledra, another thing. My scanners indicate that a single scout craft left the starship earlier ... moving toward the planet. Can you get anything on that?"

"No, Fabby. It was probably just that, a scouting assessment of Miraba's damage!"

"Why would they do that? They're leaving, now that their power base has been ruined."

"Fabby, it doesn't make any difference! Most of the Kultaki who were on that starship are dead! Now, we need to concentrate on completing the mission! Don't distract us!"

"But, Pheledra, if the Ambassador is still alive, he might want revenge."

"So what! We can handle anything! It was his roach and we gave it back. He said he could pop it easily. He miscalculated his own joke. It backfired and killed him. Karma, Fabby!"

"Yes, but after the roach filled itself with tachyon energy on the Firefly... it probably ... mutated ... became ... more than the Ambassador expected."

"Fabby's right, Pheledra," said Wave, "we might have some karmic responsibility in this."

"These are *Kultaki*, Wave ... reptilians of negative polarity! Our interaction with them is to be very limited! That's not my opinion! That is the Cosmic Directive!"

"You're right, Pheledra," said Fabby, "but, if we are somewhat responsible for what's happened to them and His Excellency wants

to exact revenge ... we have a karmic debt problem."

"A karmic debt problem!? That's ridiculous!"

Wave began to pace a little. "No, Pheledra ... it would mean that we overstepped our bounds and thereby opened up to negative energies!"

"Negative energies!? Speak for yourself, Wave. Whatever kind of energy comes my way I will purify it and direct it to empower this mission!"

"Perhaps we need to check with Aramanda," said Fabby.

"Check with Aramanda? Aramanda is not a consultant! She is my spiritual mentor. She exists in a world far above our understanding! Listen, Aramanda gave me this mission! We've solved all the problems and now we need to get on with it! Do not create additional complications that don't exist in the first place."

"Sorry, Pheledra," said Fabby.

"I just had to communicate how I feel." Wave was unhappy.

"This is way beyond our personal feelings, Wave. We need to drop our personal feelings for the sake of this mission. It will require total coordination."

Fabby agreed. "You're right, Pheledra."

Wave shook his head and didn't say anything.

"Okay," she said, "let's get down to business."

Fabby sighed. "Before we do, let's have a nice dinner together and calm down, could we?"

Pheledra nodded but didn't say anything.

Twenty Three - Alone In Space

Cobishandra and Anadia awoke suddenly. It wasn't the pressure wave from the exploding starship. They were too far away for that. It was an inner startling flash. Like a terrific scream in their heads.

"What's happened?" Anadia sat up.

"I don't know, Ana, but I felt it too."

"Check the instruments."

Cobishandra put on her headpiece and opened all channels for scan. "I'm getting nothing from base, Ana ... absolutely nothing!"

"Nothing at all? That can mean only one thing Cobi ... our former home is gone."

"Gone? You mean gone away?"

"I know it seems impossible."

"Wait Ana, I'm getting something over the secured channel."

Cobishandra carefully turned some dials. "I'm getting something ... wait ... oh!"

"What is it?"

"The starship has blown up! Survivors are regrouping! Lance is still alive!"

"Can you pick up any of their transmissions?"

"I'll try. Quick, put on a headpiece."

Anadia groaned and fumbled with the headpiece. It wasn't easy to get it on with one hand.

"I'll get you another pain shot in a micron," said Cobi.

"I need one badly."

"Okay, you listen while I get it." Cobishandra quickly took off her headpiece and floated back behind the seats.

"Here, love." She gave Ana the pain shot and reseated herself.

"They are all terrified," Ana said. "No one expected it. The majority want to hail another starship and get out of there but Lance is furious and wants justice. All the small craft have formed an energy linkup around Lance's ship. They have no independent movement. The ships are magnetically bound together. Lance is still calling all the shots. Thousands died, Cobi! Only a few hundred of our people are left!"

"Let's get down to Miraba," said Cobi. "We'll be invisible to the inhabitants. Lance probably thinks we're both dead. Anyhow, he's more interested in Pheledra right now.

We'll find a nice spot that's not too torn up and hunker down."

"He can scan us just like we're scanning him."

"Yes, if he tries."

"He will eventually. Cobi ... I want to contact Pheledra."

"No Ana, please. She frightens me even more than Lance. Ana, please try to forget about Pheledra."

"I can't, Cobi. She may be the only hope. Not only my hope, but yours too."

"She hates us, Ana. We are completely alien to her."

"Cobi, we've been together our whole lives. We were nest mates. Yet ... our souls never touched until we were together in this situation. Cobi ... what did you feel when you touched my soul?"

"I love you Ana. Your soul and mine are truly one. We can be that way because we are the same kind. We are the same kind!"

"I'm learning something, Cobi. Even opposite polarities are at root the same. Polarity is not a matter of kind ... it's a matter of choice."

"This scares me, Ana."

"I know. It scares me too but when I touched Pheledra, I found her to be like you ... like me. I must find out more."

"What do you want to do, Ana?"

"I want to telepath with her."

"I can't stop you but please Ana ... be careful ... and please let me in on what's happening."

"I love you Cobishandra. And I no longer have any secrets."

"When will you contact her?"

"Right now. I'll go to the back of the ship for awhile."

"All right. In the meantime, I'll move us behind Avengarone so we're not out in the open."

"Peace, my love."

Anadia floated to the back of the scout craft while it accelerated toward Miraba's large moon, Avengarone. Sometime later, Anadia returned. Cobishandra was anxious.

"Did you reach her?"

"No, Cobi. For some reason I can't just now. She seems to be tuned in on something else, probably her mission."

"What should we do?"

"Get a fix on the Firefly and also on Lance. Then, set down on Avengarone somewhere between mountain ranges and monitor the situation. That will give us some protection for the time being. We can watch and wait out there for awhile and just take it as it comes."

Cobishandra reached over and caressed Ana's shoulder.

"That sounds good and we won't be making any hasty decisions."

Their eyes met.

Twenty Four - New Plans

Wave refused to eat anything but fixed a large pitcher of fruit nectar, poured three glasses and sat down at the small round table while Pheledra and Fabby picked at the lentils and rice Green had spun up in the replicator. No one felt like eating. Finally they just pushed the food aside.

"No one hungry, I guess," Green said, taking away the plates and disappearing down through the hatch.

"Before we discuss anything, let's take thirty zeron," said Pheledra.

Wave and Fabby felt very uneasy but were soon able to relax and enter the transcendental field of consciousness. Pheledra found it difficult to go very deep. She couldn't release the torrent of thoughts. *Biltar ... I am coming ... we will meet face to face. For you it will be an incredible life changing experience ... for me ... the first really important mission ... on my own.*

She touched Biltar's soul and allowed herself to bask in its warmth. Her thoughts were disturbing. She began to imagine herself married to him on some far away world, living in perfect bliss with many children, then caught herself. *I must not*

empathize so much! This mission is not for my fantasies! It is for Miraba and its evolution. It is for Miraba and its transformation. It is for Miraba and its ascension. I would gladly die before losing that focus.

She thought she heard the far off warble of Mandhi's voice saying "See to it!" but then realized it was only a trick of her own mind.

Wave and Fabby returned to normal consciousness and saw that Pheledra was struggling. They said nothing and just waited. Finally, she took a deep breath and opened her eyes.

"Okay, let's talk."

The two men briefly glanced at each other.

**"Pheledra, how do you wish to proceed?"
Fabby asked.**

**"Here's what I have in mind", she replied.
"We will take the Firefly further down into the atmosphere of Miraba. I will take Orange and Red and go down to the surface in the recon saucer. On the way, we will fully materialize into third density. This is going to be especially difficult because we were recently floating around in fifth. At times, third density on Miraba may be analogous to swimming in a sewer wearing a suit of armour. The contact with Biltar and some others will be wonderful, but the work will be stressful ... and dangerous."**

"Why do you have to fully materialize into third density?" asked Fabby.

"We are under directive to let Mirabans see our ships, whenever safe to do so. Also, we will physically pick up Biltar in order to get the energy devices and distribute them. We owe it to him. He invented the PSG The time has come for all of them to know beyond a doubt they are not alone in the universe. The contacts, and even the sightings, will inspire those who wish to evolve and give them hope."

"I know you're right," said Fabby, "but I'll bet some of them will still be afraid."

Pheledra nodded. "The process of enlightenment takes time ... and work."

Wave refilled his glass. "Has it been decided where to take the devices? There are only fifty PSGs to be distributed, as I understand it."

"Yes," replied Pheledra, "Biltar's plan before the cataclysm was to deliver more PSGs to the Native Preserves and to his trusted colleagues across Shaluma where secret research and development could take place."

"I know those plans have changed now," said Wave.

Pheledra nodded. "The high celestial intelligences from the sub-plane of Athersata, represented to me by Aramanda, have carefully discerned the best places for the devices to be distributed. Now, they will be placed throughout the entire planet. There are five locations on Miraba from which the PSGs can be eventually proliferated: Shanveh, Mavira, Quepar, Tacu and Bectalyne. We will deliver ten per place."

This is only a tiny start, a seed planted. However, it is part of a plan that has been scrutinized from every angle. The high celestial intelligences have been in limited telepathic contact with key people in those areas for some time."

"So now, the PSGs will be all across the planet." said Fabby.

"Thanks to Biltar, other countries have already built a few simple devices from his plans sent out over the old computer network. And, Shaluma has thirty PSGs already being put to use secretly on four Native Preserves. The present usage there is limited to running old fashioned battery driven equipment. They have no way to do reasearch and development upon the PSG. However, the electical energy from those thirty devices will make the difference between those indigenous people staying alive and perishing in the sudden deprivation of the aftertime. Their ancient wisdom concerning oneness with the flow of nature is remembered by many of their elders and will now become a very important part of reparation for the whole planet. Biltar, in his good foresight, gave his devices to them first."

"And the fifty which remain?" Wave asked.

Pheledra pulled out a disc from under the console and held it up. "I have an updated program that will supply you with the exact details about the full plan of which this mission is only a tiny part ... but a very important part. You two put on the head pieces and I'll download it through the Psychotronic Adjuvant."

"All right," said Wave.

He and Fabby put on headpieces as Pheledra slipped in the disc and began the download. The information provided details about the five centers where the PSGs were to be delivered. They were locations well dispersed across planet Miraba and were now the seeds for the new world.

Nestingwave found it difficult to be objective. The potential for what could happen in Miraba's new age intrigued him. He imagined what it would be like to be a personal part of this wonderful unfolding. Of course, he said nothing and kept these thoughts to himself.

When the download finished, they removed the headpieces.

Fabby smiled a little. "This is really something. I can't say that I'm completely objective. I do feel some human excitement. It is wonderful and well planned. It makes me so happy to be part of this mission and it once again demonstrates the great value of cooperation and teamwork."

"Very true," said Pheledra. "As we know, one mind plus another mind equals considerably more than two minds. In the coordination itself, the Universal Matrix is tapped and lends a boosting element to evolutionary thought."

"This information is amazing and well thought out," said Wave. "Miraba will now become a global village. This has to be the beginning of cosmic citizenship."

"Yes," said Pheledra, "the nations of Miraba are no longer considered to exist."

"That's right," said Fabby, "the rest of the universe now considers them to be political entities which were destroyed by the cataclysm for ever."

"Of course," said Pheledra, "there are always holdouts who cling to the past and try to reestablish the old way. They are in their death throes but they can still present a big hindrance to the mission."

"However," said Fabby, "it's good to know that more capabilities still exist on Miraba than anyone would suspect."

Wave got up to stretch his back. "Pheledra, this download mentioned the Frazha but didn't go into much detail. Can you tell us a little more?"

"Yes," said Pheledra. "Our brothers, the Frazha, are aiding the lightworkers as well as introducing the new genetic hybrids throughout the planet. This genetic engineering program has been going on for at least three hundred annoms. It is fully approved by the Anadine Galactic Council. The hybrids will greatly bolster the overall intelligence of Miraba and at the same time give the souls of the Frazha a home world upon which to incarnate after millenia of being confined to their space ships. Although they have now evolved into a less individuated hive mentality, they relate strongly to the Mirabans because their early evolution carried them on a smiliar path. However, they foolishly destroyed their home worlds and have spent ages

contemplating, considering and mourning their foolish loss."

"I guess the time has come for them to set foot on solid ground," said Fabby.

"Yes, they see in Miraba an opportunity to share their experience and the wisdom they have learned from it. The new hybrid bodies will also provide upgraded physical vehicles for Mirabans as their souls reincarnate. Pure blooded Mirabans will still be born on Miraba and pure blooded Frazha will still incarnate on their space ships but the two races are blending. Traits which tend toward less individuation and more collectivism, such as the hive mentality, will be eradicated in the hybrids. Strong traits of the Frazha, such as their incredible intellects, will be continued. The Miraban emotions and creativity will be enhanced. The hybrids will look, act and think more like we do. This genetic engineering program was approved by the Anadine Galactic Council who foresaw a positive evolutionary outcome for the planet during its ascension and beyond. Of course, they also foresaw the cataclysm. They considered it to be just another natural event. Also, the Frazha are experts at weather modification and are willing to help us by cleaning out areas that may be toxic. Their special mission is to clean up Miraba's atmosphere."

"Thanks for the information," said Wave. "If the Council and the other high intelligences knew of the coming cataclysm, why didn't they inform us?"

"I don't know," said Pheledra, "perhaps it was more advantageous for the sake of this mission for us to discover it for ourselves,

much like the Mirabans. Perhaps that helps us to empathize."

"Yes," said Fabby, "like most of the Mirabans, the knowledge of it impacted us suddenly. We experienced a little bit of the shock. Although it was nothing like what they experienced, it definitely affected our whole approach. Probably for the better."

"To my way of thinking," Wave said, "we should have been informed from the outset. The Ambassador knew, the Frahza knew, many of the locals knew ... apparently, Biltar knew or suspected. I really don't see why we were kept in the dark. Pheledra, why didn't you pick it up from Biltar in your telepathy with him?"

"Biltar is pretty skeptical. Although his friends kept talking about it, apparently he didn't fully believe it was an approaching planetoid until the last moment. Although, like all contactees, he sensed geological changes approaching, the cause for those changes was officially kept from the public and other long term causes such as activity in the sun, global warming, air pollution and ocean currents were constantly propagandized by the government of Shaluma to hide the facts from the public."

"It's just a little disturbing to me that we were left out until the last moment," said Wave.

"It comes back to a matter of trust in the high celestial intelligences," said Fabby.

"That's right," Pheledra agreed, "although their decisions are not always understood

by us, they have proven to produce the best outcome,"

"Okay," said Wave. "I guess we are considered outsiders."

"Outsiders who need to experience the inside story for themselves," said Pheledra.

While this conversation was going on, Inky and Ginger were curled up together on their pillows, as usual, and were very content. They felt considerable relief now that Boots was back and things seemed to have returned to normal. Boots, however, was already bored. He flicked his tail and twitched an ear as he watched over these human proceedings. He sensed great and wonderful things ahead. He would not be left out. He just couldn't bear the thought of separation, having just found Pheledra again after such a life-threatening trauma. He hopped down and went right over to rub her leg and get her attention.

Pheledra picked him up and looked him right in the face. "Oh Boots, I know what you want. The answer is no... no, no, no."

Boots laid back his ears, hissed and let out several loud mournful meows.

"Uhh ...," sighed Pheledra as she cuddled him on her shoulder. "Okay Boots ... you can come along in the recon saucer but you'd better stay out of trouble .. and I mean ..."

She held him up again and looked him in the face. "Just be extra cute and cuddlesome for the little girl, okay?"

Boots meowed happily as she set him down. He proceeded to groom himself for what lay ahead.

"Wave, it will be up to you and Fabby to monitor me and back me up if I need it. You are not under any circumstances to materialize into third density. The Firefly must remain in fourth density at all times. Is that understood?"

"Why?" asked Wave.

"Because the National Security State of Shaluma, and a few other countries on Miraba, have particle beam weapons that could destroy the Firefly in 3D. They are full of fear and try to shoot down anything unusual coming in or out of the atmosphere. Some of those weapons may still be functional, even after the cataclysm. They could destroy the Firefly in 4D also but the advantage is that in 4D you will be virtually impossible to detect."

Wave shook his head. "Pheledra, why do you have to go and do this personally? Why not send the droids? They are perfectly capable of handling it. In fact, they can probably do it better than any of us."

"Wave, you just don't understand. Biltar has fears. He is mystified and somewhat confused by the experiences he's already had. He has spent his whole life trying to put it all together. If we send machines to do this job, it may frighten him. It might confuse him. He might very well think we don't care enough about Miraba to get personally involved. This is not just about distributing energy devices. It's about contact ... contact, Wave. Contact with other

beings, just like himself, who travel to the stars. It is the greatest revelation and fellowship any Miraban could experience. It is their dream of the ages. Wave, don't you see? I must do this. I must."

"Let me come with you, Pheledra," said Wave. "Fabby can monitor us and protect the Firefly."

"No, Wave, this is my passion. I live only for this and would gladly die for it. Aramanda put it into my hands ... I will do it."

"Isn't this too personal?" Doubt was written all over Wave's face. "Is there self interest involved?"

"How dare you! How dare you!" Pheledra choked up and turned away.

Fabby looked at Wave.

Wave sighed.

Twenty Five - Prepare For Contact

In a valley next to the northern mountains of Havay the night wore on. The purple sky was a thick curtain of eerie illumination. Smoke from erupting volcanos and burning cities shrouded Miraba. Electrical discharges crackled in the atmosphere, flashing across the twisted landscape. Distant thunder announced the coming of black rain. Mother Miraba began to wash her wounds.

In the cave, Biltar, Nahvar and Nelyani slept on, besieged by strange visions of the night.

Biltar ap Dyn, I am coming for you! A familiar voice resounded in his head amidst unspeakable turmoil. A woman floating above the ground, the wind blowing her hair in wild configurations blended with lightning. Behind her a metallic saucer, its skin alive with throbbing rainbows thicker than light. Biltar looked down and saw that he was holding someone's hand. He glanced over and saw Sinya's beautiful face, her eyes fixed upon the specter looming before them. He gasped, turned his head again and saw their children held tightly against his breast. He shouted with exhilaration as a beam shot out from beneath the saucer and they corkscrewed into the white void.

"Mother Miraba!" Nahvar dropped the boot he was trying to put on and jumped up.

"That was some wail! Are you okay?"

"I'm okay ... I'm okay ... a dream ..."

"Tell me about it. Did it perchance have something to do with an electric space-alien and a flying disc?" Nahvar sat back down to finish putting on his boot. He had changed into coveralls. Nelyani was busily attending to a pot of food over the fire.

"How did you know?" Biltar sat on the edge of his cot and reached for his shoes.

"Well ... Nelyani and I had the same dream, friend."

"Did you see my family?"

"No, how about you Nel?"

"No. I saw a scary woman. She spoke in my head and told me things then I went zooming up into a space ship. That's all I remember .. oh ... and a kitty ... I remember a kitty."

"Well," said Nahvar, "I don't remember no kitty but I do remember a bizzar looking female and I remember that incredible space ship ... facinating. Oh ... and I remember being pulled up by a beam of light."

Nahvar stood up and went over to the fire to pour himself some tea. "Bil ... 'they' (whoever they are) are on their way. You'd better get ready."

"Yeah? How the hell do I do that?"

"I dunno. I guess its mostly psychological preparation." The three sat down together around the fire to eat their beans and rice. Nahvar scratched his head and looked at Nelyani. "Nel, that lady said things to you ... what things?"

"Oh, they were neat things. At first I was really scared, but after I saw the kitty and the lady talked to me, I felt a lot better. This little kitty has four white paws. She let me hold him and pet him."

"What did she say, Nel?" Biltar asked.

"She lives in another dimension ... fourth I think ... and ... she's going to enter our dimension to help Biltar. She says not to be afraid and just wait. Oh, and she said 'don't go outside'. She said the atmosphere needs to stabilize. It's raining and the dirty air makes the rain dangerous."

Nahvar picked up a lantern and went over to a wall. He could see streams of black ink running down and dripping onto the floor. "Yep. Probably acidic as hell and no tellin' what else."

"I don't think we'll have to wait long," said Biltar.

"You like kitties eh?" Nahvar said to Nelyani.

"Yeah. I had one, but it ran away."

"Well, I tell you what. I've got something you might like."

"What?"

Nahvar went over to a corner and dug through a sack.

"This here. It's a wonderful book about cats. It has some great pictures.

"Would you like to look at it?"

Nelyani nodded enthusiastically. Nahvar handed her the book and sat down by the fire.

"So you have a family, Bil?"

"Not any more, Nahvar. They're all gone now. My daughter Jyla and my son Vali died five years ago. Three years ago, I lost my wife Sinya"

"Oh ... sorry."

"I was working on a defense project and we were all poisoned. I don't have long myself but right now, for some strange reason, I feel better than I have in a long time."

"Well, I've had a few tragic losses in my life too but one has to remember the good things, the happy times, those profound moments."

"Oh yes, I have many of those."

"How did you and Sinya meet?"

Biltar laughed a little. "I was a real fluter, liked to read books, write poetry and discuss philosophy. No one liked me in school. I joined this astronomy club. It turned out there were only five members ... me and four girls."

"Oh, my stars and garters!"

"Yep, it was hell."

"I'll bet."

"Those girls mocked, teased and ridiculed me unmercifully. Then, I noticed that one of them would not participate with the others."

"Ahh ... Sinya."

"Right. She stood up for me, Nahvar. She told them I was interesting and very smart. Then she made a big mistake."

"What was that?"

"She confided in one of them that she thought I was ... 'cute'"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. I'll bet things really went downhill from there!"

"Well, in one sense, but Sinya became even more defensive of me and finally I asked her to come over to my parents house for

dinner? Biltar choked up a little. "We became wonderful friends, Nahvar ... and later ... lovers ... then husband and wife with the blessings of both sets of parents."

"She sounds like a rare and wonderful woman, Bil."

"Yes. She gave me inspiration and strength, taught me how to stand my ground ... gave me a heart to love others in a way I never knew before."

"Sorry for your pain my friend. All things change ... and in the long run ... I still believe ... love prevails."

Biltar nodded but could not speak.

Twenty Six - Dhati Knows Best

"Traitor!" he screamed as he pulled the lever, ejecting the whining General into space.

Ambassador Treprestas Blastahdus Shaleedas Felance was livid, his piercing red eyes wide with rage.

"Traitor!" he screamed again as he pulled a second lever which sent a begging Major on his way to rupturing death.

Again and again he pulled the levers growing more and more agitated.

Beside him stood his new concubine, Ranilla. Every time he pulled a lever, she pulled an imaginary one with her clenched fist above her head.

"Lance dear?"

"What!?"

"Take a break. You're straining your heart."

"One more!"

The Ambassador gripped the lever and pulled hard. "Thank you!" he shouted.

"Oh!" Ranilla gasped, "that was Eratia! She was my best friend! Why? Why did you kill her? She was totally innocent!"

The Ambassador turned with a wry smile. "Yes, and a good piece too, but you see, Ranilla, I've learned my lesson. This time our other party partner will be someone whom you disdain - and - someone who despises you from the start."

Suddenly, the Ambassador's eyes grew wide with terror. Eyes bulging, his face distorted into a horrified grimace. Ranilla gasped, thinking he was having a heart attack. She then reeled in surprise as the Ambassador dissolved before her eyes and disappeared.



Far above the Ambassador's command carrier, a misty bubble of permutating geometry floated in space. Inside, the Ambassador found himself in a bright room full of strange objects.

**"Treprestas, Treprestas, find me quickly!"
The deep voice seemed to come from everywhere.**

The Ambassador frantically grabbed the strange objects one after the other, shaking them vigorously and tossing them aside. There were hundreds of items including a carved wooden cockroach, a shrunken alien head with pins through the eyes, a glass cow's tongue, a wax figure of himself, a plastic Kultaki baby-doll nailed to a plank, a bloody dagger, a thick hangman's noose, a sandal with steel cleats, a polished green stone, a metal salamander and a brick of happy powder that turned to dust in his hands. "Where are you!?" he cried.

"Find me quickly Treprestas ... find me quickly!" The voice was almost giddy with delight.

Feverish and exhausted, the Ambassador reclined to the floor scooting about from object to object, shaking them and throwing them aside.

"No, no Treprestas. Use your head for something besides a crown hanger!"

On hands and knees the Ambassador crawled weakly towards a corner of the room.

He saw a small mirror on the floor and picked it up by the handle.

Struggling to his feet, he shook it a little and gazed directly into it. He gasped and screamed, flinging it away. It crashed to the floor, shattering into a thousand shards. Out popped a figure dressed in a white robe.

"Dhati!" he cried. Before him stood the ancient wizened Kultaki with long eyelashes.

"Oh Treprestas, this little game has been so exciting for me!"

"No, no ... I like women!"

"You like women?" The figure instantly changed into a beautiful Kultaki girl that looked exactly like Anadia. She ripped off her white robe and leapt upon him, clinging to him like a leach. The girl then morphed back into the ancient wizened figure and brutally violated him. It was impossible to get away and went on and on for a hellish eternity.

When it was over, it seemed as if a corpse, like the hull of a dead insect, still adhered to him. He peeled off the remains with his trembling clawed fingers.

"That was so good, Treprestas," the ancient figure spoke from across the room and tossed him a white robe, "Cover your indecency and let us go together into the palace."

The wall swung open like a door. Dhati stepped on through and beckoned the Ambassador who reluctantly followed. He could barely walk and he was still trembling. Dhati escorted him into a lavish hall with fountains and birds. He pointed at a three legged stool.

"Sit."

With painful difficulty, Lance sat down on the stool as Dhati took three steps up onto a platform and settled down into a plush wrap around easy chair.

"Would you like a snort of happy-powder to soothe you?"

The Ambassador nodded. He was still shaking badly. Dhati smiled a crooked smile while stroking his long eyelashes and blinked his eyes. A handsome young Kultaki boy brought a dish. With a tiny silver spoon he served Dhati and then the Ambassador, who began to calm down after two snorts.

"Come back over here," Dhati said to the boy. He grabbed the dish from the boy, buried his nose in the remaining happy powder and sucked it up like a vacuum cleaner. He lurched back in his chair dropping the dish which rolled down the steps, exhaled with a long wheeze, then cleared his throat. His speech was slurred. "Treprestas ... Treprestas darling ... you've been such a bad boy... what shall I do with you? A quantum fission starship? ... the pride of our fleet? ... gone ... gone forever. Do you have any idea how much one of those things costs? Would you like for me to set up an installment plan, or do you wish to pay me back all at once?"

"Your Excellency, I ..."

"Oh, just call me 'Dhati' now that I've gotten to know you."

"Dhati, I ... I was being careful ... if my men had just done what I told them to ..."

"Oh Treprestas, is that why you murdered so many of them?"

"They were insubordinate, sir ..."

"Just call me 'Dhati'."

"They were insubordinate, Dhati ... traitors ..."

"Traitors?"

"They ... they ... I gave them the frequencies to correct the problem. They were cowards!"

"Cowards?"

"Yes."

"Then ... *they* are responsible for the loss of the starship. Is that right?"

"Yes, yes ... *they* are responsible.

Dhati stared at him. Finally, he slowly began to shake his head. "No ... no Treprestas. You see ... that creation of yours came into contact with tachyon energy ... and was changed. Your frequencies were inadequate. You should have been more careful not to allow that thing back on board your ship. You are incompetent, Treprestas. Too busy partying. Too busy having fun."

"No ... it was ... it was ... that Pheledra ..."

"Treprestas darling, you were so delightful a moment ago. I'm going to give you a chance to redeem yourself."

"Oh, thank you Dhati, thank you ... what can I do?"

"What? ... well that's up to you darling. You'll come up with something. Oh ... would it be all right if my little boy played a game with you before you go?"

"Please ... please ..."

"Is that a 'yes'?"

"No, please ... please Dhati ... no!"

"Oh, okay. Too much vigorous playful activity might weaken a strong man like you and ... after all ... you'll need all your strength now ... won't you?"

"I'll do what I can, Dhati. I'll do what I can."

"Do what you can and can what you can't. I have confidence in you, darling!"

Twenty Seven - Healing and Peace

Biltar, Nahvar and Nelyani heard the voice in their heads. They stood up.

The time has come for us to meet. Do not be afraid. I am flesh and blood like you. We are the same. You are now entering a new era where you will communicate telepathically. It is a natural part of your planetary evolution; however, for now, we will speak vocally in your language. At this moment, my craft hovers above your cave. I shall beam myself into your midst. Do not be alarmed. We will simply sit down together and talk. I'm sure you have many questions. In time, all of them will be answered. I am Pheledra.

A bright light illuminated every corner of the cave. When it went out, Pheledra stood before them.

"Hello ... I'm Pheledra."

They were speechless. Their eyes were wide. Before them stood the most beautiful woman they'd ever seen. She was smiling softly and her lovely brown hair flowed over her shoulders. She wore a one piece violet flight suit.

Nahvar was the first to speak. "We've been waiting for you."

"What's a 'new arrow'?" asked Nelyani.

They all laughed as the tension was broken. Pheledra smiled and said, "a new era ... not 'arrow' as in 'bow and arrow'. It is a new age for you and your world."

"Oh ... thank you." said Nelyani.

Some experiences are beyond words. The three just stared in awe for a little while.

Pheledra was not at all uncomfortable. She fully understood and just waited. She wanted to give them a chance to assimilate what was happening. Finally, Biltar spoke.

"Well, shall we sit by the fire?"

"Sounds like a very good idea," said Pheledra.

They all sat down together.

"Are you ... hungry?" asked Nahvar, "do you ... eat?"

"Yes," said Pheledra, "but for now, a cup of herb tea will be fine."

Nelyani poured the tea.

"Where are you from?" asked Biltar.

"The name of my planet of origin is unimportant. Suffice it to say that it is a world very much like Miraba. Ages ago, it went through what you are now experiencing and I am here to encourage all of you. And ... I am here to help you, Biltar, get your energy devices distributed. You do not yet fully understand what you have discovered. You have found the way to tap into the very Matrix of Creation. It will lead to revolutionary technologies that will repair this world quickly and turn it into a garden beyond anything you have ever dreamed. Your world is in the process of ascending into a higher physical and spiritual density. The planet Miraba will no longer be controlled by outside forces. You will meet celestial peoples and travel to the stars."

Biltar shut his eyes. Tears streamed down his face. He could not speak.

"I know ... I know," said Pheledra, "I know what's in the fullness of your heart ... the joy and fulfillment these words bring. That's why I'm here."

Everyone was so moved they could only sit in silence for a few moments.

"Can you help Nelyani find her mother?" Nahvar asked.

Nelyani spoke up before Pheledra could answer. "She's already gone Nahvar, I saw her in a dream. She's okay. I'm very sad ... but I know I'll meet her again, even though it will be a very long time from now."

"Precious Nel," said Pheledra, "like Biltar and Nahvar, you are a very advanced soul who incarnated here for this time of

transformation. You already function in telepathy, even more than Biltar and Nahvar. In the days to come, you will perfect that skill and become a teacher of others. Yes, Nel, your mother is no longer in her physical body and you will meet her again. That is certain."

For a long time Biltar, Nahvar and Nelyani questioned Pheledra about everything from the variety of life in the universe to whether or not celestial peoples needed to pee. Pheledra answered every question as best she could and they were fascinated by her answers. In the course of the conversation, she told them about Nestingwave and Fabby and Boots and their recent encounter with the Kultaki. They sat in wonderment, then made comments and asked more questions. Pheledra was learning from them also. Their perspective was deepening her understanding and appreciation for the dignity and creativity of all beings. The flame of her love was fanned by each question and each description of their fears, hopes and dreams. She found it difficult not to look too much at Biltar who simply could not take his eyes off her. Finally, it seemed as if they were full to the brim and the talk wound down.

"It is always wonderful to meet new friends with whom we form a bond," Pheledra said, "none of us will ever be the same after today. This is truly a life-changing experience for me as well as for you. I don't know how long we will all be together but from this moment, all of you will be in my heart forevermore."

"And in my heart too," said Biltar.

Nahvar nodded. "This moment is the greatest moment of our lives."

Nelyani could hardly contain herself. "I'm so excited. I feel like I'm meeting an older sister, or cousin for the first time."

Pheledra smiled, "in fact, you are, Nel. Indeed, we are relatives. Our ancient ancestors from the constellation of Lyra in the Milky Way galaxy traveled out into the far reaches of space and spread the seeds of life wherever they went. It is called 'panspermia' and there are Universal Laws which govern it. Often, those brave pioneers enhanced life through genetic combinations. Human life, even through its many variations, is pretty much the same throughout the universe. Basically, the same blood flows in my veins and yours."

"I knew it. I just ... knew it," said Biltar.

Nahvar closed his eyes tightly and nodded.

"When do I get to see Boots again?" asked Nelyani.

"Very soon, Nel. Perhaps before all this is over, you'll get to meet all the members of my crew."

"I sure hope so," said Nelyani.

"Okay, friends, what is the next step? I'm going to telepathically contact Wave and Fabby aboard the Firefly and see if they have anything for me. It will only take a few moments, but I must move my consciousness away from you briefly, okay?"

"Sure," said Biltar.

"Okay," said Nahvar and Nel.

Pheledra closed her eyes and sought the mental frequencies of her crew.

When she opened her eyes again, the Mirabans were still looking at her with awed expressions.

"Well ... shall we all go together to distribute the energy devices?"

"Oh yes, yes!" Nelyani clapped her hands.

"You want me too?" Nahvar asked.

"Yes, Nahvar, I want you. Besides, no one can stay here in the cave for awhile. The black rain is highly toxic and it's already beginning to seep in. Also, Wave informs me that a cloud of radiation is coming. One of the fission power plants nearby experienced a meltdown. We all have to leave. We have plenty of time, but I suggest we beam aboard my recon saucer now. There are comfortable fold-back seats, so I want you all to get some sleep if you can. It'll be alright. My droids, Red and Orange, are monitoring the radiation cloud and everything else. I'd like to get a little rest myself, then we'll all talk about what to do next. This is the method we use, an egalitarian fellowship rather than a militaristic chain of command. Everyone's input is considered valuable. Are you ready?"

Everyone was already on their feet.

"I need to get something first," said Nahvar, "It'll be just a moment while I grab my med bag out of the other room. Something tells me I'll be needin' it."

"Okay, Nahvar," said Pheledra, "we'll wait for you."

Nahvar went into the back room of the cave and returned with a large bag slung over his shoulder. "I've been preparin' for something. Didn't know what it was 'til now."

"We will hold hands in a circle for comfort and support," said Pheledra. "Then, I will telepathically ask Orange to beam us up, okay?"

They formed a tight circle and held hands. Nelyani squeezed Pheledra's left hand, Biltar held her right and Nahvar completed the circle. Pheledra closed her eyes and everyone else did too, in nervous anticipation. A light came.

When they opened their eyes, they were standing on the transfer pad inside the recon saucer looking down through the transparent floor at the ruined world beneath their feet.

Nahvar let out a great sob. "Healing and peace be upon you ... Mother Miraba."

D O W N S T E P



Part II

Twenty Eight - Internal Conflict

Far above, in the upper atmosphere, Nestingwave and Fabby sat at the main console. All monitors and scanners were alive with activity. The two went from one piece of equipment to the next communicating with the nerve center of the Firefly. Sometimes, Fabby would pass his fingers over an interactive screen. More often, he would switch channels on the monitors and type commands. Nestingwave wore a headpiece to interact periodically through the Psychotronic Adjuvant. He wanted to stay updated on activities occurring on the mental plane.

Fabby rolled his chair over to a separate pedestal and slipped his hand down into a groove that fit like a glove. "Do you feel that slight vibration?"

"Sure do," said Wave.

"That's not the damaged tube. I overhauled it completely. But the tachyon system is not too happy running on five. Although the reduction in power is minimal, the balance is disturbed. I'm going to see if retuning will help."

Fabby rolled back over to the main console to enter in the commands. "Did you inform Pheledra that the Ambassador is still alive?"

"I sure did Fabby, but she brushed it off. Still in denial."

"We need to do something before this situation deteriorates any further."

"I agree ... but what?" Wave removed his headpiece and turned to face Fabby who flipped an indicator light and said, "retuning complete. There, that seems to have helped considerably. We've got to stay up on this and not take anything for granted. All the shields and force fields are up and all weapons are on standby. Every channel is being scanned for activity. The Ambassador and his cluster of ships is still just sitting out there, waiting apparently ... or preparing."

"What are they planning, Fabby?"

"I can't say for sure, but His Pestilency is monitoring every move Pheledra makes and he seems to be very interested in something that's happening on Avengarone. Later on, when it swings back around, I'm going to zero in."

"Okay, we're doing what we can as far as the external situation is concerned. What about the internal situation between us?"

"Well, that's where the greatest danger lies. I've got all my computers working on it and there seems to be no definite solution. Possible solutions are only low percentage points of probability. It all depends upon Pheledra and the choices she makes."

"Fabby, the three of us have been through so much together. We always coordinated as an efficient team. But, more than that, we love and respect each other as friends. Fabby, I've never told you this before ... but ... I want to tell you now. I was one of those

naysayers who was adamantly opposed to the whole ... Bioborg idea. Minglin' human beings with machines seemed monstrous to me at the time."

"You and a lot of others, Wave, and it's entirely understandable. I never volunteered to be half man, half machine, you know. I was synthesized in a laboratory. Whether it's a good idea or not only time will tell. As for me ... I accept who and what I am. I'm very thankful not to be 100% machine. It is the human things ... the things of the spirit that make my life worthwhile ... even though I can never marry and have children."

"Ah ... when you're my age, your wife is long dead, your children are all scattered across the universe - off on exciting adventures - you seldom hear from 'em ... and ... you don't care much about sex anymore ... of course, you can always take aphro's and risk having a heart attack or a stroke. I love Pheledra like a daughter but I do admit that, at times, my old heart does a few flip-flops. She's so damn beautiful and graceful ... but lately, she's been a real fool. A hard headed fool but I still love her ... and love is all that matters. But, I still can't understand why this important mission was given to such a novice. What can we do, Fabby?"

"Let's do what we always do. Let's talk. Reason together. Work it out. She's in a state of heavenly bliss right now having made contact with Biltar and the others. It's obvious that she is ... shall we say ... personally involved."

"Yeah, although she's trying hard to play spiritual and detached."

"But there's more to it than that. She's confronting herself."

"Helaah?"

"Yes, that's certainly part of it."

Nestingwave stroked his white beard, thought for a few microns, then said, "Okay, let's contact her and arrange for a meeting."

"It's likely to anger her, Wave. She's right in the middle of beginning the search for the energy devices and not only that, she's fully materialized into third density. She's in the heavenlies now because of the spiritual fellowship of the contact but when she gets under a little stress, she's going to begin to feel the full weight and heaviness of third density life. Who knows how she's going to react."

"But," said Wave, "this is far too important to wait."

"Well, let's take ten to center and then get her on the horn."

"Righto."

Twenty Nine - Much Confusion

It was a dark morning. Occasionally, black rain obscured the view but most often, the panning lights could pierce the gloom. Here and there, an area of green or a running wild animal announced that life on Miraba would go on. There was hope here in the northern mountains of Havay.

Pheledra sat in an observation chair at the central console of the recon saucer. Beside her, on either side, Orange and Red flew the ship and monitored everything. A transparency was open to reveal the landscape as they slowly progressed. They were flying at low speed and low altitude in ever widening circles to view the damage. An indicator light in front of her had been on for a while. If it was urgent, Wave would telepath. *This is a request for a face to face conference*, Pheledra heard both Wave and Fabby telepathing at the same time. She had no privacy at the moment and telepathed an explanation back to the *Firefly*.

Only Nelyani was asleep. She rested on a little fold down bed behind Pheledra. Boots was curled up next to her snoring softly. Pheledra had covered them with a beautiful blanket.

Biltar and Nahvar were trying to rest in the reclining chairs on the periphery of the circular room but they were so excited it was all they could do to stay seated.

"Would you both like to come over here with me so you can get a better view?"

"I thought you'd never ask," said Biltar.

"Only a child could sleep through this," exclaimed Nahvar, trying to keep his voice down.

Pheledra moved her hand over some controls. The men's chairs configured into an upright position and slid over to the central console across from her. "Here, I'll open up some additional transparency to increase the view field."

"Oh!" gasped Biltar as the entire side of the ship became transparent, "how do you do that?"

"Frequency adjustment," said Pheledra. "It's one of the simpler things we do. Soon, your people will be able to do it too."

"Will you show us how?" asked Nahvar.

"No, but you'll find out for yourself. It's a small part of what you will learn in the days to come."

"Whow!" Biltar exhaled, "I guess I have about a billion questions."

Pheledra smiled. "That's a few too many for me to answer right now. I suggest you both try to calm your intellects for the moment and just enjoy the new things. Trying to figure them all out will only give you a headache."

"Good advice, probably," said Nahvar, "my head is already about to blow a gasket."

Biltar shook his head as he looked out over the landscape. "This is like ... some kind of dream. I know it's real... but ... somehow it doesn't compute."

"That's completely normal," she said. "You need time for adjustment. I need to contact Fabby and Wave for a conference. Red and Orange are flying the ship and if you have any questions, or need anything, just ask. I'm going to slip down to the belly deck and into a small alcove while you two keep watch."

"Sure," said Biltar.

"Adjustment ... yes ... I certainly do need time for adjustment, said Nahvar.

"Oh," said Pheldra pointing to something, "if anyone needs to use the retiring room, it's right through that hatch. Okay, I won't be too long and when I come back, we'll have a little conference of our own to decide the best way to proceed. Until then ... be at peace. Better days are ahead, my friends."

"Th... thanks," said Nahvar.

Biltar was speechless.

Pheledra went down through a hatch and quickly entered the alcove on the belly deck. She boosted the entire alcove area up to fourth density and lit up the monitors. Soon, Wave and Fabby appeared.

"Let's take ten," said Pheledra, and they entered meditation.

This time, Pheledra had no problem with her meditation, but from the moment Wave spoke, tensions began to build.

"How are things going?"

"Fine, Wave. Why did you need to talk with me now?"

"Fabby and I have some ... concerns ... and wanted to do as we always do and bring them out on the table for discussion."

"That's right," said Fabby, "we're in combat mode here. Like I told you, the Kultaki Ambassador is very much alive and his cluster of ships is just sitting out there monitoring you and keeping an eye on us as

well. We have no idea what he plans to do but we don't feel good about it."

"What do you think, Pheledra?" Wave asked.

"Oh Wave, this is really getting old. Lance wouldn't dare do anything. What's he going to do? Attack the Firefly? Attack me? The Anadine Galactic Council would stop him instantly if he tried such a thing. You know the rules of engagement. Our interaction with beings of negative polarity is formal and very rare. It can only happen while passing through one another's domain. Above third density, spiritual polarities live separately and normally do not have interaction."

"That astral roach was an attack," said Wave.

"It was sent under the guise of a gift exchange - part of our formal contact - even though his motives were distorted."

"I know, Pheledra," said Fabby, "but what about Anadia? What about the special interaction between polarities that Aramanda spoke of?"

"Fabby, that was a unique case. A choice made by Anadia due to that terrible trauma. It was a matter of her survival."

"It was more than that," said Wave.

"Yes," said Pheledra, "she had curiosity, she was inwardly seeking consciousness expansion, a new destiny, but she didn't make it. She's gone. The unique situation that Aramanda spoke of was only a temporary anomaly and now things have

come back into balance, back to the way they've always been."

"I disagree," said Wave. "First of all, you have no way of knowing for sure what happened to Anadia and ..."

"You saw what happened!" Pheledra interrupted, "the ship blew up! She probably fainted before she got onto the transfer pad! She's dead, Wave!"

"That may be," said Wave, "but, as I started to say, somehow this whole situation is a unique case because of the transformation of Miraba."

"Look," said Fabby, "as evolutionary lightworkers we often downstep from fifth density for the sake of lending a helping hand to emerging worlds. In fourth density, we are still capable of doing exactly what we are doing now - arguing - because we are divided over our opinions, which are nothing more than our individual limited perspectives ... our egos. I suggest we stop everything and return to fifth density for awhile to recall who we really are and balance ourselves out. Perhaps we have lingered too long here and have forgotten our true status. Perhaps ... we have become planets of forgetfulness."

"There's truth in that, Pheledra," said Wave.

"Yes, Wave, there's truth in it. But we were just in fifth density, remember? We originally agreed to downstep not only to help ascending planets but to learn lessons ourselves in order to gain knowledge and experience it into wisdom and thereby solidify, coalesce, further materialize, if you

will, our ongoing fifth density experience, which is relatively new to us due to our own recent transformation."

"I could sure enjoy serenity like that more often," said Wave.

"True," said Pheledra, "and the time will come for that. It's wonderful to float around and play a harp, as they say in 3D, but that is only the outer edge of what fifth density life truly is. There is a profundity that can only be gained through experience in service to lower densities."

"That's right," said Fabby, "fifth density usually provides no stress, no problems ... and ... very slow evolutionary growth. If we wish to continue to evolve rapidly, we must allow ourselves to undergo the pressures of lower densities, even though there is distress and some forgetfulness involved. Inwardly, we know who we are. That's why we meditate."

"To center ourselves," Pheledra continued, "Because ... yes ... we forget. We forget because we become distracted from our own inner being. We don't need to raise our vibrations up to fifth density in order to balance ourselves out. We simply need to go within. Where do you think Aramanda resides? Why is she so frightening to us when she downsteps to communicate? It gets our attention, does it not. Why does she communicate at all? Isn't she happy to just float on a cloud? No! She is compelled to evolve just as Creation itself is compelled to evolve by its far flung continuum into the densest matter."

"But Pheledra," Wave said, "that's not the point."

"Well," Pheledra asked, "what is the point then?"

"The point is," replied Wave, "you ... have become distracted and are endangering all of us due to your denial."

"Denial!?"

"Yes," said Wave, "denial of the fact that we overstepped our bounds and have opened ourselves up to interference from the negative polarity."

"I can't believe you're saying that again! Utter nonsense!"

"Well," said Fabby, "we believe its true, Pheledra ... and that itself causes a big problem."

"Fabby ... Lance infected us with that astral roach. Right there he violated the Cosmic Directive. It almost destroyed the Firefly. It could have easily killed all of us. Had it done so, Lance and the entire Kultaki starship would have been instantly annihilated by the Anadine Galactic Council. We would be dead and have to reincarnate in fifth density bodies and start again from scratch. That would be okay except that this particular responsibility that has been taken on by us would not be fulfilled and Miraba would suffer the loss, small though it may be, since we are only a tiny part of the unfolding cosmic plan. The point is, we have already experienced interference from the negative polarity. We overcame it, survived, and if need be, we'll do it again. We now stand an

excellent chance of fulfilling our responsibility if ... if ... we can drop this nonsense, accept things the way they are and continue on."

"But," said Wave, "we are responsible for killing thousands of beings. We didn't intend to do it, but our actions caused it to happen. Therefore we ... we ... especially *me*, are somewhat responsible for that atrocity. The Kultaki are not our enemies. They are fourth density sentient beings of negative polarity. Necessary for a balanced universe in which all things are created by means of duality - negative and positive - both proceeding out from the one source of all. Negative polarity, service to self, self-ish-ness and all its inherent negative consequences, is a legitimate choice, a choice made by evolving beings during their final third density incarnation, a choice allowed by Creation itself ... blessed be the name of the One."

"Oh Wave," said Pheledra, "we're getting nowhere. Can't you see that this guilt you're feeling is totally unfounded? We, including you, are not responsible for this. Lance is responsible. We were only defending ourselves which is the absolute right of every being in the universe."

"Okay," said Fabby, "we've reached an impasse on this matter. We have a strong difference of opinion. A part of it, Wave, may indeed be your own feelings of guilt because you came up with the idea of tossing the roach back to the Kultaki. However, we all assented without objection or even a second thought really. We are in this together. I think we were influenced by the Ambassador's arrogance and actually

believed, like he said, that he had the capability to pop that bug easily. In fact, he believed it. But, our tachyon power system caused unexpected changes in the roach. Again, it was our tachyon power. Perhaps we are negligent in not exploring the mysteries of the tachyon energy more thoroughly."

"Oh my," said Pheledra, "this has gotten completely out of hand. Are we going insane? This is wearing me out! What is going on here? This is not like us at all. We seem to be stuck in some kind of double bind. We're all speaking truth but we're not ... connecting somehow. And the worst thing is that this impasse is such a downer. It can do nothing but hinder, if not totally destroy the mission."

Spontaneously, they all fell silent, gazing into each others eyes for a long time. They were frustrated and confused. It was the first time such a lack of mutual understanding had ever happened to them and it was heart breaking to each of them.

Finally, Wave broke the silence. "I suggest, dear friends, that we drop this right now and just go on. Go on with the mission and take it as it comes. If we've erred, we will surely find out. If there is some other cause, we'll find that out too. Regardless, we need to remember Biltar ap Dyn, Nahvar and little Nelyani. We need to love 'em and serve 'em as best we know how. In the end only love prevails. Let's resolve right now to put them first and to do our very best from here on out. The past is the past. It cannot be undone. One thing for sure, we will all learn something ... come what may."

"Thanks Wave," said Pheledra, "that's what I intend to do."

"And I also," said Fabby.

Thirty - Go Within

The conference ended. Pheledra downstepped to third density and buried her head in her arms. She felt tired and very insecure. The weight was crushing. It was hard for her to walk as she struggled back up the ladder. She paused in the hatchway before going all the way up. Biltar was energetically questioning Red. Nahvar was moaning in pleasure while getting a foot massage from Orange. Nelyani had awakened and was happily playing with Boots who was bouncing and jumping in delight. Pheledra smiled.

"Hi Pheledra," said Nelyani, "what do space people eat for breakfast?"

Pheledra felt her strength returning as she greeted the three Mirabans. Biltar and Nahvar were also interested in how she and others from her plane of existence nourished themselves.

She took them over to the replicator and explained. "This device is what we call a *replicator*. It is capable of accessing energy from the Universal Matrix, the very thing you, Biltar, are now discovering. Since all matter, in all planes of existence, is nothing more than energy spinning in various configurations, the replicator simply spins up material objects, such as food. It does so according to a chosen program. In the case

of food, the program is the most nourishing and healthful known."

"Yeah, but how does it taste?" asked Nahvar.

"See for yourself. What would you like?"

"Uh, how about ... an apple."

"Red, green, yellow or blue?"

"Uh ... red."

"I'd like a blue one," said Nelyani, "I've never seen a blue apple!"

Pheledra smiled."How about you, Biltar?"

"No ... uh no, I've never seen a blue apple either. I'll try one."

"Wait," said Nahvar, "instead of red, I'll try one of them blue apples too."

Pheledra entered the code and a bright light went on inside the compartment. She opened the transparent cabinet and removed three beautiful blue apples. As the three Mirabans hungrily munched on the delicious apples, Pheledra explained, "don't get the wrong idea about this technology. There are definite limitations imposed by Cosmic Directive. For example, we cannot replicate something we don't need and we cannot replicate life beyond the plant kingdom."

"Why is that?" asked Biltar.

"Because animal life and human life have a soul matrix and are at the heart of Creation

in its evolutionary intention. Soul is a seminal manifestation of frequency/value, generating individual consciousness and will. We make choices. The self-awareness of an apple or a crystal or a piece of wood is electromagnetic, chemical and environmental in nature, having a species consciousness, but no individual consciousness and will. As sentient human beings, we may freely manipulate those factors, but not soul and spirit."

Orange turned to them. "But when you eat an apple, it is rendered up into a higher service of Creation and the purpose of the apple is fulfilled. This stimulates all apples everywhere to be the best they can and, to put it in human terms, it makes them happy and joyful."

"Whow!" exhaled Biltar. "I'd like to spend a few hours just listening."

"Really," said Nahvar.

"This is the best apple I've ever tasted," said Nelyani, "do you have any ... peanut butter?"

Everyone laughed. Orange and Red picked up the resonance and chucked. Their lights gleamed and cycled up and down in hue.

"Sure," said Pheledra, "would you like it on whole wheat bread?"

Everyone, including Pheledra, had a peanut butter sandwich and then she spun up four hot cups of aromatic herbal tea.

"What do you do with the cups afterwards," asked Nelyani, "do you have a dishwasher?"

"No," said Pheledra, "when we're through, I'll just put the cups back into the replicator and unspin them back into the energy matrix. But I won't forget to say *thank you*."

Boots meowed letting Pheledra know it was time for him to eat too so she spun up some dry cat food in a bowl and some fresh water. Nelyani giggled a little at how Boots laid back his ears and dug in.

"What a way to live!" said Biltar, "how long before Mirabans are there?"

"A little while," said Pheledra, "What you see here is a prerogative of fifth density existence. You Mirabans are just entering the cusp of fourth density existence. The unusual thing about what your planet is experiencing is the speed, in your linear timeline, with which you are ascending into fifth density. It usually takes millenia upon millenia. In this unique case, it will only be a few hundred annoms."

Pheledra went back over to the central console to sit down. Biltar and Nahvar followed but Nelyani began to examine everything around the periphery of the saucer.

"Nel," said Nahvar, "you'd better not touch anything."

"It's perfectly all right, Nahvar," said Pheledra. "All devices and controls on this ship are directly linked into my consciousness and to the droids. It is much like a key inside our heads. When and if the right time comes, I'll lend a few keys to you also."

Nahvar shook his head in amazement. "I have a whole lot to learn, Pheledra."

"I do too, Nahvar," said Pheledra.

Nahvar shook his head, still overwhelmed in amazement. "I sure would like to know how you are able to use your mind so effectively and with such creativity."

Pheledra just smiled and nodded.

Boots finished his morning dry food and Nelyani picked him up to cuddle. Boots purred and allowed her to cradle him in her arms. All this attention kept him from being too bored. It was nice to meet a new friend who appreciated him so much.

"Nelyani," said Pheledra, "come over here and sit down next to Biltar. Boots will be glad to sit on your lap. I have something very important to share with the three of you. This is the most important thing I will ever tell you."

Nelyani eagerly came over and sat next to Biltar. She was all ears.

Pheledra felt that this may be the last opportunity to give something of extraordinary benefit to the Mirabans, something that would stay with them for the rest of their lives and bless them forever. Her main purpose on this mission was not to teach, but to demonstrate truth. However, in this one case, she deemed what she was about to do essential because it was the one thing that brought balance to her and all the celestial peoples she had ever known and loved. She was somewhat ashamed of the conflicts still residing within her, in spite of

this precious gift, and was constantly reminded of how fragile and fleeting such a gift could be. But, nevertheless, she knew that, despite her failures, it would bless the Mirabans forever.

Seeing my faults, she thought, perhaps they will more readily forgive their own.

"I want to give you some help on properly using meditation to access different levels of awareness. These things are already within the planetary consciousness of Miraba, so my mission allows such instruction."

Nahvar perked up. "My old religious order, the Renunciates, practices what they call, meditation. We repeat prayers and contemplate spiritual thoughts. Sometimes I use beads to keep track of the prayer repetitions and guide the contemplation."

"Yes," said Pheledra, "and the most enjoyable and healing meditation is not praying nor thinking about something. It is consciously transcending thought and becoming aware of the very source of thought."

Nel was puzzled. "Transcending thought?"

"It means temporarily getting beyond your thoughts and encountering their Source which is the ocean of infinite energy and intelligence from which everything springs. The regular practice of dipping into that ocean is the most beneficial thing anyone can do, but often it is easy to become distracted, so one must *grow* into this practice. In your normal waking consciousness, thoughts are constantly

going through your mind like a stream. These thoughts seem to arise spontaneously as a monologue in your mind, sometimes an inner dialogue. Mostly, they are disconnected thought waves, a constant barrage of concerns, worries, calculations, plans, imaginations, intentions and so on."

"Yeah," said Biltar, "there's a lot of stuff that goes through my mind."

"Yes," said Pheledra, "and every worrisome thought produces a degree of wear and tear on your body. Worry makes your heart beat faster and your blood pressure rise which produces unnecessary stress on your entire bioform. What is worry? How would you define it?"

"Usually ... worry is simply thoughts which are unreal," answered Biltar.

"Manufactured hallucinations," said Nahvar. "My brother literally killed himself by worrying about his health. The more he worried, the more he became afraid. The more he became afraid, the more he worried. The longer this cycle continued, the sicker he became. His condition wasn't even specific. Finally, his worst fears were realized and he died."

"Yes," said Pheledra, "that's an example of the power of uncontrolled negative thoughts, the devouring monsters of one's own blind creation."

"How true," said Biltar. "Worries are just future scenarios that *might* come to pass. They usually don't."

Pheledra nodded. "Unless you give them enough energy through constant focus to materialize them."

"Worrays produce all kinds of stress and depression," said Nahvar.

"Yes," added Biltar. "It's even worse if your body is already stressed because of some kind of organic disease or poisoning. Believe me, I know about that."

"True," said Pheledra. "Thought and matter are just different frequencies of the same energy. It is an ideomaterial Universe. All arises out of the Prime Thought. When we realize this, we can see how important it is to consciously control our thoughts so we can bring positive, uplifting and life giving effects to ourselves and to others."

"You know, Pheledra," said Nelyani, "thought comes before everything I do. I have to think about something in order to do it."

"That's right, Nel. In fact, your thoughts produce everything in your life, don't they? Look around you. Everything you see, everything good or bad, came from thought. Let me give you a very good example."

"Yeah," replied Nelyani.

Pheledra got up and went over to the periphery of the ship and searched through a couple of sliding drawers which opened at her touch. She found what she was looking for and brought it back over to the others. It was a small red oblong object. "Do you see this?" Pheledra unfolded a knife blade from

the object. "This is a very useful invention from the previous age of my home planet.

"It's a knife," said Nelyani. "What's so special about a knife?"

"Oh, but it's not only a knife." Pheledra began unfolding other tools from the object. A screwdriver, pair of sissors, can opener, pry bar, tooth pick, pliers and even a small magnifying glass.

"I'll bet I could start a fire from the Sun's rays with that there magnifying glass," Nahvar blurted out.

"Wow," exclaimed Nelyani, "what *don't* you have there!"

"Well, there's no jackhammer. That's another thought materialized."

Nelyani giggled.

"What's the point, Pheledra?" asked Biltar.

"The point is, this useful and ingenious object is a materialization of thought. Long ago, a human being with a vision to serve his fellow beings had this thought. He imagined a survival tool kit contained in a compact case. A tool that would actually be many tools made out of the finest and hardest steel and could be carried in your pocket anywhere, always ready for action. His thought became a vision of what this little tool kit could be. He drew his thoughts on paper and began to engineer the design. He searched the world for the finest steel and worked and worked until he had the most practical design. He then manufactured it and offered it to his world.

Everyone that used it loved it because it was so compact and practical and worked so well."

Pheledra held up the tool. "Here is one human thought which has blessed and continues to bless countless souls through the long corridors of time."

"Wow," said Nelyani.

"I suppose all thoughts produce something," said Nahvar.

"Everything," said Biltar. "Thoughts produce everything ... good and bad."

"Well," said Pheledra, "if your thoughts produce everything in your life, good and bad, we should learn how to control our thoughts, right?"

"If we don't someone else will," said Biltar.

"That's certainly right," said Nahvar.

"Control over your own thoughts is precisely what meditation produces," Pheledra continued. "Meditation is the process of dipping into the infinite ocean and bringing the energy and peace residing there outward into your daily life."

"Oh, I see," said Nelyani, "well ... how do you learn to do that?"

"By understanding the process of meditation and learning how to concentrate the thoughts you truly want in order to manifest things in your life."

"That makes sense," said Biltar. "How can a person learn to do that? It seems like I have a lot of trouble keeping out the thoughts I don't want."

"Trying to suppress thoughts will bring you a lot of trouble," said Pheledra, "not to mention stress - because when you suppress thoughts, you focus on them, concentrate on them, and give energy to them, making them even stronger. Attempted suppression of thoughts has been a major problem for all your religions leading to excesses and distortions."

"So ... what's the answer?" Nahvar was pondering.

"Meditation," said Pheledra.

"Tell me how," asked Nelyani.

"It's real easy. Relax and observe your breath. Just pay attention to it coming in and going out and out don't do anything to try and adjust it. When a thought arises in your mind do not try to stop it. Just turn your attention back to your breath as soon as you notice its presence."

"Wow, is that all there is to it?" Nelyani was amazed.

"Yes, but much more can be discovered."

"What else?"

Pheledra closed her eyes for a moment before she spoke.

"We have found that a good way to meditate is to start out by observing your breath and

then go to a sound. Now, a sound is a vibration. It is a vibration that continues far past what your ear can hear. A thought can be a sound vibration in you mind. Are you with me?"

The three Mirabans nodded.

"When you hear a sound, such as a gong, it grows dimmer and dimmer to your ear. The vibrations become finer and finer until you finally do not actually hear it with your ears, but you can still hear it in your mind, right?"

"Right," said Nahvar.

"A mental sound is a vibration. Like a gong, its waves become finer and finer. So fine, in fact, that it merges with the ocean of Creation itself, like all vibrations do in actuality. Creation gives rise to all vibrations. The celestial peoples of my race sometimes use a personalized mental sound as their object of meditation. It is a sound which matches and coordinates with one's personal soul, brain, nervous system, biology and genetics. We focus and mentally follow the waves of a certain sound down and down into our awareness. There comes a point where it reaches the Source. Creation itself. The Universal Matrix. The Creator. The one Source which resides at the root of all. The thinker and the thought are one and the same."

"Unless we went to sleep somewhere along the way," said Nahvar.

Everyone laughed a little.

"That's right," said Pheledra. "If you go to sleep ... it's because you weren't paying

attention. But, the energy and bliss you experience along the way ... will certainly keep you awake and attentive when you are trained properly, take it step by step and do not become discouraged."

"Well, what sound are you talking about?" asked Biltar.

"People have used all sorts of mental sounds for meditation, but ideally that sound should not itself give rise to any other thoughts. In other words, *ideally*, the sound which you meditate on should not have any intellectual meaning or symbolism to you. This is because, a sound which is a symbol, such as a known word, gives rise to other thoughts about that subject. Ideally, it should be a sound which is just that, a sound, not a meaningful symbol or word. This is *ideally*, however, all forms of meditation have proven useful. I'm just sharing with you the benefit of eons of experience."

Pheledra opened a small cabinet in her console and took out a disc. "This disc contains a meditation program. When I use it in conjunction with a machine called a Psychotronic Adjuvant, it explores you. That is, it probes your biology and even your emotions and mentality - the full algorithms of your signature, including your genetics. It then recommends a personal sound. Each sound it recommends is for a specific individual according to their unique, one of a kind, signature. Therefore none of us meditates on the same sound. It can be a syllabic sound of one or two vocalizations capable of being spoken out loud. When you first use it, you will, indeed speak it out loud. Then, you will take it within your mind and

keep it there for your own personal use. From then on keep it in that subtle place of the heart because you want to keep it pristine without any meanings or symbolism attached to it - just the sound itself. You entone it vocally at first because that is the best way for you to learn it. The pitch of it will start out at a certain frequency. The frequency of your voice. The speed at which you repeat it will start out at a certain speed. But, the pitch and speed and timbre of it will vary and vary greatly within your mind as you meditate. You must understand this and completely allow it to be. Never force it or constrict it. Allow it just to be whatever it is. It changes and varies because your conscious awareness travels through many levels and frequencies which affect it. You simply repeat the sound mentally and never force it into any pitch, speed, configuration, duration or anything else. You simply allow the sound itself to be whatever it wants to be according to your focus upon the original recommended sound. Such focus carries your consciousness to finer and finer frequencies which naturally oscillate faster and faster. The finer and faster the level of vibration becomes, the more energy, power, bliss and peace is interfaced."

"Wow," said Nelyani, "I'd just want to stay there!"

"No, Nel. The point is to dip the ladle into the water, then drink, dip the ladle, then drink. That itself is a balanced vibration. You go into that altered state of consciousness through meditation and transcend beyond individual thought to the very source of thought itself, that's dipping the ladle into the cosmic ocean, then you come back out

into your normal waking state of consciousness and drink the water, which means, live and work and create and express and fulfill the destiny and purpose of your incarnation and ... you do it with growing awareness, focus, willful intention, allowance, balance, cheerfulness, love and joy. You are becoming an outlet for Creation's infinite supply of energy and intelligence. Then you will find yourself growing thirsty for another drink so you take a refreshing dip once more. That is the practice of meditation."

"If that disc will do that, I sure want to try it," said Nelyani.

"It's not the disc, Nel, but it is your desire for expanded awareness. It is your desire to know who and what you are. It is your desire to touch the Source of all that is within. It is your longing to truly be one with the Creator and all creatures. I'm sharing this with you because it means so much to me. I want you all to clearly understand that this is strictly voluntary. If any of you do not feel ready or have any hesitation at all, it is perfectly all right. I have merely presented to you something I know. All the other celestial beings of positive polarity know it too. But, to enter into this is strictly your choice. It is a matter of your free-will and will always remain so."

"Now is the time for me to learn this," said Biltar.

None of the three Mirabans had any hesitation. Pheledra knew they wouldn't. She led them one at a time to a small private alcove to play the disc into their minds so they could receive their personal sounds.

She also remained with each one to give further instruction and see to it that they were starting properly and having a good experience. She showed them how to breathe and sit in a way to facilitate meditation. She assured them that as they developed their telepathy, she would teach them more and answer their questions no matter where they were. Then they all sat together and meditated for ten zeron.

It was her greatest gift of love.

Thirty One - Blue Apple Key

A while later, Biltar stared through the transparency. "I'm astounded at the amount of life still remaining after the cataclysm. I saw plants and animals and a fast moving river in the mountains that, believe it or not, didn't look polluted."

"You will be amazed," said Pheledra, "at how rapidly Miraba will repair herself. And, we will find quite a few human survivors. Especially those who were somewhat prepared both physically and psychologically and especially those who were outside the big cities."

Pheledra took the craft above the mountains and increased speed toward Urbantia 7. She wanted to give plenty of time for their conference, so she set the craft to arrive in 80 zeron.

"Okay," said Nahvar, "here's the big question, Pheledra. Why didn't your people

just divert the planetoid and prevent all this destruction and death?"

"It has been done many times in the past," she said, "but this time, for some reason unknown to us, a cataclysm was allowed. We do not do things on our own. Nor are we ordered to do things. Every major action and mission we undertake is allowed to us by higher wisdom. In this case, we fully trust that the higher wisdom foresees this cataclysm, as horrible as it now appears, to be for the highest good for all concerned."

Red turned to Nahvar and added. "I am sure it has to do with the unique transformation of your planet. Some of the Mirabans who died will reincarnate into your new age of fourth and fifth density. Others will be required to reincarnate upon other worlds to complete their third density experience of choosing their future spiritual polarity. This in itself is highly unusual because the normal laws of reincarnation require a soul to return to its planet of origin. Not so in this case because the entire planet is undergoing an unusually fast density shift. Those who have already chosen a spiritual orientation of negative polarity in their final third density existence will reincarnate in fourth density on others worlds suited for those experiences. Miraba no longer qualifies because she is becoming a home for beings of positive polarity to experience fourth and eventually fifth density life and even higher frequencies."

"Why a separation between third and fourth densities?" asked Biltar.

Red swung over to adjust a monitor while Orange answered the question. "Third and

fourth density evolutionary experience has two different goals. Therefore, those two groups are separated. The goal of third is to choose spiritual polarity, positive or negative. Once a definite decision has been made, usually over the space of many incarnations, an entity enters into fourth density evolutionary experience. The goal is then to develop cooperation. In the case of negative polarity, such cooperation is brought about by hierarchy, control and coercion, fear based. In the case of positive polarity, it is brought about by natural telepathy and egalitarian teamwork, love based. In third density, while souls of these two perspectives are living together, you constantly grapple with this polarity and call it 'good' and 'evil'; however, higher wisdom recognizes the necessity and validity of both but they cannot reside in the same place after third density."

"Well," said Nahvar under his breath, "glad to meet some other heretics."

Biltar chuckled and Pheledra smiled and nodded. "The higher wisdom recognizes the sanctity of individual willful intent. For willful intent to operate, choice must be present. Every choice has its consequence."

"Can I come sit with you?" asked Nelyani.

"Of course," Pheledra replied, "you are an important part of our discussion too. Sit in that chair next to Biltar. Here, I'll raise it up a little for you."

Nelyani put Boots on the fold out bed and he curled up to take a nap. She walked over to the chair and sat staring intently at Pheledra as if waiting for something profound.

"I wonder if anything will be left of my former home," said Biltar. "I just finished an important paper and I have copies of the old ones. They're kept in a steel safe. If they survived, we need to get them."

"We'll soon know," said Pheledra. "We'll go there first and take a look."

Nahvar looked around as if trying to get his bearings. "Pheledra, when we run across survivors ... what will you do?"

"This is going to be hard for you, Nahvar. This mission is highly specialized. Apart from my specific intentions, I am not allowed to directly help nor interfere with anyone. All I am allowed to do is be on the lookout for Mirabans who are willing to help and point them in the right direction."

"I'm a practical man," said Nahvar, "and pretty good with medical matters. If I need to stay behind and help someone I will."

"That's your call, Nahvar. All I can promise you is, I'll do what I can."

"Thank you," said Nahvar.

"Biltar," said Pheledra, "after searching through the wreckage of your dome, can you guide us to find the PSG machines?"

"Fryd has them stored in a vault outside a small village called Penyat. If he's still alive, he may be guarding them or trying to find some way to contact me. Penyat is between Urbantia 7 and Mediaenge Complex. We just need to travel south and follow the maglev line out of Urbantia 7, if any of it is still there. I ... I really don't know if it will be

possible for me to recognize anything after all the destruction."

"That won't be a problem," said Pheledra, "I have ways of pinpointing objects. All you'll have to do is visualize a mental image of the device. I will make a mental copy and use it to attract, for lack of a better word, the location of the devices. I can zero us in."

"Wow," said Nelyani, "could you find my kitty that ran away?"

"Perhaps I could, Nel, but I'm prohibited from taking anyone else on board."

"Oh yeah, I remember. That's okay. It was a long time ago anyway and who knows if that kitty is even alive after this."

"I tell you what Nel, visualize your kitty and I'll see if it's still alive, or maybe even find out where it is."

"Really!? Okay!"

Nelyani closed her eyes and Pheledra accessed her thoughts.

"My, Nel, that was a long time ago. Your kitty, whom you called *Rhuada*, ran away because a dog chased her and she became lost. She showed up on someone's doorstep. They fed her and gave her a home. She lived there happily and died a natural death after having five litters of kittens."

"Where are the kitties?"

"Scattered everywhere, Nel. A few survived the cataclysm, most didn't."

"Pheledra ... will I ever be able to do that?"

"Oh yes, Nel ... and sooner than you think. You are the best natural talent among us for telepathy and all things psychic. It just needs to be developed. The geological changes on Miraba have permanently weakened the magnetic field of the planet and your entire solar system is now entering a highly energetic area of space. These things combine to accelerate fourth density experiences, such as telepathy and all things you refer to as 'psychic.'"

**"You mean extra sensory perception?"
Nahvar asked.**

"Actually, Nahvar, it's not extra sensory at all. We all have a primary universal sense out of which all other senses arise. It is our very first sense. Can you guess what it is?"

"Hearing," said Nahvar.

"No."

"Smell?" ventured Biltar. "No, that can't be right."

"Touch!" exclaimed Nelyani.

"That's right, Nel. The sense of touch is our primary sense. What you Mirabans refer to as 'extra sensory' is actually a refinement of that Universal sense of touch. It is the first physical self-awareness of a fetus in the womb and the last sensory awareness when you die. It's what makes you know that you are you and it survives physical death because the soul energy has touch. It is primal because through it ... the individual awareness touches the rest of the universe.

Sight, hearing, smell and taste are simply ... specialized touch. As consciousness expands, touch specializes into many other senses as yet unrecognized."

"When I was a little baby," Nelyani exclaimed, "I was playing in the woods and ate some mushrooms. My mama thought I'd been poisoned and rushed me to the doctor. I didn't get sick or anything, but I could ... hear color ... and taste sound ... is that anything like what you're saying?"

Pheledra smiled. "Yes, Nel, there are chemicals that produce changes in consciousness. They heighten awareness of the senses but by far, the best way to permanently expand consciousness is with knowledge through meditation. In that way, you will soon find that it is utterly impossible for you to expand your awareness. Conscious awareness expands *entirely on its own* once you cease and disist from the things that hinder it. Let go and let be. The value is not so much in the meditation itself as in the powerful effect it produces upon the rest of your life as you fulfill the purpose of your incarnation."

"We have a lot to learn," said Biltar.

Nahvar nodded. "Pheledra, how do your people view reincarnation?"

"The question is *what* reincarnates. Nothing whatsoever of the physical ego/personality reincarnates."

"What does that leave?" Biltar asked.

"All that the soul matrix has ever learned concerning Universal Values throughout its

timeless individual journeys into countless ego/personalities which are all illusory and therefore impermanent."

"I'll have to think about that," said Biltar.

"Likewise," said Nahvar.

As the recon saucer proceeded, they continued to watch through the transparency. Pheledra lowered their altitude and remained in third density so the ship could be seen. It was important that Mirabans become aware of the celestial presence.

The wasted natural landscape below gave way to industrial wreckage and ruined roads. The monorail maglev system was completely mangled. They could see movement below.

"What is this place?" asked Nahvar. "We are on the outskirts of an industrial city named Vuldecep," Biltar replied. "It looks pretty bad down there."

"Mostly rubble," said Nel. "No wait! There are a few buildings standing over there."

Nahvar shook his head and sighed. "There's a lot of activity down in that one area. Pheledra, could you fly us in a little closer so we can get a better look?"

"Sure," said Pheledra, "but I've got a better way. I can bring up magnification in the transparency so you can see what's happening."

The scene below zoomed in and they could see details.

"Oh my," said Nahvar, "that looks like a huge rescue operation. Look at all those stretchers laid out in front of that building. They're bringing out casualties and treating them right there. The hospital is probably gone."

"Those poor people." Nelyani was concerned. "I suppose there are thousands of places like this with no real medical help."

"I know, Nel," said Pheledra, "It's horrible and the casualties are far too many to take care of. The limitations of my mission are so painful. It's hard to look upon such human suffering and be unable to help."

**"I just can't stand it," said Nahvar.
"Pheledra, I've got to do something."**

Pheledra thought for a moment and shook her head. "Nahvar, I know your heart. You are a man who loves your fellow man more than your own life. But anything you could do down there would just be a drop in the bucket and very frustrating."

"I know how Nahvar feels too," said Biltar. "I'd like to go down there and do what I could."

"Of course you would," said Pheledra, "but we must triage priorities according to the maximum benefit for all the people of Miraba. Right now, that maximum benefit is the distribution of the PSGs. It will not only save lives, but improve the entire quality of life for the whole planet."

Biltar was distressed. "But when people are lying in front of you crushed and horribly injured ..."

"I want to go down there," said Nahvar getting out of his seat. "That's why I brought my med bag. Those people need my assistance and they need it now."

"I can't say no to you Nahvar because it does not concern the mission. As I said before, it is your choice but I want to warn you. I am picking up very bad feelings from that place down there, Vuldecep. If you go down, you're likely to find an impossible situation. Many of those people have snapped and some of them are dangerous. It's likely to be chaotic."

Nahvar was already going through his med bag. "Get me down there."

"Okay, here's how we'll do it. I'm going to set you down and come back before sunset after we've checked out Biltar's dome. At that time you can decide whether to go on with us or remain."

"How will I be able to contact you?"

"Well," answered Pheledra, "I'm going to give you one of those keys I told you about." Nel was excited. "Oh goody, now I get to find out!"

"Tell me." Nahvar was checking his field surgery instruments.

"When you want to contact me," said Pheledra, "visualize Nelyani taking a big bite out of a *blue apple*. This will tune us in together."

"Wow," said Nelyani, "is it that simple?"

**"Yes, because I have lots of experience,"
said Pheledra.**

"Is that all I have to do?" asked Nahvar.

**"Yes. That key will tell me to turn on the
Psychotronic Adjuvant and communicate
with you further. If you get into trouble, we'll
get here fast to pick you up. Regardless, I'll
come check on you just before sunset."**

"Let's go," said Nahvar.

**Pheledra boosted the recon saucer into
fourth density so she could get down
without being seen. She circled and located
a well hidden spot behind a piled up stack of
maglev cars and materialize back into third
density in order to beam Nahvar down. It
was not too far away from the rescue
operation. Nahvar wouldn't have far to walk.
They hovered near the ground. Nahvar
strapped his med bag around his shoulder
and stood on the transfer pad. Pheledra
beamed Nahvar down to the surface of
Miraba. She then upstepped into fourth
density and flew straight up to continue
their previous course for Urbantia 7.**

"Bye Nahvar," said Nelyani, "bless you."

**Pheledra gave Nelyani a look of admiration.
"Yes, bless you Nahvar."**

**"Bless you, brother." Biltar sighed, wishing
he could have gone too.**

Thirty Two - On Avengarone

Avengarone. Miraba's large moon.

It has a thin atmosphere, highly poisonous to the Mirabans and the Kultaki alike. It's tall spires reflect a glimmer of sunlight, while the dark canyons rest in cold shadows. It is an eerie wasteland. Beneath its surface, honeycombed with tunnels and caverns, lie the deteriorated remnants of strange machinery.

Most of the rich titanium was removed long ago and hauled away to other worlds by alien races who fought over her secretly in the shadow of Miraba.

Twelve Mirabans once ventured here by means of primitive rockets and without knowledge of those who came before. The Mirabans didn't realize they had landed in the middle of a booby-trap.

The security devices, left behind by the last alien outpost, automatically turned on, producing mental hallucinations of incredible horror. Ten of the Mirabans went insane and murdered each other. The other two were able to make it back to Miraba and tell their tale, not really knowing what had happened to them.

The Space Agency of Shaluma, who had backed the exploration, became convinced that aliens were warning them off. No Miraban ever went back. Eventually, their primitive space explorations collapsed in a

total failure of vision and purpose due to political corruption producing turmoil.

In the black sky to the north, Avengarone's sister, Tarsenay, looms yellow above the horizon. Tarsenay has very little atmosphere at all, it is a cratered desert moon.

On the darkside of Tarsenay, which never faces Miraba, an insectoid race had long processed the sand for its mineral content and transported it to their home worlds - chemicals to fuse into building materials and radiation shields. When the planetoid came by, it brought destruction and havoc upon their secret operations. The survivors pulled up stakes and left for home, a distant star system they called Kaderalon.

Mirabans, even the scientists, knew nothing of the ancient insectoid race on Tarsenay. The Mirabans had been too concerned with their own problems and trying to develop bigger and better weapons of mass destruction to enforce their political world views upon one another. The Kultaki, for the sake of control and exploitation, preferred it that way and wanted to maintain such confusing conflicts among the Mirabans for as long as possible.

Now, nature herself had brought an end to that long era of control and manipulation.

In one of the unnamed canyons of Avengarone, Ana and Cobi looked out from their stolen scout craft. They looked south toward Miraba. She loomed in the sky. A blue green world of primitive third density human life. Perhaps, with hope for the future, now that her terror had passed.

"What's Pheledra doing now?" Ana asked as Cobi stared intently at the monitor.

"Flying at low altitude in third density," Cobishandra replied, "probably helping that Biltar fellow that Lance found out about through his thought machine. It's her mission, Ana, and she's totally focused on it. A real do-gooder."

"I'm still trying to telepath with her," said Ana, "but she has tuned me out. She probably thinks I'm dead. What do you suppose Lance is doing?"

"I don't know. The secured channels are saying nothing. He just seems to be sitting out there ... waiting. I don't know what for. But as long as he stays put, it means he's not coming after us. I think he has something in mind for Pheledra ... perhaps the whole planet."

"Cobi, why would he be sticking around now that our power base is gone?"

"Well, he's staying because of Pheledra ... or us. Are the cloaking shields up?"

"Yes, Ana, partially so we can still see out, but I don't think they will do us any good. If he decides to come after us, he can find us quickly. Let's not kid ourselves, we're quite vulnerable."

They didn't say anything for awhile but busied themselves with the instruments and monitors, refining frequencies in order to keep the best vigilance possible. Cobi sent out a small probe from the scout craft to keep a close eye on Lance. It landed on top of a nearby peak.

"Ana ... do you think you could use natural telepathy to find out what Lance has in mind? I mean, now that you no longer have any inhibitions against it."

"It's all so new to me, Cobi, and it still scares me. I sure don't want Lance to know someone is mentally probing him. He'll probably figure out that it's me."

"Please try, Ana. I'm so afraid. I need to know what's happening and whether we should get out of here or what."

"There's really no place to go, Cobi, except Miraba, and he'd soon find us there no matter what we do. The insectoid aliens on Tarsenay left and that's really no place to go anyway. It's nothing but desert. A waste land only good for the chemicals in the sand."

"Please try, Ana," Cobi begged.

"Sure, my love, I ... I'll go to the back where I can concentrate for a long time. Maybe I'll come up with something useful ... or ... maybe I'll just manage to alert him and he'll get a fix on us."

"It's worth taking the chance, Ana. I can't live with such doubt and anxiety."

"All right, my love." Ana made her way to the back of the craft, stopping to take a pain shot along the way. Cobi nervously went back to the instruments.

The shadows of Avengarone grew long as time passed. Ana slowly managed to go into a deep trance. It was as if the experience of losing her hand and arm and contacting

Pheledra had opened her psyche. She found herself in new territory and it was somewhat frightening. It seemed more than mere telepathy. It was more like the vision she had experienced when she went out of her body due to the pain.

A ball of light with a dark core hung in space. Fear itself. A low hum. A saurian corpse with empty eyes floated nearby, its entrails stringing along behind like red rope. It began to spiral into the center of the core. Faster and faster it turned and twisted. The low hum turned into a deep resonating moan of despair. "Treprestas, Tresprestas, find me quickly!" The voice was filled with a dark lust that drew like a magnet. The corpse awakened and began to scream. A tiny flame appeared for a moment, then flashed into a raging inferno. Lance stumbled out of the flames. He was wearing a heavy cumbersome helmet on his head out of which emerged hundreds of wires. They were connected to a gigantic machine that looked like a huge globe. He reached up and tore the wires loose, then lifted his clawed hands as if in prayer - parted them - and snapped his fingers .

Anadia collapsed. Cobishandra heard her fall. "Ana, Ana are you okay!?"

There was no response so she quickly undid her harness and made it to the back of the craft. She found Ana unconscious but breathing. "Ana what happened!?"

Cobishandra gasped with realization. Ana's face was blistered. It had been burned.

Thirty Three - Crash and Burn

The recon saucer approached the outskirts of Urbantia 7. Biltar and Nel sat besides Pheledra and looked out at the torn landscape. Boots had quickly become bored and decided to take a nap on Nel's lap. Pheledra had increased speed after dropping Nahvar off but still maintained a low altitude so they could see the conditions. The black rain had come to this area once and dark clouds threatened to bring it again.

"I'm going to put on the psychotronic adjuvant and try to locate your friend," said Pheledra.

Biltar nodded. "I sure hope Fryd is alive and near Penyat where the devices are stored."

Pheledra put on the head piece and closed her eyes. Biltar had drawn a picture of the device with lots of detail for Pheledra to visualize in order to pick up Fryd's vibrations. The device was inside Fryd's mind and she could find it there if he was alive.

"Nothing ... nothing Biltar, I can't pick up anything."

"Are we too far away?"

"No, distance doesn't matter." She took off the head piece and looked out the transparency. "We're entering the outskirts of Urbantia 7. My, it looks terrible."

"This area is level 9 toxic," Red announced.

"Oh," said Pheledra, "that's too poisonous for us to go down, we'll have to send a droid." She glanced over at Biltar, "Where was your dome located?"

"Further east," said Biltar, "yes ... right over there ... I think. We'll need to get closer to see what's left."

Pheledra slowed the ship and took it down. As it passed over what used to be settlements and businesses, they were amazed. The damage was incredible. Large buildings had collapsed, gas mains ruptured. Fires still burned and all roads were rubble.

Bodies and wreckage lay strewn about. Every now and then, they'd see a dying survivor. Biltar wanted to stop and help but Pheledra shook her head grimly and continued on. She began to move the ship in a circle to see if Biltar could recognize anything.

Pheledra shook her head. "Most of the survivors died when the black rain came. Here it must be especially toxic because of chemical pollutants and radiation. Orange, how hot is this area?"

"A human cannot be out in the open for over 60 zeron without showing the first signs of radiation sickness."

"What a mess," Nel whispered. She held onto Boots so tightly it made him growl a little.

"Look," Biltar exclaimed, "the dam has broken ... and there is a large lake. My dome was right over there. I can't tell if the water came up to it or not." Biltar pointed to the right at some indistinguishable wreckage. Pheledra hovered the scout ship above the spot.

"No, that's not it," said Biltar, "the dome was further down the hill. It must be under water now. My papers are in a steel safe. Its waterproof and they'll probably be okay."

Nel looked over at Pheledra. "Is there any way a droid could get the safe?"

"Yes ... Orange or Red could be given a description of the documents and use their sensors to locate them, then go under water to retrieve the safe, or they could simply retrieve the information by scanning."

"I'll go," said Red. "Biltar, just give me some key words in the documents and I'll try to locate them."

"Really? Is that all you need?" said Biltar.

"Yes," said Red, "unlike natural telepathy, this technology requires the use of short range energy scanning. Close proximity to the actual documents is required. What is the paper called?"

"Continuous Energy from the Fabric of Space-Time is the title. Key words would be ... uh ... systems out of symmetry ... negentropy ... B field ... A field ... do you need more?"

"No," said Red, "that'll do fine."

"That sounds great!"

Pheledra went into commander mode. "I'll beam you down, Red. When you come back up, I'll create an energy bubble for you to decontaminate the safe and yourself."

"Aye, aye," said Red as he headed for the hatch.

They watched him beam down. He followed Pheledra's commands exactly as he hovered just above the water.

"Go over a little to the left. That's it. Look there."

Red pulsed his energy, growing brighter and then dimmer. His facets gleamed like a diamond as his energy beams penetrated the murky water in a systematic search. He went in a circular pattern, often going back over the same area. Sometimes he stopped altogether for a moment and then proceeded carefully.

"Nothing here, Pheledra," he finally said.

"Try going over to the right and further out into the water."

"Okay." Red moved out taking his time, "nothing here either."

Pheledra looked at Biltar and shook her head. "Red, go right and ..."

"Wait," Red interrupted, "I've got something ... yes ... it's right under me. I can sense it very well. It's here. Do you want me to just scan the info or get the whole safe?"

"Get the safe if you can," said Pheledra, "scanning would be okay but Biltar would probably like to have the original hard copies."

Biltar shook his head. "Pheledra, that doesn't really matter as long as we retrieve the information."

"Red, go ahead and bring up the safe."

"Okay," said Red.

Biltar was admiring Pheledra and trying not to stare. Her beauty was hypnotic. "All right," he said, "if it's that easy. You people seem to be able to do just about anything."

Pheledra smiled. "Just about."

Red disappeared beneath the muddy water and they waited a few moments. "See anything?" she asked.

"It's a tangled up mess down here. There's some metal ... or wreckage ... the safe is underneath, buried in the mud. I'll have to get some of this stuff out of the way first."

There was a pause and Red spoke again. "This stuff is heavy. I don't know if I can move it. Just a moment. Almost got it. Ohh ..."

"What's wrong, Red?"

There was no answer.

"Red?"

"Oh ... my arm is caught. I can get it loose though. Just a moment. Oh ... I didn't see that!"

"What's going on Red? Are you okay?"

"I ... tried to get my arm loose ... and ... a big piece of metal has pushed me down into the mud. I'm a little stuck but I'll get out okay. Just a moment."

"Red, do you want me to send Orange to help?"

"No need. No need ... I'm okay. I just need to push out a little more. There ... ohhh ... another piece of metal toppled over on me. Oh ... I'm really pinned now ... can't seem to move any way ..."

"Red, I'm sending Orange down to help you!"

"Don't do that Pheledra, he'll get stuck too. It's really a mess down here. Let me try to work myself out. You don't want both of us stuck ..."

Orange was already on his way.

"Oh no, he should have just done a scan." Biltar was upset.

"What can we do?" Fear was in Nelyani's voice. Boots laid back his ears. He didn't like this at all.

Pheledra didn't say anything but stared intently down at the waters. She was feeling some regret and guilt that she had told him to go ahead and get the safe. It was another unfortunate mistake.

When will I ever learn, she thought to herself, I must not lose him.

Orange disappeared below the surface.

"Do you see Red?" Pheledra asked.

"Yeah, he's really stuck," Orange replied.

"Can you get him out?"

"I don't know. He's really stuck bad ... and sinking deep into the mud."

"I'll be all right," said Red, "Orange, just give me your hand so I can pull myself out of this ooze."

"He's going down further, Pheledra!" Orange sounded excited. "The weight of the metal is forcing him down. I ... I ... can't lift this huge ... oh ... he's almost completely under ... what can I do? What can I do?"

"Think ... Orange ... is there anything around that you could use to keep him from slipping further?"

"No, Pheledra ... all these pieces are too heavy - that's the problem!"

Pheledra felt her blood run cold and her heart pounding.

"Red ... is there anything you can hang onto? ... anything you can use to brace yourself or ...?"

"He's completely under!" Orange was stressed. "I'll try to get a grip on him!"

"No, Orange, no!" cried Pheledra. "Don't get yourself in trouble too. Please, Orange."

That's an order. Do you hear me. I order you to cease ... now!"

**Fabby's voice screamed in her mind.
*Pheledra! Pheledra! Danger! Get out now!***

"Ohhh, Pheledra," cried Red, "this thing is crushing me ... taking me down ... oh ... its rupturing my back ... water is coming in ... my circuits will ... short out ... I'm ruptured ... water is coming ..."

At that moment, an explosion of light and heat shot past the recon saucer and another, then another.

"What was that!?" screamed Nelyani.

"It must be a particle beam weapon!" Biltar was intense.

"I'm taking the ship up and moving into fourth density!" cried Pheledra, trying hard to maintain herself, "Red, can you hear me? Red!? Red!?" The ship was already zipping upwards.

"He's gone, Pheledra," said Orange, "crushed and shorted out."

"Get to safety, Orange! We're under attack here! There's a particle beam weapon firing at us!"

Biltar quickly looked around. "The weapon is being fired from the ground! Look! Over there." Biltar pointed to an area of collapsed buildings some distance away.

Pheledra had already boosted them into fourth density and they were invisible to the enemy below, but the weapon continued to

fire randomly hoping to bring them down. She was breathing heavily and struggling to keep her composure and not to cry. "Red is gone. There's no retrieving him now," she said with great sorrow. "The instrumentation on that particle beam weapon must not be functioning properly or we'd already be dead! We *must* go back down and get Orange!" Biltar and Nelyani were shaking, knuckles white from clutching the arms of their seats. Their eyes were big as plates. Nelyani was whimpering. Boots had himself embedded across her chest, panting wide-eyed in a daze. Pheledra shot a quick glance at her monitors. "We have sustained some damage. The Matter Condenser beam circuit is not functioning. We'll have to density shift down into third when we beam Orange up and that won't be a problem, but due to the circuit malfunction we won't be able to upstep back into fourth density, so, we'll be stuck in third for our trip get Nahvar and go back up to the Firefly.

"Pheledra, Pheledra, I'm so scared!" Nel was still clutching Boots who was on full alert, his tail quivering, not knowing what to do.

"We'll get out of this okay," said Pheledra, looking over at the two and trying to sound confident, "just try your best to relax. We're out of immediate danger."

Biltar's eyes were wide with excitement. "Why don't you just blast that installation down there?"

"Can't do that. In the first place, we have no weapons aboard this recon saucer and also, we can't interfere with Miraban life beyond the directives of the mission. Taking a human life is forbidden, unless there is

absolutely no other choice. Otherwise, Fabby and Wave could blast them from the Firefly. But, we're out of immediate danger and there's no reason ... hold on for a micron."

Wave's voice was in her head. Pheledra, we recommend that you allow us to use the tractor beam from the Firefly, we will shift Orange and bring him up to us. It is far too dangerous for you to downstep to get him. You can come back to the Firefly to regroup and then go back.

No, Wave, she telepathed, it will take too long. I told Nahvar that I'd pick him up before sunset ... and ... there's no need to delay the mission. We can do it.

Pheledra, Fabby's thought filled her mind, you are jeopardizing everything including the lives of Biltar and Nelyani. You will not be able to upstep into fourth density until we repair the circuitry. Our consensus is that you should return now and go back later.

Not a chance, Fabby. I will take care of it. We'll have a face to face later. Pheledra shook her head and turned to Biltar. "This is going to be real dangerous ... but we need to go on with the mission. The best thing for us to do is distract the weapon crew below by getting them to fire at something else after we downstep into third density and pick up Orange. I'm going to send out a probe over them and, hopefully, not knowing what it is, they'll fire at it instead of us. I hate to risk losing a probe, but it's a chance I'm willing to take. Do you have any ideas?"

"I don't know enough to have ideas," said Biltar in a shaky voice, "do whatever you think is best."

"I will do it then," she nodded.

Pheledra took the recon saucer back down. They were still in fourth density and would remain there until they would have to downstep in order to pick up Orange. The gun crew below could not detect them as long as they were in fourth density. Orange, still vulnerable, had remained under the water and found a place of safety at the end of the lake, hiding inside an underwater indentation in the bank. His computers were processing the situation and recommending the best thing for him to do.

"We'll go in low," said Pheledra. "They are shooting skyward ... and if we're close enough to the water, we can allude them. They won't think we would ever risk being at such low altitude while fully visible."

Nelyani put her hands over her eyes and let Boots hop down. "It's hard to believe this is really happening," she said.

"This is a awful lot for a little girl to experience," said Pheledra, "but you can do it, Nel. Hang in there."

The saucer came down just above the lake and then materialized into third density.

Pheledra shot out a probe and the particle beam weapons began immediately to fire at it. On the third shot, the probe exploded.

"Orange ... quick! Come out from where you're hiding. I must beam you on board now!"

"Okay," said Orange, "do you have a fix?"

"Yes!"

Orange looked around carefully, and floated out from his underwater hiding place. But before Pheledra could get him beamed aboard, an unexpected blast came down from the sky. It shot right through the water and came very close to Orange, knocking him out of the way. He rushed back to the bank to hide. Another blast missed him but turned him upside down.

"They're firing at us from above!" Biltar cried. "It must be a satellite or a spacecraft. We're totally exposed!"

***Get out of there, Pheledra!* Wave's voice resounded in her head. At the same time an image popped into her mind - it was Nelyani starting to take a bite from a blue apple!**

"Nahvar!"

A tremendous explosion ripped through the ship and they went plowing into the bank, tumbling over and over and over as the recon saucer flew apart. What was left of it came to rest and violently exploded in fire.

When Nelyani came to, she felt terrible pain and unbearable heat. Wreckage entangled her. Fire raged everywhere ... and the black rain began to fall.



Nahvar was living a nightmare. He desperately tried to hold the image of Nelyani eating a blue apple. *Pheledra was so confident. It must work! The image was easy to picture clearly but there was no response. I wonder if I'm doing it right. What could be the problem? Pheledra, I need out of here now!*

The rescue operation had been impossible. Too many trapped people and too few rescuers. While he was sewing up a bleeding victim, someone stole his med bag and from then on he had to improvise with whatever he could find, which wasn't much. There were plenty of people but most of them didn't care about those still stuck in the rubble. Many of the less injured just walked and stared. Some children and teenagers looted items from the dead and others vandalized anything left intact. He carried four victims to immediate safety but when the black rain came, there was no time for any more.

When the first drops began to fall, the people ran into a large basement that still had a roof. The darkness grew. Even the light of lanterns and fires was swallowed by it. The sunset gave way to thick blackness.

Inside, some of the people went mad with fear and despair. A man in the corner next to a small fire pulled out a puncture blaster, shot his wife and then himself. Others fought among themselves over items they had stolen. A wild eyed man broke a bottle over someones head and began threatening Nahvar with the broken end. He cursed and swung the jagged glass at others standing nearby. Finally, he jamed it into his own

throat. Nahvar tried to help but others held him back as the man quickly bled to death.

Everyone seemed to be in terrible emotional crisis and mental confusion. Just as Pheledra had predicted, it was an atmosphere of chaos. The worst part was the despair and the suicides.

Nahvar tried to calm everyone with positive words but no one listened. He talked to a young girl who had helped him with the victims. He spoke of the positive future for Mirabans and the possibilities of a new age; but she, like most of the people there, were frightened by the space ships. They believed them to be an invasion from outer space connected with the dying government trying to maintain control over their minds and lives. As the night wore on, the young girl slept and died. No one knew that she had taken a whole vial of sleeping pills.

Nahvar was worn out and felt he could do no more. Toward morning when the rain stopped briefly, he squeezed himself through a broken window above ground. He was covered with poisonous black mud and did his best to wipe it off, then ran as fast as he could to hide. He found an intact stairwell with a waterproof tarp thrown over the top and ducked in hoping no one had seen him. There he remained -- lost and alone. Feeling utterly abandoned, he cried, "Pheledra, Pheledra, it's been so long! Please hear me!"

Thirty Four - The Indictment

Pheledra knew she wouldn't die. She sensed the glass bubble of the photoron around her and welcomed the shower of healing rays that gently mended the damaged cells of her body. Energy ... all ... is energy ... reorganize ... cells ... remember who you were ... before.

Her mind sank deeper. She was twelve again ... absorbed in sheer liberating fun.

"Catch me if you can, Sevret!" she cried, as she plowed her go-sphere into a huge wave trying to keep up with the dolphins in their joyous frolic. Sevret followed close behind in her go-sphere plowing through one wave and then another. Both girls zoomed up into the sky dripping and shrieking with laughter, infused with the smell of the ocean and the happiness of dolphin wisdom.

"Where'd they go?" Sevret shouted.

"Over there," Pheledra cried, as they headed down once again to play in the joy of life's ocean.

And as the times roll by, awareness grows ... responsibilities emerge.

Oh, Sevret, dear one, don't cry. You do measure up to your intention. The mistakes you made are balanced by the wisdom you gained ... and we soar together, into the sea and into space and into time. So many tears. I love you. Payra and Noctera love you too .. and Helaah ... oh Helaah ... Helaah ... that stupid argument ... you went without me ...

"Fabby, how long has it been?" Wave's voice broke the long silence. "Too long. 2500 zeron. What are we going to do about this hearing?"

Wave looked over at the Protoron where Pheledra, Biltar and Nelyani were being bathed in healing rays. "I sure don't understand all the reasoning behind the decisions that come down from the higher wisdom. In fact, I don't understand anything any more. I had no idea that negative polarities could put in a complaint. But, I guess anyone can. The beings of higher wisdom are ... inscrutable."

Fabby tried to be diplomatic. "I believe those beings see things we don't see and foresee outcomes that are hidden from us."

"Oh really?" asked Wave. "I wonder. All I can do is use the equipment available to me now and make decisions based on that."

"Well," said Fabby, "when Pheledra comes around we'll need to tell her everything. Do you want to do it?"

"No I don't."

"Okay ... okay, Wave, I'll tell her ... I'll have my computers come up with the gentlest way of communicating it."

"I wouldn't be very gentle myself. She's acted like a idiot ... and, frankly, I'm angry and disappointed. There was no need for this and it's beginning to cost me more than I'm willing to pay."

"Okay, Wave. We need to think about the Mirabans and how to tell them about what's happened."

"You tell 'em!"

"All right. I'll explain it to them too."

"I'm going to the workshop and finish putting Violet back together. You talk to 'em. Do whatever you want."

"All right, Wave," said Fabby, "don't be too disappointed. Things have a way of working out ..."

"Yeah," Wave said abruptly as he went out of the med pod.

Fabby looked again at Pheledra and began to whistle a beautiful melody. She was stirring a little. Nel and Biltar had more serious injuries and were still unconscious - bones mending - organs regenerating - burnt flesh peeling away as skin regrew.

"Where ... where?" Pheledra was starting to come around. Her voice was filled with anxiety.

Fabby swung open the bubble. "You are back on the Firefly and emerging from Protoron treatment. How do you feel?"

"What happened?"

"A satellite with particle beam weapons survived. It destroyed the recon saucer and you were almost killed. You were thrown clear but received a bad head injury and a severe case of poisoning from the toxic environment. Biltar and Nelyani are worse

off than you. They were badly mangled and burned. Their hearts stopped beating. We had to quickly revive them. I put in an appeal for a specialist to construct a biological archetype disc for the two of them. An emergency lightship was sent in and he beamed on board the Firefly. With his special equipment we were able to save their lives but just barely. It will take them a while to repair."

Pheledra slowly got out of the Protoron. "Where's Orange and Boots?"

"Boots and Orange are still down there. Boots is very shaken up and barely escaped from the flames when the recon saucer crashed, but he is alive and able to move about. He is very lost and scared. The two of them are separated at the moment but not far from each other. Orange is safe for the time being. He's found an underwater cave and has shut down all communications to prevent detection. They are both very vulnerable because Miraban military units are searching the area."

Pheledra stumbled to her commander's chair and sat. She closed her eyes, sighed and slowly ran her hands up and down the arms. "How could everything go so wrong?"

Aramanda did not appear - but her voice warbled clearly inside Pheledra's head. *You will not listen to me.*

Pheledra barely heard Fabby as he told her about the complaint Lance had filed with the Anadine Galactic Council and the hearing that would now be scheduled as soon as she was well enough.

Fabby held up an official document and handed it to her. She read it carefully.

(1) Pheledra: Light Worker: We the Anadine Galactic Council have scheduled a hearing concerning the destruction of a Kultaki starship.

(2) Treprestas Blasthadus Shaleedas Felance does file grievance against the entire crew of the Firefly. He will be heard.

(3) Likewise, Pheledra , Nestingwave and the Frequency Adjusting Bioborg B -- known as "Fabby" -- will be heard.

(4) Judgement has already been made through the foresight of the Council. However; beings of space and time are allowed to witness the process and at the same time experience the process for the sake of the beneficial lessons learned.

Our record in the past is 100% satisfaction -- even those who are severely reprimanded say that justice was done and the hearing was fair for all. Like all that have gone before you, perspective is allowed and respected.

(5) Pheledra and her entire crew are prohibited from any further involvement with Miraba until the hearing is complete. Pheledra must respond at the earliest possible moment.

"Where is Wave?" Pheledra spoke slowly. She sounded far away.

"He's awfully upset - over in the shop reassembling Violet. He's ... really ... going through something, Pheledra."

"Me too, Fabby. I didn't believe this could happen." Her eyes suddenly darted around. "What about Nahvar? Where's Nahvar?"

"Still down at Vuldecep where you left him ... waiting for you I suppose."

"Fabby, we're going to get him. I'm headed for the observation dome. I must contact him right now."

"We'll talk later," said Fabby. "peace, my dear friend."

Pheledra didn't say anything as she headed up to the observation deck. She already had the picture firmly in mind - Nel biting a blue apple. She sat down putting her hand into the slot on the armrest and headed the Firefly down to Vuldecep. She turned on the psychotronic adjuvant and put on the head piece.

Oh Pheledra? Pheledra! is that finally you? Whats going on? Nahvar's thought was frantic.

Sorry, Nahvar. We're all okay. We had a problem - the Mirabans shot us down. We're up on the Firefly. Nel and Biltar are receiving healing treatment. They will be good as new - with a few stories to tell. We're on our way. Look for us.

"We can't do this Pheledra!" Wave's voice resounded. "You are disobeying the Council. Do you know what that means?"

Pheledra disengaged from the psychotronic adjuvant. "You're full of fear, Wave, the Council is *just* and I'm doing the right thing."

Fabby's voice was in their minds. *The Firefly is slowing down for no apparent reason ... we have stopped, Pheledra. The Council is pulling us back.*

Wave glared at Pheledra but said nothing.

"No need to worry, Wave," she said, getting into a relaxed position, "they'll just gently take us back in. We're safe in their hands. My worry is about Nahvar."

"You got him into this mess," said Wave. "Just like you got us into this mess through your arrogance and stupidity. All this is your fault, you know. Everything was going fine until you started playing miss captain!"

"We'll talk about it Wave - and see if we can retune our perspectives - so we can resume our teamwork. Right now, I'm going to check on Nel and Biltar."

Pheledra slid down to the control deck. Inky and Ginger followed.

Nestingwave closed his eyes and nodded. "Yeah ... well ... it's *your* perspective that's out of tune."

Thirty Five - Some Decisions

The shadows grew long between the mountains of Avengarone. Cobishandra trembled as she rubbed ointment upon Anadia's blistered face. The burns themselves were not bad, only superficial. It was the way they happened that frightened

Cobi. Ana was upset by it too. The new found gift clearly had its dangerous side.

"Oh Ana," said Cobi, "you've been through so much physical torment. The cat scratches on your face, then your arm and now this. Do you need another pain shot?"

"No, love. This little pain is nothing. No worse than a sun bake. It'll be gone tomorrow ... but the vision won't be gone. Lance has complained to the Anadine Galactic Council concerning the loss of our starship."

"What does it mean?"

"There's a lot to it, Cobi, and Pheledra needs to know as soon as possible. She and her crew are already being manipulated and don't know it."

A bell sounded indicating an anomaly. They quickly looked through the videoscopes and watched the Firefly as it was being drawn backwards.

"The Anadine Galactic Council is preventing them from getting Nahvar," said Ana.

"The Council wants them to stay put until the issue is resolved. Pheledra tried to get to him anyway."

"Now, there is one determined do-gooder," said Cobi with a strong nod.

They continued to watch as the Firefly was being drawn back to its original location. It was as if an invisible hand had gently picked up a toy and said "no no."

"I must try again to telepath," said Ana.

"Okay, my love."

This time Ana didn't go to the back of the scout craft. She simply closed her eyes and searched for Pheledra's frequencies. She found them but was still unable to communicate.

As she tapped upon the door of Pheledra's consciousness, Ana perceived a war raging inside that soul. She felt a longing affinity. At that moment she knew beyond any doubt that Pheledra would be victorious regardless of the Council's judgement - and knew the same was true of herself and Cobi, because an eternal bond was being born.

"We're going to get Nahvar," she suddenly said, opening her eyes.

"But Ana, Nahvar has never even seen a Kultaki. We'd probably scare him to death."

"Well," said Ana, "we'll do it the old way."

"Abduct him?"

"Sudden captivity. No questions. No resistance."

"Okay ... then we'll take him to the Firefly."

As they lifted off Avengarone, Cobi smiled at Ana. "I know why I'm doing this. Although I love you more than life ... I need ... we need ... friends."

Ana's gaze was fixed far away upon the blackness of space, as she slowly nodded twice.

Thirty Six - Abduction Defections

In the former industrial town of Vuldecep, Nahvar sat with his back against the wall. It was beginning to clear. The sun was trying to break through. He had no idea how many suns had past. This was the first one he could see. Again, Pheledra had failed him.

Out of the dark northern sky, a light appeared and Nahvar's heart sped with expectation. He formed the picture of Nelyani biting into a blue apple.

Pheledra had just checked on Biltar and Nelyani when the image flashed strongly. She donned the headpiece. *Nahvar, again I'm so sorry, the Anadine Galactic Council is preventing me from getting you ...*

Pheledra, what do you mean? his impressions returned, *I see a light, it must be the Firefly!*

You see a light? It's definitely not us!

Not you!? What is it then?

I don't know ..., Pheledra was perplexed.

just a minute ... a light ..., Nahvar gasped as he was bathed in brightness, then spiraled upward as he lost consciousness.

Pheledra erupted from her chair shouting. "Fabby, scan down and see what's happening to Nahvar!"

"It's a Kultaki scout craft, Pheledra. It was the one that went to Avengarone. It's right

on Nahvar's location ... Pheledra! I believe it's Ana and Cobi... they're getting Nahvar!"

"What!?" Immediately, Pheledra searched for Ana's mind and found it easily.

Ana, Ana, I'm so sorry. I've made a horrible mistake! I thought you were dead. I can't tell you the elation I feel knowing that you and Cobi are still alive!

Ana's voice was strong in her head. *We've got Nahvar. We're bringing him up to the Firefly. Cobi and I need sanctuary. We want to help you and I have important information.*

How's Nahvar? Pheledra felt the energy of excitement running through her body, producing goose flesh on her arms.

He's unconscious - our doing - for easy transport. He's been poisoned by the black rain but has no radiation sickness nor any injuries. The deadly cloud from the meltdown missed this area. He's scared and worn out. He hasn't seen us. We're bringing him up.

"Fabby, prepare the Protoron, they're bringing him up!"

"But, Pheledra," said Fabby, "we have no biological archtype disc for Nahvar!"

"That's okay. Just use a general program to purify his blood. Ana says he's okay except for being exposed to the black rain."

"I'll have it set in a micron."

The Firefly was back in the exact place from where it had left, in the upper atmosphere of Miraba. Pheledra started to go up to the observation deck when Wave slid down.

"We need to talk, Wave," Pheledra said quickly.

He went right past her without a word right into the shop to continue working on Violet. Pheledra went on up through the hatch. Inky and Ginger followed and settled down on their pillows watching everything.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, through the observation dome, Pheledra saw the scout craft come near and slow.

We will take you into the Firefly. Pheledra was using the psychotronic adjuvant to insure that the details of her docking instructions would be completely understood and also to insure that their communications were not monitored. *Pull up underneath us and fly in as soon as you see the bottom open. Fabby will get Nahvar into the Protoron and I'll beam you two up onto the observation deck. We can talk.*

She took off the headpiece and set the controls for the transfer station to beam up the two Kultaki women. Soon, they materialized on the pad and stood before her.

Pheledra couldn't say anything, only gaze at the two Kultaki women in amazement. Her soul was filled with joy. She gestured for them to come and sit around the small round table. She just looked at Ana and Cobi for a long time. How foolish she'd been to discount them. Now, they were suddenly the

most important part of the picture. Pheledra felt new hope.

Ana looked back at Pheledra, drinking in her mind. Cobi was very nervous and kept glancing back and forth between the two, wondering what Pheledra would say.

"You are here by your own free will?" Pheledra asked. "Yes," replied Ana, "we want to join forces with you. We fear Lance and ... I'm curious."

"Cobi," said Pheledra, "I can tell you are a bit doubtful about all this. I hope you will feel better soon. I won't bite and neither will the Council. They are watching all this, so we must do everything properly and not overstep our bounds. Right now, you are here because of Ana, am I right?"

"Yes," Cobi finally said after a long pause.

"Do you realize that your devotion and love for her already makes you in violation of your negative polarity and the Kultaki code of conduct?" Cobi nodded slowly. "I don't care," she said, "Lance will try to kill me now because I helped her and stole the scout craft. He will consider me to be a traitor worthy of death ... or worse. I don't understand you, but Ana thinks she does ... and ... she has some information for you. I am here because I no longer have a choice. She is here by choice. Where she goes, I must go because ... she's all I've got."

"I understand, Cobi. This is amazing me as much as it is you. Just try to remain open to what these synchronicities may bring. I was told from a higher source that something unusual was occurring between polarities. I

tried to put it out of my mind ... but ... this must be it. Let's watch together as it unfolds."

"Fair enough," said Cobi.

"Pheledra," Ana said, "I want you to know that Lance is using a very powerful type of energetic mind-control. Two doctors who are specialists in psychology have downloaded some new technology. Lance is influencing minds by enhancing psychological tendencies already present in the subconscious. Have you been experiencing any anomalies?"

"Yes, Ana come to think of it, indeed I have ... my whole crew has."

Just then, Fabby came up from below.
"Pheledra, the Council is calling for us. They say that Anadia and Cobishandra are also being called before them as material witnesses. The Council will talk to us one at a time and then together. They want Lance, Cobi and Ana first, then you, then me and finally Wave. Lance is going before them now. Cobi and Ana will be called next. We are all to remain here until summoned."

"Oh no," said Cobi, "if they make us rejoin Lance we're dead!"

"Cobi," said Pheledra, "the Council will not force you to do anything against your will. You need to decide right now what you really want."

Cobi looked at Ana then at Pheledra. "I want ... I want to discover what Ana's discovering. I want to know her soul ... and your soul. That is my choice."

"Okay," said Pheledra, "don't worry about anything. Just open up and be honest about what's inside you. They already know and are just waiting for you, and me, to bring an honest assessment of our own situation. I've got some tall explaining to do. More than you."

Pheledra looked intently at Ana and Cobi as they agreed. "Regardless of how this turns out, I respect you two and always will. It is I who have erred and I must own up to it."

Just as Pheledra finished her sentence they all heard a clear and gentle voice within their minds.

We are the Anadine Galactic Council. Private interviews are the protocol at this moment. After you have been heard individually, everyone will attend a group session for discussion and final judgement. We have finished our private interview with Ambassador Felance. Because of pressing business, he is being allowed to return to his ship and will be summoned again for the group session. If anyone else has the necessity to do likewise, please inform us now.

Pheledra slightly shook her head, knowing that the Council already knew what was in their minds.

Very well. Now we summon Anadia and Cobishandra. Come into our midst!

An intense light filled the room. Ana and Cobi were gone. "Fabby, how's Nahvar?" asked Pheledra.

"He's undergoing Proton treatment. He's still unconscious and knows nothing about what's going on. It's probably better that way."

"Have you talked to Wave?"

"He's hurt and bitter at the moment. He won't talk to me at all now. It's probably best to just leave him alone for the time being. He'll be all right once this business with the Council is over."

"I hope you're right, Fabby." Pheledra sounded very sad.

Pheledra tried to call upon Aramanda in her mind but there was no response. *Aramanda is no longer dealing with me*, she thought. *She's left me on my own to work through this*. Pheledra gathered her emotions. "Fabby, Orange and Blue will be in charge of the Firefly while we are up before the Council."

"Good," he replied.

Wave came up through the hatch. "So, this is the moment of reckoning eh?"

"It'll be all right," said Fabby.

"Oh sure, Fabby, it'll be all right. But how do we regain what we've lost? Tell me that. We can't just pretend all this hasn't happened, can we?"

Pheledra tried to improve his attitude. "Wave, something wonderful is happening. Cobi and Ana have requested sanctuary. They're somehow ... switching polarities."

"That's impossible!" Wave said. "It just can't happen! You know that as well as I do! This is nothing but confusion and we're all mixed up!"

"Wave," said Pheledra, "Lance has been using mind-control. He is enhancing some of our inner psychological tendencies. Perhaps our arguments and disagreements were ...magnified? ..."

"There you go again! You're tryin' real hard to wiggle out of any responsibility, aren't you?"

"No, Wave ... I just want to make things right ... between us ... and ..."

"I'm not saying anything else!" Nestingwave got a glass of geyser water and sat down at the little table.

Fabby sat next to him and tried to reason. "Wave ... let's just ... don't try to anticipate anything. We don't really understand what's happening. Things are changing, and ..."

"Shut up, robot! Leave me alone!"

"Certainly," said Fabby, "we'll talk later. Just tell the Council what's on your mind."

"You already know what I'll tell 'em."

"Wave, please don't feed your guilt and bitterness," Fabby pleaded.

"The truth is the truth. I am guilty and miss smarty here totally botched her mission."

Fabby looked at Pheledra. Her hands were on her forehead and her eyes tightly shut.

Nestingwave shrugged as the voice of the Council filled the room.

Pheledra, come into our midst.

A bright light filled the observation dome and Pheledra vanished.

"I'm next," said Fabby looking over at Wave. He grunted and took another drink of geyser water.

After awhile, they called Fabby. The summons took him and Wave was left alone on the observation deck. He went over to the communicator but hesitated a moment, then opened a channel to Ambassador Lance.

The Ambassador looked very relaxed. Ranilla and another Kultaki girl sat beside him. "Well ... hello, Mr. Nestingwave. I'm surprised to hear from you." He glanced at the two girls beside him. "Oh ... this is Ranilla and Petuva." He squeezed them and they both giggled a little. "Is everything all right with you?"

"Yes. You know, your Excellency, I ... I feel somewhat responsible for what happened to your starship ... and ... I'm being called before the Council any moment now and ... I thought ... well ... I thought I would talk to you a little first."

"Well, Wave, I'm glad you called me. I was thinking about you and your situation. It seems you and the crew of the Firefly have been at each other's throats lately. I must confess that ... indeed, I've been a little responsible for that. I'm doing a bit of experimentation with this new thought machine and ... well ... it brings out

tendencies that people may not know they have. Very interesting."

"Yes, we heard about that. I guess you can get away with it because you don't actually put anything into a person's mind but merely enhance what's already there?"

"Enhance ... yes ... that's the word ... *enhance*. Very revealing, eh?" He smiled and squeezed Petuva.

The Ambassador looked back at Wave.
"How's your sex life, Wave?"

"My sex life!? Well, I'm an older man, you know and ..."

"Nonsense! Wave, you just need to get out of that box you stay in. You need to open up a little. Look at this beautiful thing." The Ambassador ran his clawed fingers across Petuva's face and she rippled with self pastels. "She's been good for me, Wave. And I'll bet she'd be good for you too. It might give us a common ground, so to speak ... to view one another's perspective. She's very mammalian, you know." The Ambassador pulled her top down to expose her breasts.

"Well ... I ..." Nestingwave was a bit shocked and embarrassed.

"Look ... it's going to be a little while before the Council calls you. Besides, this new thought machine has some really incredible capabilities. I can manipulate time. Oh yes. I can compress many zeron into a fraction of a fraction of a micron. If you wanted to, you could come on over here and ... meet Petuva

and I'd have you back before the Council calls you."

"I couldn't do that, Your Excellency ... uh ..."

"Oh sure you could, Wave. Then, later at the joint hearing of the Council, we can all talk and iron things out. What do you say?"

"Well..."

"Ah come on. No one needs to know. Get a little wild. I'll bet you want to, right?"

"I've, ah, never done anything like that before..."

"See what I mean? You're trying to live in a box that just doesn't fit. Come on."

Wave thought for a few moments and then said, "Pheledra and her pride is responsible for all this ... and ..."

"No Wave ... I'm not going to talk to you anymore unless you come on over here and get a little relaxation. It'll take your mind off your worries and help you to think clearly."

Wave looked around. He hadn't counted on this. "Look, Ambassador, I really don't have the time ..."

"Time ... time ... a fraction of a micron? Come on, be real."

There was an eternity of silence. Then, Nestingwave made his choice.

"Beam me on over, then. I'll be on the transfer pad in four microns."

"You'll be glad you did, friend. You'll be glad you did."

When Wave materialized aboard the Kultaki command carrier, the Ambassador, Ranilla and Petuva were all smiles.

"Welcome, my friend," said the Ambassador, who stepped forward to shake Nestingwave's hand. "From now on, you can call me 'Lance', and I'll call you 'Wave' okay? Petuva has something to show you ... down in the spa. Just you and her. Go along."

Petuva smiled, put Wave's arm around her shoulder, ran her hand across his behind and led him down through a hatch toward a small private room with a full view of space and lots of crystal fixtures with aerated hot water.

When they were out of sight, the Ambassador smiled. "He's a great guy. It's always wonderful to make new friends. It broadens my perspective."

Ranilla looked at him for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

Thirty Seven - Her Testimony

Pheledra found herself seated at a large round table. The atmosphere was peaceful, relaxed. The Council up in the gallery were fully materialized as ordinary men and women and appeared to be kind and concerned. Both polarities were represented on the Council but it was impossible to tell which was which.

Pheledra, a soothing voice said in her head, *just tell us what happened.*

"Well, I was given a mission to Miraba - by the council of higher wisdom - to help out in the transformation and ascension of the planet. On the way, we were invaded by an astral roach. We found out that it was sent to us as a gift by Ambassador Felance. He had some notion about testing our wits. To him, it appeared to be great sport. But, the astral roach almost destroyed our ship. After we blasted the roach with our disrupters, it morphed into three cockroach looking creatures which then shrunk to microscopic size. When they appeared again, they merged into one huge creature, ate one of our tachyon tubes and severely damaged another. One of my crew, Nestingwave, came up with a plan to disperse the astral roach back into the Kultaki Star Ship from whence it came. It was all a big ... game with Lance. He was confident that he could deal with it through his superior technology and we had no reason to doubt it. We were desperate. Wave's plan worked and the roach went back into the Kultaki starship. Later, we were horrified to see the huge ship explode. We had no intention of harming them in any way and I'm very sorry that it caused the death of so many. I do believe that it was Ambassador Felance's fault in the first place for ever sending it to us. We were only defending ourselves and thought Lance would have no problem handling the astral roach which came from him."

How do you personally feel about what's happened?

"Indeed ... I have been negligent. I would not listen to my crew when they tried to tell me that perhaps we were somewhat responsible for what happened. We ... argued. I think, in part, the controversy was due to mind-control being directed against us by Ambassador Felance."

In fourth density, mind control only works with willing subjects.

"Yes, I am aware of that. However, we ... have issues within us ... that only came out when they were amplified."

Why did you not see that you might have some responsibility?

Pheledra hesitated. "Well ... I guess ... I was focusing on my mission ... and ... really didn't want to hear distractions. It all seemed like something initiated by Ambassador Felance to keep the mission from happening. They were losing their power base of deception and control. The Ambassador was trying everything to prevent that from happening."

Doesn't he have a right to do that, since the people of Mirada invited such control?

"Yes, I suppose it's his right to do that ... but he almost killed us ... and we responded. We defended ourselves which is also our right."

Every being in the universe has a right to self-defense, but ... how much real danger were you in?

"Considerable danger, I would say. The roach ate one tube and damaged another. Four tachyon tubes can't deliver enough

power to get us back through the worm hole through which we entered into the Adadine Galaxy."

How much do you know about tachyon propulsion?

"Frankly, very little. We know it works but we don't know exactly how. It is still somewhat of a mystery to us."

Thank you, Pheledra. You will now be escorted to a waiting room while Fabby and Nestingwave are interviewed. We have already heard testimony from Ambassador Felance as well as Anadia and Cobishandra. At the end, we will all come together to hear the judgements of the Council and then you will be sent on your way according to the judgments rendered. Understand that this Council is only interested in issues being raised about the destruction of the Kultaki starship. No other issues interest us at this time. We enforce the equanimity of positive and negative polarities and see to it that boundaries are maintained. The question in your mind concerning entities switching polarities cannot be answered by us. Hear the wisdom of the Anadine Galactic Council!

A young lady escorted Pheledra out of the judgement hall to a waiting room.

They went passed Fabby who was just being brought in. She wondered what he would say. She knew what Wave would say. Inwardly she felt very disturbed but tried to shake it off. She couldn't.

Thirty Eight - Friendly Persuasion

"Well, hello, Wave! Did you and Petuva have a good time?" The Ambassador smiled as Petuva and Wave entered his chambers. He and Ranilla were stretched out on a couch but he got to his feet and came over to Wave. "Go ahead and sit down, Wave."

The Ambassador looked at Ranilla and then Petuva. "You girls leave us alone for a little while - go play with yourselves or something."

The two girls left while the Ambassador sat himself in a chair across from Wave.

"I really do have to be going now," said Wave, "the Council ..."

"Look out that window," said the Ambassador, nodding toward an oval shaped viewing glass of space, "do you see anything moving?"

"No ..."

"Well, that's because we are all in a speed up. All this is happening in a fraction of a micron, Wave. The Council won't be calling you for quite a while." He chuckled dryly. "We have plenty of time to chat."

Wave looked out the window. Indeed, nothing was moving at all. Usually, there was some sense of motion from the relationship between the ship and other ships as well as planets and moons, but

now everything seemed to be frozen in place, standing still.

"It looks like you really have sped up time," Wave said, "I hope you don't think you can influence me ... I mean ... because of Petuva ... I ..."

"She's good, isn't she? I'll bet she turned your head around a few times!"

"Well ... frankly ... yes, she's incredible."

The Ambassador laughed. "Wave, you and I have a lot in common. Even more than that beautiful girl. Ah ... can't get her out of my mind myself. Firey ... hot ... you know what I mean."

"Yes ... but ..."

"Wave, I really want to know something that only you can tell me."

"What's that?"

"What's happening to Pheledra? Has she gone bonkers?"

"I dunno. She's acting snooty, like she knows it all. It's making her irresponsible."

"Oh, that's too bad. But it happens. Give some people a little power and, well ... you know."

"Lance, I'm really sorry for what happened to your starship. It was my idea to dispense the roach back to you. I ... I do feel somewhat responsible."

"Oh, Wave, forget it! No need for guilt. It was just as much my fault as it was yours. I should have known better than to allow you to toss it back to us. Like Pheledra, I guess I was a bit arrogant ... and it wrought disaster."

Lance's contenance grew more serious. "My superior would like to see me do something to make the situation better. I thought I'd try a new method. Something that would help the people of Miraba who are now in such a chaotic state. This mind machine enables me to gently persuade. No force, no coercion, no fear inducing violence. Just logical planning and a consensus of opinion."

"Are you trying to regain control?"

"Oh no, Wave, I've seen the light on that! Now I understand that the best way is not to ... control, but to guide. I wish to offer my services to guide the good folks of Miraba back into some kind of order."

"Really? I guess it's pretty traumatic to suffer the great personal loss you've experienced."

"Oh, yes. Not only did my starship blow up, but Cobishandra took Anadia and ran out on me. I was overly ... shall we say ... harsh. I disciplined Anadia in the Old Way. I would have gladly taken her back and even downloaded the technology to regrow her arm, but Cobi came into the picture and now they're both traitors. It really hurts to have those you love turn against you."

"Yes," said Wave, "Pheledra, Fabby and I used to have a wonderful relationship, but

now all that seems to be gone. Somehow ... trust is gone."

"You feel guilty ... don't you Wave?"

"Yes ... a little, because after all, it was my idea to dispense that roach back into your ship."

The Ambassador gazed thoughtfully through the viewing window out into space. "You know, Wave, we have incredible technology. We can even change a person's genetics to, ah, balance them out a little. Make them happier ... more confident. I could have my specialists give you a little treatment that would bolster you right up. No more guilt. No more uncertainty. That's your problem, Wave, you need to enjoy life more, assert yourself more, achieve more. No more self-loathing, guilt or shame - just confidence, discipline and personal power. Empowerment leads to concrete accomplishment, you know. You have so much potential. I can help you if you want me to."

"Well, I know that reptilian genes are necessary, and that balance is good. I've always thought of myself as being quite balanced but lately ... I wonder."

"Well, just think about it. I want you to know that I'm here to help you if you need me."

"Okay. Listen, I'd better be getting back don't you think?"

"Oh, we have plenty of time. I'd like to ask you something before you go."

"Go ahead."

"What is your understanding of spiritual polarities? Does anyone ever switch sides ... really?"

"That's a good question, Lance. Anadia really does seem to be switching polarity. I'm skeptical, though. I don't see how a fourth density person who has already made their spiritual decision in third density can suddenly up and switch. I guess, if a person wills hard enough to do so, they can ... but I don't know about Anadia. Certainly not Cobishandra."

"It puzzles me. There are many things that are mysterious to us as well. We have a lot to offer as far as wisdom is concerned. But not too many people are willing to learn anything from us. Not like you. You are the exception. I'm really amazed at your intelligence and foresight ... and openness. You're so much more generous than most folks of positive polarity. They tend to judge us unmercifully and put us into a category or a box of their own limited perspectives and opinions."

Wave nodded slightly. "I've heard from others, and even witnessed myself, that you are somewhat unmerciful, even brutal."

"What you've heard about us is mostly not true. We're strong, yes. Unmerciful? That's a limited viewpoint. Brutal? Disciplined, yes, but *brutal*? I guess it all depends on how you view life. We are energetic and forward thinking. Sometimes that requires harshness, strictness, to insure that the job gets done properly. Some interpret that as *brutality*, I suppose. But ... we really don't hate other beings. Not at all. Not at all. We appreciate them for their many ... talents."

"Well, I like hearing you say that, but you're also known to lie, right?"

"Lie? Oh, Wave ... there is only one truth in this universe (bless the name of the One). Everything else is a lie. Reality is flexible. The truth we speak takes into consideration the consciousness and understanding of everyone. If I tell you I'll give you something and don't deliver, did I lie? Not necessarily. Perhaps when I promised, I really meant it but when I didn't deliver, it was because things changed. Things always change. This universe never remains static. A situation that exists today may not exist tomorrow. What is true for today may not be true for tomorrow when you consider that truth is for everyone's benefit in the moment. The moment, Wave ... that's where truth lies. I'll bet you found that out when Petuva shook you up!"

"She's a real fireball all right. I forgot about everything!."

"Good! That's exactly what you needed! A pleasant break. Look, I'll get you back now, but I'd like to talk to you some more. Nobody needs to know about this. It's just between us. We can have these little conversations in a fraction of a fraction of a micron ... anytime. Here's a code to contact me. Just think of a black flag with a solid red circle in the center. That will immediately alert me that you want to talk. And ... oh, I almost forgot. Remember what I told you? I've got two doctors that can do wonders for you - and no one would ever know. All they'd know is that Nestingwave began to blossom and fulfill his true potential. Just think about that."

"Okay, I'll think about it. You'd better get me back now."

"Just step on over there on the pad and I'll beam you right back. Don't forget - just visualize a black flag with a solid red circle in the center."

"I'll remember."

Thirty Nine - Galactic Judgement

Wave materialized back on the Firefly. He was amazed at himself for not feeling guilty about his encounter with Petuva. To be honest with himself, he liked her. He even felt a little calmer about his role in the destruction of the Kultaki starship. He really had no idea that his actions would cause such a catastrophe. Lance had really been very generous in his attitude.

He must realize that I really had no murderous intentions nor hatred toward the Kultaki, Wave reasoned with himself, it was a mistake ... a mistake that had unforeseen results.

Still, he couldn't shake off the gnawing within.

He slid down to the control deck to check on the Droids and had just started back up to the observation dome when he heard the voice booming in his head.

We, the Anadine Galactic Council, now summon Nestingwave.

He found himself in the waiting room with the others and managed a slight smile as he saw Fabby give him a thumbs up.

A few moments later, a young lady came to escort him before the Council. As the door closed behind, Pheledra closed her eyes and yearned for communication, seeking him desperately with her consciousness. He was no where to be found. She ached with sadness.

After awhile, Lance materialized across from them having been summoned. He was in full Ambassadorial attire and sat in the chair opposite Fabby, lightly tapping his staff twice upon the floor.

“Hello there,” he said softly as his red eyes moved across them. Fabby smiled, Pheledra was occupied, Cobishandra quickly looked away and Anadia boldly looked him straight in the eye, challenging him to a staring contest.

No one spoke.

After some time, the voice of the Council resounded within them.

We have heard individual testimony and will now bring all parties together for final arguments and the revelation of the judgement imposed by the wisdom of the Anadine Galactic Council.

Five young women entered from side doors and escorted them into the Hall of Judgement. Wave was already there and looked sad and conflicted. They sat around a huge table while the Council looked on

from the gallery and the voice spoke in their minds.

There was kindness in the voice. Each word and sentence was delivered in crystal clarity, giving pause for thought, emotional feeling and contemplation.

We have heard each individual perspective in this case. Everyone has voiced their opinions. Truth and untruth are found in all. To strike a meaningful balance, we must synthesize. All are now free to speak at any time. Restraint will be up to each individual. Questions may be asked. Your prompt responses appreciated.

Ambassador Felance, what was your motivation in sending the astral roach to the Firefly?

The Ambassador cleared his throat. "The 'astral roach', as you refer to it, was a gift to celebrate our historic encounter."

"That is a lie!" shouted Cobishandra, mustering all her courage. "The Ambassador wanted to hinder Pheledra's mission. Anadia and I personally heard Ambassador Felance talk of this many times."

Pheledra spoke up. "There is no doubt in my mind. Ambassador Felance wanted to stop my mission at all costs."

The Ambassador shook his head. "That is ridiculous. We already knew of the coming cataclysm. Our power base was doomed anyway. Exchanging gifts is a common practice between alien cultures. I gave her a priceless gift, accomplishment in

overcoming. I was sure she would have no real problem with it. She is not only smart but wise - well able to handle that little bug. It was a gift of love ... and great sport too."

"It scared us plenty," said Wave, "and I wanted to get rid of it quick. It put me under - wiped out my memory. The damn thing was dangerous. Sure, I got rid of it ... but ... I did it in the wrong way. It caused the Kultaki starship to explode and kill so many beings. I feel guilt for this. I know I'm somewhat responsible. I certainly never intended for such a thing to happen. I ... I've gotten to know some of the Kultaki ... and I am so sorry."

"Look," said Fabby pointing to himself. "I am a friend of this man Wave. He is not solely responsible for this. Pheledra and I are equally guilty because we assented. We did not object to Wave's idea. We bear equal responsibility with him. But none of us should be called into account for it because the Ambassador's distorted gift was well beyond our capability to handle and he knew it. Through a supreme effort of cooperation, teamwork and sheer luck, we were able to return it, believing he knew how to destroy it. I personally feel no guilt at all. We were trying to save our lives."

Anadia blazed out of her seat. "And now you shall hear from me!" She pointed directly at Lance with the stub of her left arm, still oozing through the bandage. "This Ambassador Felance enslaved and sexually abused Cobi and myself for hundreds of annoms. Then he stuck my arm into a meat grinder and tried to torture me to death. Cobi, my friend, objected and saved me by taking one of our scout ships so that we

could escape with our lives. He is a twisted fiend who betrays his own kind. He should be sanctioned!"

Order! Order! We are not here to review personality disputes. We remind you that the purpose of this hearing is the destruction of the Kultaki starship. This is our sole purpose. If you have other problems, work them out. We are the Anadine Galactic Council - we only respond to formal complaints of merit.

Everyone fell silent. A few moments passed and when no one else spoke, the voice of the Council resounded.

And here is our judgement: All rise.

Everyone got to their feet silently.

Ambassador Felance, we are very sorry for the destruction of your starship and the thousands of deaths it caused. Had everyone been a bit more prudent, it wouldn't have happened at all.

Ambassador Felance, why would you bring such a reckless gift? But it was not a gift at all but a weapon. A weapon with which you intended to do harm. You are hereby prohibited from extending your influence to planet Miraba. We suggest that you move elsewhere. Your intentions were untruthful. Therefore, Pheledra has a measure of power over you.

Pheledra, you were not being careful. You played games with the negative polarity and thereby violated the Cosmic edicts. You play-acted to get your own way and encouraged others to do the same. You

used deception to gain an advantage, exactly like Ambassador Felance. This demonstrates a lack of trust in your inner light. Perhaps what is happening at this most present moment is the consequence of that lack of faith and trust. Your decisions were flawed because there was a far better way for you had you resorted to logic instead of emotional expediency. A way which would have prevented this whole tragedy.

You should have simply told Ambassador Felance the truth. He would have gladly helped you dispose of the roach. You should have reminded him of his lawful obligation to never initiate conflict with positive polarities. Such a reprimand would have been sufficient to bring Ambassador Felance to his senses. He would have helped you and the roach would have been dissolved before it grew out of control because of feasting on the Firefly's tachyon energy.

In addition, Pheledra, you are irresponsible for coming into the Anadine Galaxy with a method of propulsion that is a mystery to you. This is dangerous for you and for other beings.

Pheledra, in view of all this, Ambassador Felance has a measure of power over you. You are hereby prohibited from completing your mission on Miraba as a lightworker. You may go to Miraba for the sake of picking up the members of your crew who are stranded there. Also, the Mirabans now on board your ship must be returned to Miraba when it is safe to do so. After you have done that, you may never again fly to Miraba and you may not order any one else to go there,

including your machines. We advise you to leave. Understand that you and Ambassador Felance have opened to each other's influence and created karma with which we will not interfere. You, Pheledra and you, Ambassador Felance, brought it on yourselves. You are responsible for your own actions and must own up to the consequences, whatever they may be. So, the Council will let it stand where it is.

This concludes the wise judgements of the Anadine Galactic Council.

Forty- New Tensions

A brilliant light swallowed them. When it subsided, Pheledra was back on the observation deck of the Firefly along with Fabby, Wave, Ana and Cobi. They all just stared at one another for a moment.

Pheledra broke the tension. "Fabby, check on our Miraban guests and bring up a nice meal of fruit and protein bars. Meanwhile, we'll stand around and chat. Wave, could you get us all something to drink?"

"All right," said Wave as Fabby nodded and went down the hatch.

"I had a terrible flashback when I saw Lance again," said Ana, "not only did I momentarily relive the horror and pain but remembered everything, even a few positive moments during those ages of bondage. Now, I have tasted freedom and could never go back, even though the future is so uncertain."

"Lance is isolated and doesn't even know it," said Cobi. "What a lonely place to be - never opening up to another soul."

"He's just playing a game," said Wave, as he poured the cold geyser water. "He has his own inner satisfaction, I'm sure."

"Power and control over others is what he lives for," said Pheledra, "he will always find someone to dominate. That is the essence of negative spiritual polarity."

"He's already replaced us," said Ana, "we, like all his relationships, were nothing but meat to him."

"Well," said Wave as he set the water pitcher down, "isn't self-interest a part of every relationship?"

"Yes," said Pheledra, "a part of every relationship - but when it is out of balance it hurts and damages others."

Thoughts of her love for Helaah came into her mind but she dared not entertain them.

"I can testify to that." Ana said, holding up her bandaged stub.

"Well..." added Wave, "apparently he seeks balance by using his own set of scales - ha ha. No pun intended."

Pheledra smiled a little. "Yes, Wave, that's the problem. The certainty of Universal Law is well beyond his reach because he chose to stop short. He continually swims in the low vibrations of instant self-gratification and believes he has reached the pinnacle of all life."

"I don't understand any of this," said Cobishandra, "all I know is that I want to love and be loved in return."

"That is a very open and genuine thing to say, Cobi," Ana said softly.

"Yes," replied Pheledra, "that is the deep inner longing of every entity regardless of genetics or polarity. In this regard, we're all in the same."

Cobishandra looked at Anadia. "I don't know what I'm becoming but I love Ana. She is the best part of everything I want to be. My love for her is becoming a new life. There is no denying that it is a scary new life that I don't understand - but this love is stronger than fear, Pheledra. Now that I've met you and your crew, I am much more at ease. Ana touched your soul and it changed her life. For the first time, after ages of being together but apart, she and I touched souls also. Please tell us what you need and we will do it."

"Yes," said Ana, "that's why we're here."

Pheledra was deeply moved as she looked upon the two Kultaki women and slowly nodded twice.

"What are you thinking, Pheledra!?" Wave was adamant. "You cannot allow them to complete your mission. They're not even lightworkers and they come from negative polarity!"

"I'm thinking," said Pheledra, "that the most important thing is for Miraba to have those energy devices and the Council won't allow me to do it."

"Pheledra!" Wave insisted, "these two will betray you as soon as a better deal comes along! What are you thinking? Have you gone mad?"

She looked intently at the two women and said softly, "No Wave ... you are wrong ... this is what Aramanda spoke of. Yes, it is peculiar. It is strange. But my spirit confirms it. There's a big yes inside me, Wave. The judgement of the Council was correct. I do not deserve to finish this mission because my self-interest has indeed disqualified me. My pride overshadowed my reason - and I did not listen to you nor to Fabby. That was wrong and foolish - and I apologize. But ... I cannot ignore this synchronicity. I have no idea how it will turn out ... but I'm going with it, Wave. What you do is your own decision. I need you, if you can still work with me. But ... if you can't ... I understand. It's not your fault but mine."

Wave didn't respond. He sat down at the big conference table and held his head.

"Pheledra, Pheledra, I'm all better!" Nelyani's voice resounded even before she bounded up through the hatch.

"Oh Nel, I'm so glad to see you," said Pheledra, as she gave Nel a big hug. "I want you to meet some friends."

"Hello," said Nelyani. She was a more than a little surprised when she saw Ana and Cobi and gasped.

Ana extended her good hand with a warm greeting. "Hello Nel, my name is Anadia, this is Cobishandra."

Nelyani shook hands a little reluctantly. She glanced at Ana's bandaged stub and then turned to Pheledra. "Who are they?"

"These are two very special Kultaki women, Nel. They have decided to help with the mission. A lot has been happening while you were healing in the Protoron. Our plans have changed - but everything's okay - oh, and that's our good friend and companion Nestingwave."

"Hello, Nel," said Wave rising from the table. "It's wonderful to finally see you healed." Wave came over and shook her hand.

"I feel like I already know you," said Nelyani, "Pheledra talked so much about you and Fabby - he's on his way up with some food!"

Just then, Fabby came through the hatch with a large tray of fruit and protein bars.

"Let's all sit at the large table to eat," said Pheledra.

She sat at the head of the big conference table. Nel sat on her right, Cobi and Ana on her left. Fabby sat next to Nel and Wave beside Ana. Fabby passed the tray and everyone ate.

Inky sensed tension as he hopped down to use the cat box. Ginger licked the fur on her belly and stared at the hatchway, hoping Boots would come bounding through. He didn't, so she went back to her bath. Inky rejoined her and they curled up together.

Nel got up from the table and went over to the two cats. "This must be Inky and Ginger!"

They're beautiful!" She gently stroked them as they purred.

"That's them, Nel." said Pheledra, "they miss Boots. He's still down on Miraba and we'll have to go find him - and Orange."

"We'll go get them," said Cobi.

"No, Cobi," said Pheledra, "there is another task for you. The Council is allowing me to recover Boots and Orange and return the Mirabans - but there is something of very great importance for you to do."

Wave quickly got up from the table. "If you will all excuse me, I need to put the finishing touches on a disabled droid."

"Nice to meet you, Wave," said Cobi, as Wave went down through the hatch.

"He seems upset," said Ana, "he appears to be undergoing an inner conflict. I'm sorry if we're the cause of it."

"No, Ana," said Pheledra, "Wave must learn to accept things and stay flexible. He's confused at the moment."

"I'm going to check on Biltar and Nahvar," said Fabby, "I need to talk to them and break things to them gently when they come around. Please excuse me."

Everyone bid him farewell as he slipped down the hatch.

"What do you want us to do, Pheledra?" asked Ana.

Pheledra went over to the central console and pulled out a disc. "I want you and Cobi to download this information and become familiar with it. It is the mission that must be completed. It will insure the evolution of Miraba as it awakens from bondage. Your people have had an ongoing relationship with Miraba for a long time - but - have you ever thought about what the Mirabans have gone through?"

Cobi spoke up. "We always looked upon the Mirabans as ... playthings. We were taught that they were inferior and barely conscious. Our people looked upon Miraba as nothing more than a big hunting preserve and an opportunity to experiment with living beings to find their potentials and limitations. I never met any Mirabans until now. Ana and I were somewhat isolated. All our duties revolved around the person of Lance. We were his concubines, spokespersons and hostesses for his social life. We're pretty good at that but we've never done anything adventurous. I'm pretty scared of dangerous activities."

"I'm the same," said Ana, "but our scout ship is loaded with technology way beyond your own - and we know how to use it. It will be far less dangerous for us than for you. Let's download that information."

Pheledra gave them each a headpiece and slipped the disc into the psychotronic adjuvant.

Nel looked up from petting the cats. "These last few days seem like a dream. I can hardly wait to see what happens next!"

Down in the workshop, Wave tightened up the last bolt on Violet with a torque wrench. All he needed to do now was turn her on. He hesitated. *This has gone too far. I'm going to take care of my own interests for a change.*

He shut both eyes and visualized a black flag with a solid red circle in the center.

Forty One - Boots and Orange

On the wounded planet of forgetfulness called Miraba, it was night. Boots was so weak he couldn't cry anymore. He was up a tree covered with black tarry mud. A pack of vicious dogs had nearly killed him, so up he went. It appeared to be the only tree left standing for miles. He was in shock and wanted to sleep but he had to grip the branch tightly to avoid falling when the wind blew.

Across the dark lake, every now and then, he'd briefly catch sight of an orange light. Soldiers in protective suits patrolled the shores firing puncture blasters down into the water whenever a flash of orange appeared. One of them walked around the edge tossing explosives into the water. The concussions almost knocked Boots out of the tree every time they went off. The particle beam weapons fired occasionally, hoping to hit an invisible ship in fourth density. Boots could always tell they were about to fire because his nose would detect an unusual smell a few microns before they slashed across the sky. Of course Boots didn't know why, but it was because of the ionization of the atmosphere produced by

the carrier wave for the weapon itself. It was always sent out slightly before the particle beam to zero in on any target in third density. Ordinarily the weapons wouldn't fire until target acquisition but the gun crews had turned that feature off because they were hoping to hit an invisible fourth density ship which the carrier wave could not detect.

When Boots smelled that smell, he would grip the tree tighter in nervous anticipation hoping that a stray beam wouldn't suddenly end his life. They weren't as jarring as the explosives, because they weren't hitting anything, but the stress was wearing him out.

He knew Orange was still functioning because occasionally the droid would contact him through his psychic sensors. Orange was pinned down and trying hard to avoid being shot. Evidently he had found underwater caves in which to hide but everytime he tried to come out, they'd spot the orange light and open fire.

The black rain had come several times and Boots knew he'd been poisoned. His head was spinning, he was sick all over and about to pass out. He knew if he did it was all over, so somehow he hung on and stayed awake.

Third density was so heavy. He felt as if he weighed more than his muscles could carry. Somehow, he'd managed to get up this tree. It was a matter of climb or be eaten - so climb he did. He was more of a hole-going-in cat than a tree-cat but the instinct to survive and the good fortune of a tree left standing, drove him to altitude. Now, he was too weak to come back down nor even move very

much. All he could do was cling. Hope was almost gone. Inside, he moaned for Pheledra. He had felt her mind and knew she wasn't killed in the crash but she was far away and could not come to him. All he could do was fight to stay alive.

When the recon saucer crashed, he had been thrown clear. It exploded in fire. He had tried to go back and find someone but the flames singed off his whiskers and nearly caught him on fire. He panicked and ran headlong into a snarling pack of dogs. He barely escaped. His heart ached for Nelyani and Biltar. He liked them - and now they were almost certainly dead.

He dreamed of home - dry food was his thing. Would he ever eat again? Would he ever feel warmth again? Pain didn't frighten him anymore. Death wasn't even a thought. His only regret was losing the touch of love. How he yearned to curl up next to Inky and Ginger or play with that little girl, Nel, his new friend. Most of all, he would give anything to be cradled in Pheledra's arms and feel her soft kiss against his brow. For the hope of those things, he fought to stay alive but everything was getting dimmer and dimmer.

He was about to let go and finally fall into the void when he heard a hum. A light was coming up the tree! It looked funny - not like anything he'd ever seen. When it grew near, an arm popped out and grabbed him. It was Orange! Boots couldn't see him clearly because the droid was covered with black mud. Boots relaxed into his grip as the droid whisked him out of the tree and flew for cover underneath a pile of rubble. Shots

rang out and the branches splintered off the tree where he'd just been.

"Hi Boots," said Orange, "tonight is not a good time to die."

Forty Two - Clear Directions

In dilated time aboard the Kultaki command carrier, Wave and Petuva had finished making love and were relaxing in the spa.

"Can you believe this?" Petuva was exuberant. "Such an explosion of passion all within a fraction of a fraction of a micron. It seemed like forever to me."

"Me too," said Wave.

"You're so tender, darling. I'm not used to that. I like it!" She cuddled him and kissed him gently on the cheek and neck. "You're different than any man I've ever known. I'm ... really falling in love with you."

"Our time together is really something different for me too, Pet. You've brought out new life in me. I ... love you too ... but ..."

"What? What is it?"

"I don't know ... so many conflicting thoughts going on inside my head, I ... I think I need to go now, I ..."

"No, don't go," she pleaded. "Come on Wave, stay awhile longer. Let's get back into bed and ..."

"No, Pet ... you belong to Lance ... this is a violation of ..."

"Oh, come on Wave. Stay ... please."

Wave gave her a long kiss, then began to drag himself out of the spa. Petuva sighed and sank down into the water. "Please come back soon."

As he was just about to leave, she stopped him. "Wave?"

"What is it?"

"I don't like being with Lance. He doesn't ... make love to me. I'm just ... a piece to him ... nothing special. You make me feel special."

"Oh Pet," said Wave. "You are special. Listen, I'll ... I'll come back soon ... okay?"

"All right," she said, showing her disappointment. "I love you."

Wave nodded but didn't say anything.

Lance was all smiles as he beamed Wave back on board the Firefly. He materialized a fraction of a fraction of a micron later than when he'd left. He was right back in the workshop exactly where he'd been. *Wow, he thought to himself, that technology is really something. Those Kultaki are so advanced ... I'd like to learn some of this.*

Wave checked Violet over once again. She was all ready to go. All he needed to do was turn her on. *No, I'm not going to light her up just yet. I need time to think. I'll just stay out of sight for awhile. I need to think. This is so damn strange.*

Fabby was in the med pod observing Nahvar and Biltar who were still recovering. Nahvar was just about ready to come out and Biltar's intensive care was almost over. Fabby was searching his computer to find the best way to gently update them. He would be cheerful and positive and would then ask them to download the discs concerning the mission.

Nelyani was not too far away on the control deck playing with Inky and Ginger who were delighted and far more active than usual.

Meanwhile, Pheledra, Ana and Cobi continued their conference up on the observation deck. The two Kultaki women had finished the download and were astonished. They were burning with enthusiasm. Pheledra allowed them to settle down before she spoke.

"What do you wish to do?"

"I want a new life," said Ana.

"Yes, I do too," Cobi agreed.

"All right," said Pheledra, "I'll help you. I'm offering you sanctuary until this mission is completed and you are safe. What is happening to you is unusual and rare. You are fourth density beings in the middle of discovering the high frequencies and amplitudes of positive spiritual polarity. Unconditional love, peace, joy, personal responsibility and a desire to serve your fellow beings overrides hate, resentment, jealousy, control and selfishness, all of which are much lower frequencies."

"Can we live where you live?" asked Ana.

"You are not able to do that yet because I normally live in fifth density. Beings of negative spiritual polarity, such as your people, the Kultaki, can evolve no higher than fourth density. Their belief system does not allow for anything beyond that."

"In fact," said Ana, "we've been told that there is nothing beyond fourth density. We've all been taught that we are the pinnacle of evolution."

"We know better now," said Cobi.

Pheledra nodded. "In the higher densities, positive beings downstep to give assistance to those struggling upwards. You are proving your change of heart by helping us. This mission, for the transformation of Miraba, cannot be accomplished now ... without you."

"I'm deeply touched by this," said Ana, "and thankful."

"It's strange," said Cobi, "although this is so dangerous I feel peaceful and strong."

"Are we the only ones of our kind?" Ana looked puzzled.

"No," replied Pheledra, "there are reptilians of positive polarity like you, but well on their way to ascension. I know some in the galaxy from which I originated. You are not yet quite ready for fifth density - but you will be over time."

"What should we do about this?" asked Cobi.

"When we have completed our mission here, I will return to my galaxy and eventually go back into fifth density. I propose that when this is over, you travel with me and I will introduce you to some reptilians residing in fourth density, much like yourselves. They are of positive polarity but not very different from you - physically or mentally - just positive beings just as you are now becoming. You can remain with them or make some other decision, if you wish."

"Would we ever see you again?" asked Ana.

"Oh yes, I promise. I can visit you in fourth density or downstep further into third density but I cannot live there. Sometimes recently ... I wish I could."

While she continued talking, she secretly thought of the wonderful and courageous beings that had kindled her love. She thought of Biltar and her undeniable feelings for him. Perhaps it was because she missed Helaah so much. In one reckless moment, she had even thought of giving up her evolutionary status in fifth density to be with Biltar, if he wanted it too ... but she knew it never could be. It was just a fantasy due to incompleteness and loneliness. Time would take care of that too. She knew it intellectually ... but her feelings ... the longing of her desire ...

"Fourth density is only a temporary pilgrimage - like this mission," she said, "there will be other times, other missions, and I'll visit you then."

"Thank you so much, Pheledra," said Cobi, "I'm feeling much better knowing I'll be with

Ana in this new adventure. Even though it's so scary."

"Sure it's scary," said Ana, "but we can't deny what we've seen and experienced. I know we've only touched the surface of what's there and I intend to embrace more of it all of it."

"Me too," Cobi agreed.

"When you two leave the Firefly on this mission, you'll take Biltar with you. It would be a good idea for you to head to Tarsenay or Avengarone rather than go directly to Miraba. It would look bad if you left the Firefly and went directly down to the planet. The Council might intervene and stop you. But you are doing this strictly on your own. I am not persuading you nor ordering you to go. Do you agree with that?"

"Absolutely," said Ana, "we're doing this because we want to. After learning the details of the plan and the purpose behind it, I'm very motivated and I'm sure Cobi is too."

Cobi nodded. "This is the wild sort of thing we always wanted to do, but never got the chance."

"That's an understatement," said Ana.

"Good," Pheledra nodded. "Distributing the devices to these five places will be instrumental in bringing a happy future to all Mirabans and it will forever connect you to them because you will somewhat make up for the millenia of tyrannical control your people held over Miraba."

"Maybe, in the future, the Mirabans won't hate us so much," said Cobi.

Pheledra smiled. "When they become informed that the Kultaki have been behind their manipulation, not only will they remember how brutal and uncaring their masters were, but they'll also remember that two beautiful Kultaki women risked everything to heal the wounds and give them hope. They will tell their children."

"What kind of effect will our discovery of these higher vibrations have on Miraba?" asked Ana.

"Your intervention will, in the long run, soften the feelings of the Mirabans and aid in their recovery from resentment. As I said, there are many reptilian races in the universe that are not of negative polarity and, as the Mirabans transcend into fifth density and expand space travel, they will come into contact with them. They need to know from the beginning that not all reptilians desire control and exploitation. After all, the control exerted by your people was only possible in the first place due to the Mirabans' own abdication of their own personal responsibility. The learning of this lesson will be a big step. As they begin this ascension they will learn that resentment is never justified. They will learn to always be diligent and never allow others to decide their destiny - and they will learn to be discerning of others - and themselves."

Cobi was amazed. "So our changing over will aid in their evolution?"

"Oh yes," said Pheledra, "more than you realize. So how will you proceed?"

"We'll head out for Tarsenay," said Ana, "we'll hole up for a short while, then sneak down to Miraba with Biltar, get the devices and go distribute them."

"How much contact should we have with the Mirabans during the distribution?" asked Cobi.

"As much as possible," replied Pheledra, "I think it would be good to develop a trust and camaraderie with Biltar so the three of you can work as a team and show the Mirabans the coordination possible between folks of diverse genetics. That in itself will demonstrate the evolutionary attitude they must develop as they come into contact with other celestial peoples that are so different from themselves. It will lessen their fear and pave the way for future alliances."

"The impact of this will go far beyond the mere distribution of the new technology," said Ana, "it is great beyond anything I ever imagined and I want to give myself to it completely."

"I also," said Cobi.

"Okay," said Pheledra, "in the meantime, I will rescue Boots and Orange and take Nelyani and Nahvar home to Miraba in a way that insures their safety."

"Will Boots and Orange be okay?" asked Ana.

"I don't know," replied Pheledra, "they've been stuck down there a long time. I'm in sporadic telepathic contact. They're still alive but Boots is very sick. He needs treatment quickly."

**"Is there anything else we need to know?"
asked Ana.**

**"Yes," replied Pheledra. "I have some
additional discs for you to interface ... just a
moment ... Fabby tells me Ambassador
Lance wants to speak with Cobi and Ana
over the communicator!"**

**"Oh no!" said Cobi, "I wonder ... oh ... I think
I probably know."**

**Pheledra turned on the monitor. After a
moment, Ambassador Lance appeared. He
looked very relaxed and wore a new tan cap
on his head. "Cobi! Cobi and Ana! I'm so
glad you two are alive and well. You got out
just in time, didn't you. In fact, you left
ahead of time. Of course, I know why. You
were running out on me! You thought I
might ... hurt you." Ambassador Lance
shook his head. "Why would I ever want to
hurt you? After all the laughs and good
times we had? Of course ... whenever
someone betrays their own people ... turns
their back on their heritage ... steals
expensive equipment! You know girls, I
could overlook all that now, if you'd just
bring the scout craft on back and we could
just sit down and have a little talk, just like
old times. Ana! I have some technology
downloaded to regrow your arm. I'm sure
you've learned your lesson. We could go
back to the way things were. How about it?"**

**Ana looked intently at the monitor. "There's
something you don't understand, Lance.
Since I opened to natural telepathy, I'm a
new person. I see things a different way.
Lance ... I touched the soul of other beings. I
found out that there is no need for secrecy.**

There is no need for deception. There is no need for fear. I've found love. Real love."

"Ana, Cobi, you know I love both of you. Why, I'll get rid of those other two girls right away. They were only temporary. I want you back. We had great sex together, didn't we?"

"Oh sure, Lance," said Cobi, "but we were young and naive. Since then, Ana and I have learned a lot more about how the universe works. We have each other and a new life. We don't need you. And we have new friends and a new perspective that excites us beyond anything you have to offer."

"What?" Lance was livid. "You get back here right now and bring back my scout craft! If you don't, I'll inform the Council of your theft and they'll force you to give it back!"

Ana and Cobi looked at each other for a moment. Then Ana turned back to face Lance. "Give us a few moments and we'll get back with you, okay?"

"Sure Ana," Lance replied, "I'll end the communication and call you back in, shall we say, five zeron?"

"That'll be fine," said Ana.

The screen went blank. Cobi was agitated. "Pheledra, what shall we do!?"

Pheledra thought for a moment. "At some point, you'll have to give the scout craft back. If Lance brings the Council in on it, they'll demand it. There's something else that you should consider - Lance may still try to kill you."

"That's right," said Cobi.

Cobi hadn't wanted to consider it but knew it was true. She looked at Ana who was already looking at her. A slight ripple of deep purple and dark blue passed across their faces.

Pheledra continued. "He now considers you to be a traitor and a security risk since you and Ana know proprietary secrets. He may not want them to fall into the hands of others. He probably doesn't understand that we really don't care."

"You're right," said Ana. She closed her eyes for a moment. "How long would it take him to put in another formal complaint with the Council?"

"Not very long," said Pheledra, "but I don't think he'll do that. He doesn't want the scrutiny of the Council upon his deeds."

"We'll give it back to him when we're finished with it," said Ana.

"If you keep that intention," said Pheledra, "the Council will know and not be too concerned if Lance happens to complain. But I don't think he will."

"How do we get out of here without Lance following our every move?" asked Cobi.

"Hologram technology," replied Ana, "we'll create a diversion to give us time to escape to Tarsenay and go on to complete the mission."

"How good are those holograms?" asked Pheledra.

"Very realistic," said Cobi, "of course, when he checks with his instruments he'll know immediately we're trying to fool him - but it might give us enough time to disguise where we're actually going."

Ana nodded in agreement. "May we receive the rest of those downloads now?"

"Absolutely," replied Pheledra. She handed them the head pieces and inserted new discs into the psychotronic adjuvant. "I'm going to set up a bit of a delay for Lance so I'll have time to talk with everyone about what's happening."

Pheledra typed a message.

Pheledra and crew are in an important meeting and unavailable.

A few moments later, Fabby's voice came over the communicator. "Ambassador Lance is trying to reach us."

"I'm giving him a delay message," said Pheledra, "what's going on down there?"

"Biltar and Nahvar have finished Protoron treatment and I've updated them. Biltar has just received the download and is very excited to get going."

"Good. What I want to do now, Fabby, is assemble everyone up here in five zeron. There are new developments and we all need to talk."

Forty Three - Our Connectedness

On his command carrier, Ambassador Lance looked upward at a tiny light hovering in the distance. Surrounding him in a circle, the small crafts energetically linked together gave him the feeling of still being in charge of something big. From here, Pheledra's lightship seemed like an insignificant spark in the vast surroundings of space - a far cry from where he'd been just a few moments before. He had just mentally come back from the observation dome of the Firefly to take a little breather. He adjusted the small tan cap upon his head for comfort. Across from him, Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken moved as if performing a ritual. They held their hands above a misty globe carefully adjusting the electromagnetic frequencies. Occasionally, Dr. Draken would spin around to an interactive screen and tap it here and there with a clawed finger.

"Your Excellency, we are slowly bringing you back on line," he said.

"Whenever you're ready, Dr. Draken," Lance nodded.

"First, we must give your mind a little time to stabilize so you are not harmed," whispered Dr. Vagila, "just relax."

The new psychotronic technology was far superior to the old cumbersome mind-machine he had used for so long. This new advancement empowered him in so many new ways. In addition to time dilation, which was important for getting a lot done in a

fraction of a fraction of a micron, he could now remote view exactly as if he was sitting in the room. He had dreamed of this for years. It meant that he could never again be deceived nor lied to by enemies. They could no longer keep any secrets. It was like being invisible and following them around. The tan cap on his head was tight fitting and barely noticable. No cumbersome wires - no indication that it was anything other than a simple cap. He liked it that way. As long as Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken were adjusting and stabilizing the frequencies, he could know everything. It was a hidden revolution to spawn his new plan. The influences were so subtle, they could not be detected until they had brought forth their purpose.

"All right, Your Excellency," said Dr. Draken, "I'm ready to send you out once again."

Lance found himself back on the observation dome of the Firefly just as everyone was sitting down at the big conference table. He moved his mind to the very center of the table. That way he wouldn't miss out on anything. But, he didn't really care what anyone said. His target was precise, and he'd already made great inroads - Nestingwave.

Everyone sat at the table except for Pheledra who remained standing. "I'm glad everyone is here." Wave didn't look very happy as she continued. "Biltar, Nelyani and Nahvar, my dear Miraban friends, I am so thankful for your complete recovery. In case you were inclined to think otherwise, you can certainly see from all that's happened that we celestial people are far from perfect. Wave, Fabby, I have much to discuss with you. I have apologies to make because I was

wrong, and it's led us into these difficulties. However, a synchronicity is occurring. Anadia and Cobishandra, whom some of you barely know, are undergoing a unique life change. They want to complete the mission in return for sanctuary. I have agreed. Biltar ... I'm asking you to work with them and trust them."

"I adore these two," said Biltar, "I've never met more charming ladies."

"I know their inner intentions," continued Pheledra, "and I have confidence in them as I do in you. As for me ... I must go get Boots and Orange and return Nelyani and Nahvar to Miraba. Now, I'm going to ask Ana and Cobi to speak to us of their intentions."

Pheledra sat down and Ana rose. As she spoke, Nestingwave became aware of a presence within his thoughts.

Hello Wave ... may I come in?

Lance! How can you be inside my mind without my invitation!?

Oh Wave, it's that incredible machine again. Damndest thing I've ever seen. I won't come into your mind if you don't desire to talk to me, but I'm already bored with what Ana and Cobi will have to say.

You might as well go ahead since you're already here. Wave was a bit uncomfortable.

Listen to what that girl's saying, the voice of the Ambassador echoed in his brain, she is betraying her own people. You and I both know that she could not be changing polarities. There is no such thing as positive

and negative spiritual polarities. It always takes two poles for anything at all to exist. What do you suppose she and Cobi have up their sleeve? They probably want what we all want, Wave - more power. A chance to do their own thing.

Are they deceiving Pheledra? Wave inquired.

Oh yes, Wave. No doubt about it. But do you recall what we were talking about the last time you popped over to see your little Pet and my two doctors?

I've been thinking about it, Lance ... but what is it that you want exactly?

To give guidance, Wave, guidance to the new Miraba. Through you I could give wisdom and direction. You can be a great leader, Wave. All I need to do is get you down to the city of Mavira. There are scientists in that city who have crude but working anti-gravity vehicles. And, as you know, Biltar's PSGs will be going there. Ten of them! With the proper guidance Mavira could become the center of everything.

Why Mavira?

Because after this cataclysm nothing big moves without those anti-gravity machines. Wave, we can have a monopoly on a commodity that is more than a necessity. What an opportunity!

I don't belong there. They don't know me.

Ah, but they know one thing, Wave, and that one thing is all they need to know.

What's that?

Money ... money money, Wave. Money is communicative! And I have pure gold! Tons and tons of it right down there on Miraba ... and it survived the cataclysm. We can share. Oh, and by the way, Petuva is looking forward to being there with you. Since you like her so much, I'm giving her to you. She and Ranilla don't get along, you know. They fight over everything. Petuva doesn't like sharing her man. Of course when you go down there what she doesn't know won't hurt her. You'll be free, Wave, really free because you'll be unique ... at the very top of the heap. Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken have a machine like this one for you to play around with. And one of them will be glad to come down regularly to continue your genetic treatments. Call your own shots. All I want is audience with you - and a small slice of the pie of course.

"What's wrong, Wave?" Pheledra's voice brought him fully back to the conference. "You don't look good - do you have something you want to say?"

"You're damn right I do!" said Wave as he stood up, "this whole plan is insane! Can't you see that you're bein' used, Pheledra? You're gonna get us all in terrible trouble again - more trouble than you've already gotten us into! This is a total violation of the Council's edict! Pheledra, you know what Ana and Cobi intend to do! Therefore you are in on it! That blatantly violates the judgement of the Council! And besides, those snakes are deceiving you! You've blown it, Pheledra, and I'm having nothing more to do with it!"

Without another word, Wave stormed across the room and slid down through the hatch.

Pheledra shook her head. "You can see, dear friends, that even in fourth density we are still capable of resentment. I'm sorry. I believe Ana and Cobi - and we will continue."

"He's just upset," said Fabby, "things have come to a head with him. I think he's disappointed and maybe a little jealous. I'll talk with him gently. Let's all try not to be too upset. It'll work out. I'm sure it will."

"Wave sounds like some people I use to know back home," said Nelyani.

"Nel," said Cobi, "I too am finding out that people throughout the universe are pretty much the same when it comes to strong emotions."

"It can hurt other people so bad," said Nahvar, "but one thing I appreciate - Pheledra, Cobi, Ana, Fabby, even Wave - none of you are afraid to sit down and speak your heart to one another. If we can learn to do that too, and teach others, the new Miraba will be a reality."

"Yes," said Biltar, "you are doing the best you know how to do, Pheledra, and I see that you certainly are not perfect. And I'm glad you're just like me."

Biltar's eyes began to fill with tears and he caught his breath to control his emotions. "I love all of you. I feel so close to you ...like a family. I don't ever want to say goodbye. Pheledra ...you remind me so much of my Sinya. I'm beginning to understand that

when you really love someone, it's not just their personality you love, it's...it's what's deep inside them, and that thing is there in all of us ... when we look for it."

Nelyani quietly started to cry. Nahvar reached over and hugged her. He was fighting back tears himself. Cobi and Ana just looked down. They weren't used to strong displays of emotion but they felt it too. Their minds soared as the waves of feeling passed through them and subtle colors rippled across their soft scales.

Pheledra was trying hard to control herself. She didn't want to say goodbye. The loneliness she had felt since Helaah's death was being healed by the very presence of these dear friends. She felt so strongly for everyone there, and Wave too. She wanted to merge herself with their souls. She wanted to say how sorry she was but more than that she wanted to tell them that which was beyond words - her deepest gratitude and appreciation.

Fabby knew in that moment - and was very glad he was human. His only regret was that Wave was not there.

Inky and Ginger did what cats often do in such circumstances. Ginger went to comfort Nelyani and Inky curled up in Pheledra's lap.

Ana spoke from the depths of her being. "My dear friends ... I never called anyone 'friend' before, except for Cobi. What you see in me I cannot describe. All I can say is yes to this precious treasure. I found out that there is a great power within. And when you use it, it multiplies, and when you do not use it, it recedes from you. From this

moment on I am yours and you are mine. Wherever we are, we are one, for I have touched your soul and found it beautiful."

They all rose and embraced. The tears still flowed but they were different now. The time had come for Biltar, Ana and Cobi to be on their way. They all dried their tears and sat back down, talking softly as lovers among themselves.

Pheledra spoke with Biltar. "Where do you think you should go on Miraba?"

"I don't know at this point. I think it will probably be somewhere that we deliver the devices. We'll just have to see what conditions are like when we get there ... and I'll choose a place where I think I can do the most good. Possibly Shanveh. It has the capability of developing and manufacturing the devices. It will all depend upon the people I meet. If Fryd and Rysen are still alive, we can go together. They have been my most trusted co-workers all these many annoms."

"You know, Biltar, I've thought a lot about Nelyani. Where should she go now? And Nahvar? You three have experienced something profound together. Nel is just a child and needs much love. If the three of you could be together, it would probably be best. My heart breaks because I cannot take Nel with me."

"Why not?"

"Because even if it was possible, she is a great soul who has incarnated upon Miraba to be of specific help during this time. I would be robbing her of her chosen destiny."

And that would be wrong. I believe all three of you have selected some sort of common destiny and need to be together."

Nahvar overheard the conversation and added his affirmation. "Pheledra ... I know you're right about that."

Biltar nodded. "Let's get Nelyani over here and discuss it with her."

Nel had already become good friends with the two Kultaki women and was eagerly talking with them. Pheledra motioned for her to come over and she politely excused herself from Ana and Cobi.

"Where shall I go on Miraba?" she asked Pheledra.

"You, Nahvar and Biltar have been through so much ... and you've bonded together. Somehow, your futures are mingled. What about you three being together?"

"Oh, that would be great!" said Nel, "I have no family left, no relatives nor friends that I know of. I had some but I don't know if they're still alive."

"If you three are in agreement, here's what we'll do. When Biltar leaves with Ana and Cobi, we'll go down to Miraba and get Boots and Orange and go back into orbit to wait. When Biltar finds out where he needs to be, I'll take you wherever he is."

"That is the perfect idea," said Nahvar.

"Yes," said Biltar, "I love you two very much. You are my family. Nahvar, you and I can teach each other everything we know -

and work together. Same with you, Nel. The three of us can be a team. We've been through things that Mirabans need to know about. We just need to coordinate and work together. It will be very powerful."

"Oh, I'm so happy," said Nel, "I was starting to feel empty and lonely not knowing what was going to happen next."

"Then it's settled," said Pheledra. "No matter where you are. I'm going to be in contact with all of you. You'll see me in your dreams ... you'll sometimes hear me in your meditation. Other times later, when you become a little more proficient in telepathy, I'll communicate with your minds when you are in normal waking consciousness. I suggest that you two learn some things from Nel. She is a natural telepath and she will teach you. You three are to be each other's teachers and students of one another. There will be others that will join you, but you three are a core - a key element for Miraban education. I will be far away in another galaxy, but in fifth density, distance is no object. All I have to do is remember you ... remember your souls ... and that's something I can never forget."

Cobi, Ana and Fabby were paying attention to the conversation now.

Fabby asked Pheledra, "Are there any preparations you need to make for the sake of Ana and Cobi before they leave?"

"Yes," said Pheledra. "As you all know from the briefing on the mission, five places have been selected for the distribution of the PSGs - Shanveh, Mavira, Quepar, Tacu and Bectalyne. I'm going to telepathically

contact the Frazha to do weather modification and detoxification in those areas so the black rain won't be a problem and if there is any toxicity already there, it can be nullified."

"What about the outskirts of Urbantia 7 where you are going to get Boots and Orange?" asked Nahvar.

"It's stretching our cosmic allowance toward the mission but I've already done that. I'm going to ask the Frazha to clean up that place too. In fact, I'm going to ask them to do it first. Boots and Orange have been there far too long. A cleaner environment for Boots might save his life."

"Cobi and Ana," said Fabby, "before you leave, I want to make some adjustments in the equipment on board the scout craft, to insure our ability to monitor your progress."

"Sure," said Cobi, "how long will it take?"

"Not too long," said Fabby, "it's simply a matter of adjustment and calibration."

"Okay," said Ana, "I think we should all start making our preparations."

Forty Four - Some Suprises

Biltar, Ana and Cobi prepared to leave. Cobi made up the program for the hologram while Ana and Biltar talked. Fabby went aboard the scout craft to make his adjustments. Nahvar moved around the control deck trying to understand the various monitors and instruments. Pheledra, Nelyani and the

cats remained on the observation deck. Nel was talkative and followed Pheledra around while she went through her check list. The Firefly's capability of beaming up entities in third density while remaining in fourth should make it easy to extract Boots and Orange - but Pheledra took every precaution and rechecked every piece of equipment. Not only was she checking the external situation to be sure everything was ready and in order - she was also examining herself. She didn't want a repeat of her former mistakes.

In the workshop, Wave made a final connection and Violet lit up. "Hello, Violet," he said.

The droid geared up a little and turned to speak. "The last thing I remember is carrying Boots along the corridor of a Kultaki starship and an unexpected electromagnetic pulse shutting me down. Has anything happened since then?"

"Just had to make a few repairs. Go back to your regular station and stand until Pheledra needs you. Blue and Green will fill you in with an update."

"Aye, aye sir." Violet flew out of the workshop.

Wave considered what he was about to do. There would be no turning back from this moment on. He was shaking violently. His thoughts burned within him. *I need to break out of this cage I've gotten into ... begin to consider my potential and try to develop it as far as it will go. Good old Wave. Reliable, jolly old Nestingwave. Liked by all, taken*

seriously by none. It's high time I got the respect due these white hairs on my head.

He hesitated for a moment, then closed his eyes, visualized a black flag with a solid red circle in the center - and vanished. No one knew when he left.

On the observation deck, Pheledra and Nel sat quietly waiting for the communication from Fabby that Biltar, Ana and Cobi were ready to go on their way. Pheledra wanted to say one last farewell. She found herself longing for what she knew in her heart could never be. She was attracted to Biltar and knew she could not deny her love for him. If things were different she would have been honored to be his wife and partner. But she discarded these thoughts because things were not different. She was a fifth dimensional lightworker and Biltar was bound to a planet just awakening. He had a destiny to fulfill - a gift to give - and she was being selfish to think of her own need and loneliness.

Nevertheless, she could not deny the heaviness within her heart. *Oh Helaah .. forgive me ... I miss your warmth and strength. I'm so sorry we parted the way we did. My foolish words destroyed us ...*

"Why do you look so sad?" Nelyani's voice brought her back.

"Oh, Nel, it's nothing ... just remembering my old life."

Nel looked very serious. "Sometimes, when you go fishing, you might catch an old shoe. Don't become discouraged. Just throw it back and try again."

"What?" Pheledra said in surprise.

Suddenly a voice came into their minds - it was not Fabby's - but a strange voice. It was strong. Each word carried a tightly packaged bundle of thought forms with associations and meanings. The words were an abbreviated outline. The message came across as a detailed package of thought which gave far more information intuitively than the words themselves.

Hail and greetings. We come to talk. We know you. You know us.

"The Frahza!" Pheledra exclaimed. She and Nelyani heard the message at the same time in their minds. Down below, everyone else heard it to.

Yes, we know you Frahza. Welcome.
Pheledra was still surprised and now somewhat taken aback as she answered the hail. It seemed to be another synchronicity. They already knew her need for their help and everyone on board the Firefly already knew why the Frahza were contacting them. They were delivering a Miraban passenger! Biltar raced up to the observation deck.

"Edyn! Edyn!" Biltar was out of breath from exhilaration and exertion as he shot up through the hatch. His excitement seemed boundless.

"Take a deep breath, Nel," said Pheledra, "don't be afraid. These entities are the Frahza. I told you about them. They will seem a little unusual to you at first."

"No kidding," said Nel. Her eyes were wide with excitement.

Inky and Ginger were fully alert, carefully viewing the whole affair to see what might happen next. Ginger meowed and bristled. Inky quit licking his paw and looked up. Three huge ships appeared above the Firefly. Biltar, Nel and Pheledra stared through the observation dome. Each ship looked like two metallic pancakes stacked together. It was a shock to Biltar and Nelyani when five of the Frazha floated right through the walls into the observation dome and came over to them. They all looked alike - short, skinny, blue-gray in color with huge heads and large black round lidless eyes. The five floated around them in a seemingly haphazard manner. They carried their own gravitational fields and were immune to the gravity produced on the observation deck. They didn't seem to care which direction their heads pointed as long as their eyes were fixed on Pheledra. Their faces were featureless except for those large black penetrating eyes, two small nostril holes and a slit for a mouth. There were two appendages on the side of their heads which appeared to be vestigial ears. They wore a tight fitting fabric the same color as their skin. The hands had four long fingers which were apparently double jointed.

Then a light burst forth on the transfer pad and a young Miraban appeared.

The Frazha said nothing more but just waited for everyone to assimilate the message already given. They were delivering Edyn ap Tau, Biltar's friend who had disappeared so long ago. The same Edyn ap Tau with whom Biltar experienced the strange events on Falu island many annoms before. Edyn had not aged at all

since Biltar last saw him. He still looked like he was in his twenties.

Biltar understood now. The telepathic thought package of the Frazha continued to unfold in his conscious awareness. It had been the Frazha. They had been taking Edyn since he was a child. He was part of the genetic upgrade program. Biltar was not involved in it but just happened to be with Edyn during one of his contacts that time years ago.

Biltar now remembered another entity, that night on Falu island, who had greeted him alone while Edyn was in another section of the craft undergoing examination. It was a universal being of light who promised to bring counsel through dreams. The being of light gave no name and was there solely for the purpose of comforting and reassuring Biltar.

Those beings of light often requested to go along with the Frazha to offer comfort to abductees. They did not agree with the Frazha's methods but, rather than polarize with the genetic engineering program approved by the Council, they sought to reduce the stress of the abduction experience on Mirabans. The Frazha were well intentioned but a bit coarse in their understanding of Miraban tolerances. They could not understand why Mirabans objected to being abducted for their own good. The beings of light gave allowance for the social shortcomings of the Frazha genetic engineers and acted like a softening buffer between them and the Mirabans. The Frazha themselves did not see any need for it, but did not object because it had been recommended by higher wisdom. They

finally acknowledged it as a good recommendation because it helped the genetic engineering project progress more smoothly and rapidly.

Edyn's genetic material had been used to bring forth a small group of hybrids and his request had been granted to be with them all those annoms to prepare them for life on Miraba. Now the time had come for him to bring them into that new life. The Frahza wanted Edyn and his progeny to take up residence in one of the five hubs where the energy devices were to be delivered. They were reuniting Biltar and Edyn at this time because the hybrids were well suited to work on the energy devices and would make excellent students for Biltar. They could assimilate all of his Miraban perspective about hyperdimensional physics quickly - and add their own - from the Frahza point of view. The hybrid children of Edyn would be delivered by the Frahza once things were running smoothly, if Biltar agreed.

Edyn laughed heartily. "Hello, Biltar," He and Biltar embraced as Fabby, Ana, and Cobi joined the scene. Ana and Cobi were astounded. They'd never seen the Frahza before. They'd always been told that the Frahza were their enemies. The Kultaki considered them to be competitors.

Nel gazed at the five floating beings, often turning her head to match it up with theirs.

"Cute little guys," she said.

"My prayers are answered, Edyn," Biltar said, "now I know. The question is answered - but the mystery and wonder of it will always remain."

"The lines in your face speak of many tales, my friend," said Edyn with a look of admiration. "Although I still look young because of where I've been - I have a few tales also."

"I'm sure you do," Biltar said, as they hugged once again. "We'll go together now to distribute the energy devices and see what life brings."

"The Frahza told me all about those energy devices," said Edyn, "I'd be honored to work with you."

The five Frahza looked on as Edyn was introduced to everyone and they talked excitedly.

"Edyn, how did the Frahza maintain your youth?" asked Fabby.

"They are often granted special permission to manipulate time to facilitate their expertise in genetic engineering. For example, they are sometimes allowed to return to the past to retrieve a gene that has since died out. In my case, it was to provide plenty of time for me to be their teacher. These hybrids are my children and I love every one of them dearly. They will live much longer than Mirabans so, in order for me to be with them, I have been granted a bit of life extension. They'll still outlive me, but I'll have the opportunity to see them grow into their new life and perhaps impart a bit of knowledge they will need to live successfully upon their new planet."

"How many children do you have?" Fabby was curious.

"Twelve girls and twelve boys," said Edyn proudly.

"Will they intermarry with Mirabans?"

"Oh yes. The offspring from the hybrids now being dispersed throughout Miraba will one day be the main population of Miraba. The new genetic traits they introduce will result in a calm, peaceable Miraba but it will be strong, forward thinking. progressive and well able to defend itself. It is a balanced genetics. Something Miraba has not known for millenia. It corrects the imbalance brought to the planet long ago which resulted in the brutal violence, aggression and wars that have been so much a part of Miraba's history."

Fabby nodded, "That combined with the consciousness expansion of the transformation should bring a happier future and a leap into galactic citizenship for Miraba."

"Exactly," said Edyn.

The Frahza didn't enter into any conversation because their hive mentality limited their social graces among more differentiated beings. But they floated in various relaxed configurations around the room putting forth emotional energies of approval and friendliness for all. Pheledra thanked them for offering to do the necessary weather modification and detoxification. Soon, they went on their way and their three ships shot out of sight to carry out their promise.

Cobi and Ana were delighted to meet Edyn and quickly made him feel comfortable but

they were anxious to get underway. Nahvar excused himself. He wanted to see the changes displayed on the monitors and instruments on the control deck as they departed.

Fabby bowed slightly then followed Nahvar. Edyn, Cobi and Ana bid Pheledra goodbye and headed back down to board the scout craft. Biltar lingered behind. He wanted to thank Pheledra and speak with her before departing.

"Pheledra, these have been the happiest moments I have known in a long time. Finding Edyn after all this time is incredible. After nearly losing my life in the crash and receiving Protoron treatment, I know that I have many annoms left to live in this body. I want you to know that, even though Ana and Cobi must now complete the mission, it is your spirit that drives it and your spirit that has uplifted me beyond anything I ever imagined. Miraba will succeed in this transformation and you have been a great part of making it happen."

"Thank you for your kind words," said Pheledra, trying not to show her emotion. "Wherever you go, I will seek out your soul and touch it. I will remember you often." Biltar nodded. He started to say something but stopped himself. He looked into her eyes for a moment ... then respectfully but tenderly gave her a long hug and decended through the hatch to join the others.

Pheledra closed her eyes and could not move as she fought back the tears. After a few microns she felt Nelyani softly touch her arm and press her cheek against it. She looked down into her eyes and smiled, then

took the little girl's hand and the two went back to the observation chairs and sat down. Pheledra took a moment to recenter, then refocused on the monitors. *Will the hologram be sufficient to throw Lance off?*

"Where's Wave?" asked Nel. She seemed startled. "He wasn't up here..."

Pheledra felt a rush of concern. She hoped against hope that he was off somewhere sulking but when she closed her eyes and sought his frequency, she knew. "Wave is gone, Nel."

"Gone where?"

"He's on board the Ambassador's command carrier. He's been drawn away, Nel. All this has been too much for him ... the mistakes I made, my stubbornness ..."

"Oh, Pheledra," said Nel, "it's what he has chosen, not anything you have done. Yes, you made mistakes but don't go too far in blaming yourself."

The picture on the monitor shifted to the bottom of the Firefly. Fabby had slightly tilted the ship so that the bottom was out of the Ambassador's direct line of sight. A scout craft emerged. It was the hologram but looked exactly like Ana and Cobi's craft which hid behind it and the Firefly's slight tilt. The hologram craft moved toward the Ambassador's ring of ships.

They overheard Ana talking to Ambassador Lance. Pheledra brought them up on the monitor.

"Lance, darling," said Ana, "Cobi and I have decided to take you up on your offer. After all, we belong with you and we miss the way things were. We'll come in under your command carrier and you can beam us up."

Lance looked very happy. "I knew you'd come to your senses. I'm so glad. I miss you so much. Come on and we'll throw a big party!"

"Be there right away dear," said Cobi.

The hologram proceeded toward the Kultaki circle of ships. At the critical time, Ana started the program to make it appear as if the scout craft was about to fire upon the command carrier. Immediately, the Ambassador's full shield capability was deployed.

Instantly, Cobi hit the throttle and the real scout craft zipped off in the opposite direction.

"They made it!" Nelyani exclaimed.

"Now we too can get out of here and go get Boots and Orange." Pheledra had already headed the Firefly down to Miraba.

Pheledra looked at Nelyani. Somehow, she no longer looked like a little girl. Her countenance had changed. Her eyes were intense and her voice was strong and deep. "Only you and I are here together, Pheledra, and yet ... it is none but I ... state your truth."

Pheledra's hair stood on end and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh ... oh ... I'm so full of sorrow ... brought on by my own arrogance and pride ... my attitude caused useless

**dissention with Helaah .. over nothing ...
over cutting a hedge..."**

"Yes?" Nelyani's eyes were lasers burning into Pheledra's soul. She reeled back as Nelyani metamorphosed into a seething cauldron of light and color. Her voice warbled incoherently in a high pitched shriek coming to rest as clear words issuing from Aramanda.

"Speak on!"

Pheledra was sobbing now as she struggled to spit out all the poisonous toxins of her heart. "He went on the mission without me and died ... fell into a sun when the tachyon system failed ... vaporized ... and still I continue with the same thing and alienate my crew, alienate Wave and Fabby, the dearest and most loyal friends anyone ever had ... and I ruined that precious treasure ... because ... because ... I wanted my way. I felt above them, better than them and yet I fooled myself into thinking my focus was the mission. It was not the mission, it was my guilt - my guilt that I feared to admit to myself and projected outwards onto Wave - my self-righteous pride thinking I was so spiritual! I thought if I gave my all, even to the point of dying, becoming a martyr somehow - being killed like Helaah - that it would make it all right, that it would make me all right, and now Wave has slipped into an abyss and I did it, I pushed him off the side into it!"

"Oh sweet Pheledra," said Nelyani, looking like a little girl again, "even weakness shall transform into the most valuable spiritual help for Miraba. When you teach someone how to fish - be sure and tell them to simply

throw back the old shoes. And be sure to take that advice yourself?"

Forty Five - The Celestial Savior

The Ambassador roared with laughter. Ranilla and Petuva were enjoying the joke too. Nestingwave's heart was ravaged and torn, like Mother Miraba herself.

Lance had known exactly what Ana and Cobi were up to. He only put up his shields to go along with the game and appear to be fooled. He wanted the energy devices distributed - it was part of his new plan. Wave was part of his new plan. He would install Wave as a political leader and promote him as a wise celestial entity - a savior come to help Miraba through its trials. The political machine was already set up in Mavira - bought and paid for long ago as a contingency plan and very recently upgraded at great expense.

Ranilla tried to calm Lance. "Slow down a little dear - remember your weak heart. Take care of your health."

"They actually thought they could fool me with that ruse! They think I can't tell a hologram from a real scout craft! I'll bet they were worried. Thought I'd surely blast'em. Maybe I should chase after them a little to make the whole act a little more realistic. Maybe fire a few shots, eh?"

Petuva laughed and cuddled up next to Wave. "That would sure put a scare into 'em. I'd like to see their faces!"

"Well, I tell you what. I'm going to have Colonel Tordine take a scout craft and give them a little excitement. Just for fun."

Wave laughed a little. "What shall we do now Lance? I'm all ears."

"We've got it made now," Lance said, "they're working for us and don't even know it! The energy devices will be distributed. A quick engineering upgrade on the PSGs - with a little help from my Miraban friends - will make them compatible with the anti-gravity machines and ... Nestingwave will be installed as the Celestial Savior! We will have total control ... uh, I mean ... we will be in a rare position to guide the new Miraba because nobody goes anywhere, nobody takes anything anywhere, without those anti-gravity machines and my hands will be totally clean because I'm right up here only looking on from afar."

"And when does this guidance begin?" asked Wave.

"For you, immediately. For me, as soon as they have become completely dependent upon the anti-gravity machines. That shouldn't take long because all important roads are now rubble and there are very few conveyances of any type at all remaining after the cataclysm."

"What part shall I play?"

"Benevolent helper! - a celestial lightworker only concerned with the welfare and benefit of the evolving planet and its dear people - a role easy for you to play. You already have quite a bit of experience."

"Do you mean ... I'm on my own to use my own judgement?"

"Of course, Wave. I trust you. The genetic treatments that you are receiving from Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken are gradually improving your entire outlook. You are becoming stronger, wiser and more intelligent than ever. You are becoming able to pass righteous judgement ... able to rule with precision. These slow and subtle genetic treatments are so much better than the Frahza and their genetic manipulations. In fact, eventually, I'm going to introduce a fatal venereal disease to wipe out those hybrids. We can't have the Mirabans smarter than we are!"

"How long will it take for everything to be ready for my arrival?" asked Wave.

"The political machine and legal institutions are already in place ... all they need is you. You will have countless helpers to do all the work. This cost me a lot to set up, you know. I'm depending upon you, and Petuva who will be faithfully by your side. She will provide entertainment and diversion for you and she will be the most graceful and elegant of hostesses - to provide irresistible charm for all. Your career is assured."

"And when they realize their dependence upon the anti-gravity machines, what will you do then?"

"Ahh ... a very good question. You will make an announcement. You will tell them that a few changes need to be made, for better management ... I'll tell you what to say. You will remind them that the anti-gravity

machines have an exclusive ownership and patent."

"Lance, when do I get that new wardrobe you've been promising?" asked Petuva.

Ranilla exhaled loudly. "That's all you ever think about, Petuva - your clothes!" she snapped.

"Shut your mouth!" Lance then turned to Petuva. "It's all there now - already down in the city of Mavira - in the palace waiting for you - a gigantic new wardrobe with everything imaginable - and you know what to do with it. don't you."

"Ooh yes," said Petuva, "this is going to be exciting and just incredible ... don't you think so, Wave?"

"I can hardly wait to get started," said Wave, kissing Petuva's ear. She giggled a little and kissed him passionately on the lips.

"One of the scout craft will take you down when everything is ready," said Lance. He tapped on his tan cap with his clawed forefinger. "And remember ... I'll be seeing you ... oh ... not in your private moments, of course."

Forty Six - Fine Teamwork

Dawn was trying to break through the black Miraban skies. The hard rain that had poured down during the night was now over at last and the boiling the dark clouds were parting.

The Frahza were at work high over the dangerous lake area, and eerie wisps of light popped up randomly from their frequency interactions with the toxin soaked environment. The high frequencies used to neutralize the poisons and radiation also produced a new smell of freshness in the air.

Orange peeked out from under the pile of rubble. His psychic sensors were in contact with Pheledra and she was on her way. Behind him, and not at all interested in sticking his nose out, Boots tried to disappear. At least he was out of the weather and out of sight.

The Miraban lifterwhirls came back in when the rain stopped and were still trying to retrieve parts from the crashed recon saucer. Soldiers in protective suits moved on the ground. A few of the gun crews in the lifterwhirls nervously fired chainstorm puncture blasters at the mysterious lights which danced everywhere.

Particle beams occasionally slashed across the sky even though nothing was in sight.

Even hiding under the rubble, Boots still cringed nervously every time he smelled those carrier waves right before the particle beams flashed. The gunners knew that a spacecraft in fourth density, although invisible to them, could be destroyed with a lucky shot - and they still suspected that such a craft just might come into their area, since there was already so much strange activity going on.

They were convinced that planet Miraba was under an alien invasion and they were on

the front lines. Then too, they had been promised to be made bosses once the old regime returned. This motivated them.

A Frahza ship suddenly appeared overhead and skillfully dodged the crackling blasts - then zipped out of sight. This time, the particle beam rays came from above, as well as below, because the satellite, which had destroyed the recon saucer, was still zeroed in on the area.

The soldiers knew that Orange had been after something under the water, so they were watching the lake carefully. The water was far too toxic for them to go out and look for whatever it was. Even if they did, the heavy wreckage on the bottom, the nonexistent visibility and the thick black ooze would make it almost impossible.

Orange ducked down and Boots instinctively dug himself into an available dry hole in the ground. He was still plenty scared but felt a lot more secure down and tight than when he was a target up a tree blowing back and forth in the breeze.

The droid carefully replastered himself with black mud. "It sure makes good camouflage," he whispered, "but it's not good for living beings. And Boots, you've still got way too much of it on your fur."

Earlier, Orange had done his best to wipe the cat off - but it wasn't enough. He reached down the hole to give comfort by scratching Boots under the chin with his mechanical hand, then quietly explored further back in the rubble until he located a dry towel. He carefully pulled the cat out of his hole and vigorously rubbed him all over.

Boots felt like he was being assaulted and yowled loudly. Orange quickly stuffed him back into the hole. "Shh, they'll hear you ..."
"What was that?" came a voice.

"I think there might be someone hiding over here, sir," another voice said closer by.

"We've got to get out of here," Orange whispered. Boots wanted to stay in the hole and the droid had to pry his claws loose from the root he was clinging onto. He stroked Boots affectionately and tucked him securely under his arm.

Orange could hear the soldiers now. They were moving through the rubble looking for the source of the noise and getting closer. The footsteps told Orange there had to be at least five and they were closing in. He didn't want to get trapped in a small space so he decided to make a break for it.

He clamped onto Boots and, like a blur, zoomed out of the hole right past the surprised soldiers. Their sudden reactions and poor visibility, due to the protective suits, caused three of them to collide and the others to scramble out of the way to avoid being knocked down.

Orange and Boots would have made a clean escape had it not been for some other soldiers on the hill who opened fire. Orange zig zagged to avoid the projectiles but one blew off the arm holding Boots.

Orange kept on going but Boots tumbled through the air and fell directly into the midst of a whole army of soldiers. He hissed and screeched and growled running around and around their feet. They didn't dare shoot

because they would shoot each other. Instead they tried to grab him.

Several soldiers quickly realized they'd made a big mistake, as they tasted the full fury of tooth and claw gone wild. Boots was able to rip right through their protective suits. The soldiers with torn suits, not aware that the toxicity was rapidly declining due to the Frahza, panicked and ran for the lifterwhirls to extract them. Everyone else quickly got out of the way. As Orange turned back, he saw Boots break through and heading underneath the rubble again.

This time Boots was seeking out extra tight places where the soldiers couldn't follow. Orange remained high enough to be out of range but he had a fix on Boots and with his sensors could see him moving further and further back into the rubble.

"Wait," said one of the soldiers, "it's nothin' but a damn cat. Forget him."

The soldiers shined their lights into the rubble but didn't see anything so they moved out to continue their patrol.

Orange, with the black mud camouflage smeared all over him was able to sneak back to the spot where Boots had gone under and squeezed in. Orange hoped that Boots had stopped before he went too far into the rubble and got stuck. But Boots kept going quite a ways further than he should have in his panic and finally crawled into a skinny pipe.

"Uh oh," said Orange, "Boots, can you hear me?"

Orange heard a little meow in reponse. The Droid didn't like what his sensors were telling him. Boots was stuck and could neither move forward nor backward. His whiskers had been burned off from the fire of the recon saucer and he couldn't tell when he'd gotten into a place too small for him. Now, he was thoroughly stuck in the narrow pipe. He could still breathe well enough. Evidently, air was coming through the other end of the pipe, but he'd gotten himself into a very bad situation.

Orange found Pheledra with his psychic sensors. *What is your ETA?*

*Five zeron*s, Pheledra's voice resounded in his head.

Boots is hung up in a pipe, Orange responded, *he crawled into a pipe but it was too small. I don't know how we're going to get him. I can't get to him and he's under too much stuff for you to beam him up.*

We'll figure out what to do. Pheledra wanted to sound confident but she had no idea yet how they would get him. "Nel?"

"What, Pheledra?"

"Do you want to do something for us?"

"Yes, oh yes!" Nel was eager.

"Picture Boots and imagine yourself stroking him. Say comforting words to him in your mind."

"Okay, I can do that."

Boots was stuck in blackness. Even his cat eyes couldn't pick up any light. He wouldn't suffocate. Air was hitting his face. But - he could neither move forward nor back out of the pipe. Turning around was completely out of the question. At this point he really didn't care if he went forward or backward as long as he could get out of that tight spot. He heard Nel's voice in his head and could feel her hand against his fur. Pheledra's mind was there too - speaking soothing and reassuring words. *Just relax, kitten, we're going to get you out.*

"There's no way we can go near that lake," said Fabby, "you're going to have to go a ways on foot because we must beam you down some distance away from the lake area where we won't be seen."

"All right," said Pheledra, "I'll take Blue and Green along."

"Pheledra, you'll be awfully close to those soldiers," said Nahvar. "Why don't you let me come with you."

"No, Nahvar," said Pheledra, "it wouldn't be fair to put you at so much risk and it is better for you to stay here with Nel. Boots has a habit of getting into tight situations. It's up to me to go get him."

Pheledra went to the weapons cabinet and strapped two spectrum disrupters to the top of her wrists. She then summoned Blue and Green who came flying through the hatch and took their place along side her on the transfer pad. They had put on camouflage covers but in order to use their tools or weapons, they'd have to open the cover and expose their lights.

When Fabby located a safe spot, he beamed them down. They materialized in an alleyway between two destroyed buildings. Pheledra felt the heaviness of third density. The air was thick. She stood for a moment catching her breath - then they started out.

Blue and Green took up the front and rear with Pheledra in between. If she needed to get away in a hurry, she would step up onto one of the droids, secure herself by the hand and foot holds and become a flying passenger. Her disrupters were set to stun in case they were confronted by the soldiers. In third density, the only type of force field the droids could throw up was a blocking field. It would effectively block anything out, such as projectiles or explosions, but it also prevented them from moving forward, so it could only be used in an emergency situation.

Five lifterwhirls went over at low altitude. Their infrared sensors must have spotted Pheledra because they circled back and hovered over them. Pheledra jumped up onto Blue and they flew for cover just before the lifterwhirls opened fire. Blue and Green had immediately turned on the blocking field and they were safe but found themselves pinned down. The lifterwhirls had zeroed in and were hammering at the force field with everything they had.

The ordinance from the lifterwhirls was so intense and there were so many firey explosions that it looked to Pheledra as if they were inside a bubble looking into a firey holocaust. They couldn't even see through the field bubble because the outside explosions were so intense.

“Okay, I’m going to extract you guys,” said Fabby. “I’ll beam you down in another place.”

A micron later, Pheledra, Blue and Green materialized on the control deck of the Firefly, across from Fabby, Nel and Nahvar who were waiting to see if they were okay.

“Put us down over on the other side,” said Pheledra to Fabby, “be ready to beam us up whenever I give you the signal.”

“Okay,” said Fabby.

Inky and Ginger came bounding down from the observation deck and lept onto Pheledra, one perched on each shoulder, tails held straight up bristling like two antennas.

Pheledra was surprised. “Well - if you’re that insistent.”

Fabby beamed them down once more and they materialized in front of a crumbled athletic stadium. This time, Pheledra stayed firmly attached to Blue. Inky and Ginger were clinging to her shoulders and Green was right behind.

After they’d gone a ways, four soldiers came around a corner right in front of them. Blue and Green ducked to one side as the soldiers opened fire but missed. Pheledra hit one of the soldiers with a stun ray. He dropped where he was and his buddies grabbed him and pulled him to safety. More soldiers came and once again the droids had to put up the force field. This time, they managed to escape by going to the side and hiding under a bridge.

"Blue," said Pheledra, "you and Green stay here. I'm going to walk over to where Orange and Boots are located under the rubble."

Pheledra carefully made her way down what used to be streets. She ducked into the one of the demolished structures whenever she heard the soldiers. Finally, she reached Orange. "Where's Boots?"

"He's right up through that pipe," Orange said as he gestured toward the pipe with his remaining arm and hand. "The other end must be sticking out somewhere above. Right now, he's exhausted. If he could just scoot himself along and not give up, he'd make it on through."

Pheledra found Boots in her mind and felt his despair. *If you can just go a little further sweetheart, you'll come out the other end of the pipe.* She gave him a little psychic nudge from behind.

Boots felt some strength returning now that Pheledra was near, so he wiggled his paws. By hanging onto the rust inside the pipe, he could drag himself forward a tiny bit at a time. Inky and Ginger hopped to the ground and ran out from under the rubble to find the end of the pipe above. When they located it, they both sniffed and meowed. Boots was thrilled to hear their voices. It was a real encouragement and their meows weren't very far away. Boots yowled in reply and wiggled his paws a little more.

Don't give up, kitten,* Pheledra's voice said in his head, *Inky and Ginger want to see you ... you're almost there.

Boots thought he could make out a little light ahead but it became harder and harder to get a grip on anything to move up the pipe. Slipping back down was no problem. Although the pipe now went up at a steep angle, he only needed to flare out his hind legs to prevent any backslip - but - he was now completely worn out and couldn't find a grip at all.

Pheledra was aware of everything that was happening. "We need to get something into that pipe for Boots to snag onto," she softly whispered.

She looked out from under the rubble and saw some soldiers poking around. They were still searching and were very near. Too near for her to risk being out from under cover. *Inky, Ginger* ... she interfaced strongly with them and impressed the situation into their minds and they understood.

They both began a search through the rubble. Ginger found some suspenders and put one end down the pipe, but the suspenders were too short - beyond their friend's reach.

Inky discovered a large curtain. Around the bottom was an embroidered edge. One end was loose, so he began ripping the rest of it off. He held the curtain down with his paws and yanked with his teeth until all the edging came off. He carried an end over to the pipe and put it in. Ginger pushed it down with her forepaws.

Something hit Boots on the nose and put him on alert. When he felt with his claws, they snagged right into the thin piece of

embroidery. Little by little he pulled himself upward. On the other end, Inky had a forepaw snagged onto the makeshift rope and held it down with his weight. Ginger felt like she had done her job, so she sat grooming herself and expecting to see Boots any micron. Pheledra was in tune with all the cats and encouraging Boots but he had come to the end of his strength and could not pull himself up any more. He just cried and hung on. Orange ventured a look outside and saw another group of soldiers coming. "It's still not safe for us to leave," he whispered to Pheledra.

Pheledra was urging Inky and Ginger along. *Pull him. Pull him.* She carefully formed the picture in her mind of what Inky and Ginger needed to do. Finally, they got the idea and began to pull on the embroidered curtain edging. She contacted Blue and Green through their psychic sensors. *If its safe, get over to help Inky and Ginger pull Boots up.*

The soldiers just passed us, Green telepathed. We'll come.

The two droids flew quietly over to where the cats were struggling and soon had Boots out of the pipe.

Check him out and give him some energy food and water. Pheledra telepathed as looked out from the rubble and saw that the coast was clear.

"We can fly over there now," Orange whispered, "the soldiers are well past us."

When they arrived, Pheledra stepped off Orange and saw Inky and Ginger licking Boots. She embraced him and kissed him on

his forehead. Soon he was able to lap up a little fresh water provided from Green's emergency pack and Blue gave him a tasty morsel of dry food which revived him considerably. They heard the sound of soldiers rushing toward them. They had seen the lights when the droids opened their camouflage coverings to get the emergency food and water. Shots rang out. Blue and Green immediately threw off their coverings and boosted their lights up to blinding intensity. The soldiers yelled as they looked away and took cover.

"Fabby, beam us up now," said Pheledra.

Fabby was already prepared and had them pinpointed. In a micron, they were inside a fourth density detoxification bubble on the control deck of the Firefly.

"We'll have to wait 10 zeron for detoxification," said Pheledra. "We are all toxic now after rolling around in the mud and crawling through that rubble. I am so proud of all of you. You stuck together and worked in near perfect coordination to accomplish this rescue. Orange, Fabby will fix your damage and you'll be good as new. We'll get Boots into the Proton and he'll be okay too."

"Thanks, Pheledra," said Orange, "I'm just so sorry that Red was lost."

"Why don't we figure out a way to get him?" asked Blue. "If we could just reach him somehow, I'm sure he could be restored."

"Yeah," said Green, "we shouldn't leave here without him. He'd do the same for us."

"Reaching him is the problem," said Pheledra, "but maybe we can come up with something if we put our minds to it. I just hope he is not crushed beyond repair."

"He's pretty tough," said Orange, "I'm for taking any risk necessary to recover him."

The detoxification process finished and they stepped out onto the control deck of the Firefly. Fabby immediately rushed Boots to the Protoron. Nel and Nahvar congratulated everyone and Nel hugged Inky and Ginger with all her might. The cats went on up to the observation deck to curl up and wait for Boots.

Pheledra, Fabby, Nel, Nahvar and the three droids gathered on the observation deck to talk.

Forty Seven - Fruits and Nuts

In a small private lounge aboard the Kultaki Command Carrier, Wave and the Ambassador sat next to each other in plush easy chairs.

"Come on, Wave, have another snort."

"No thanks, Lance, I'm fine."

"You know, Wave, this has been a really deep conversation. One of the most profound I've had in a long time. We really got down to it, didn't we?"

"Well"

"I mean ... we really opened up - talked about what was on our hearts and minds - didn't we? I really enjoyed that. Honesty - that's what it is Wave - honesty. An ephiphany. One of those ... AHAs. Yes, Wave. hmmttttt. Goddammit you know I just saw something! An insight. You and I are destined for greatness, my friend. We have not even imagined what power is available! Oh my, what a synchronicity, what a divine coincidence! It's pretty bizarre - but - here it is anyway."

"Yeah ... here it is, I guess."

"Say, Wave ... you know, I have a commanding officer, a dedicated man. I learned everything I know from him but I ... never got to know him, uh, personally, until recently. Over these thousands of annoms, he's always been there for me though. He's praised me ... and he's corrected me. And ... I have to say ... he's done a fairly good job. He's a good old boy. We sit down, just like you and I, and share a little happy powder together, have a few snorts, and talk things over. Deep, you know. Like father and son. You know? I'd like for you to meet him - so you'll know the chain of command and you'll better understand ... uh ... our dedication and our ... management structure. He's quite impressed by the Celestial Savior. He wants to come on over here and meet you personally. Would that be all right?"

"Hey, I'm ready for another snort of that happy powder now. Sure ... sure Lance, I'd love to meet him."

Before long, word came that a guest was arriving. Wave and Lance got up and walked over to the transfer station. An energy orb

appeared and out came a puff of smoke revealing a military man with a crutch under his right arm. His right foot was wrapped in a bandage.

Ambassador Lance introduced him. "Wave, I'd like for you to meet Commander Dhati of the Kultaki Starfleet."

"Just call me, Dhati," he said, batting his long eyelashes.

"Dhathi, this is Nestingwave."

"I know who he is," said Dhathi "let's get down to business."

Ambassador Lance led them into the lounge. Dhathi hobbled on the crutch and hung his cap on a hook as he went by. They went to a small square table with wooden chairs.

Lance tried to sit next to Dhathi.

"You sit across from me so I can see your eyes, darling." said Dhathi. "Here, Wave, you sit next to me."

"It sure is good to see you Dhathi," said Lance, "what happened to your foot?"

"I stepped on a broken mirror, sonny."

"Oh ... sorry." Lance swallowed hard.

Wave smiled but didn't say anything. He was sizing Dhathi up. Pictures of various fruits and nuts kept popping into his mind.

Dhathi's red eyes gazed toward the Ambassador and he blinked his long

eyelashes a couple of times. "Treprestas, give me your report."

"Yes Dhati, ... here it is. Mavira. Mavira is the place, Dhati. A center for our guidance, agriculture, education, medicine, law, manufacturing, commerce, sales, advertising, science, research and development - and the hometown of anti-gravity machines coupled with zero point energy devices, and best of all it's the religious headquarters and Divine Temple for the Celestial Savior ... His holiness ... Nestingwave." Lance gave a gesture of presentation toward Wave.

"Celestial Savior," nodded Wave, going along with it.

Dhati suddenly looked at Wave. "Oh Celestial Savior, are you capable of righteous judgement?"

"Oh, yes. Oh yes indeedy," Wave answered. "What did you have in mind?"

Dhati's eyes softened and he took a pathetic tone as if he was about to cry. "Now that the cataclysm is over, some of the finest public servants of Miraba - the revered shakers and movers of the planet - are being severely persecuted by the Miraban survivors. The executive officers, Bank Presidents, CEOs, national security police, govenors, universal surveillance agencies and ministers from the departments of defense are being labelled 'war criminals'. They are being accused of genocide, pedophilia, rape, deception, fraud, mass murder, conspiracy, robbery and extortion. They are being called traitors, guilty of High Treason."

“Did they do all these things?” asked Wave.

"Of course," said Dhati, "that's politics, but it was all for the good of Miraba and the defense of its most valued fruit."

"Regardless of that," said Wave, "if they defrauded the people, deceived, raped and murdered them, they should be punished."

"I'm glad you see it that way, Celestial Savior," said Dhati changing to a very buisnesslike tone. "I would like to see the sacrifice they are about to make count for something. The Mirabans have been through so much. They are so angry and frustrated and now their whole lives are interrupted permanently. Their hopes and dreams are drowned in fear and despair. Everyone feels obligated to blame someone else. They want revenge ... and I'd like to provide them a healthy outlet. Once and for all, those who did them wrong should be brought to justice. I see ... public executions - quick - just a shot through the head and a fast cleanup. Of course we should toss the bodies to the crowd so they can get personally involved. It would relieve far more stress than a punching bag. When justice is satisfied, the Mirabans can go on to build the woorld tomorrow. All you have to do, Wave, is just say one word of truth - that's all. A single word of Divine Truth - 'guilty'. Not a hard job for the Celestial Savior, eh? Hey, how many 'celestials' did you save today?" Dhati roared with laughter. Lance laughed too - he didn't quite know why - Wave only smiled and nodded.

Forty Eight - A Cold Chill

Biltar and Edyn peered out through the transparency of the Kultaki scout craft. The yellow sand dunes of Tarsenay stretched to the horizon. High above - Miraba loomed in the sky. Portions of the planet were shrouded in darkness. The erupting volcanos had dumped volumes of dust and smoke into the atmosphere. Weather patterns had been disrupted and some areas were engulfed in torrential rains while others wilted under tormenting heat.

"Well," said Anadia, "Pheledra is having success. Boots and Orange have been rescued and are now on board the Firefly. The droids are planning to retrieve Red from the lake bottom. As soon as they get Red, she'll take the Firefly back up into orbit and wait for us to complete our mission. Meanwhile, when we're sure the coast is clear, we will go down to Penyat and get those energy devices. So far, I have not been able to locate Fryd. He may be dead but we won't know for sure until we get there."

"He lived close to where the devices are hidden," said Biltar, "maybe someone there will know what happened to him. If he is still breathing, those energy devices will be his number one priority. I still have hope."

"I pray you can get together with your old colleagues," said Edyn, "it is so inspiring to work with those you have come to know and trust."

Cobishandra looked excitedly at the instruments. "There's a scout craft moving over the horizon. It's got a fix on us."

"That can only mean one thing," said Ana, staring at the monitors, "Lance has sent someone to get us."

"Get us?" Cobi was breathless.

"We've got to be ready for combat," said Ana, "there's no losing them now. They'll know every move we make and be right on our tail."

"Look," said Biltar, "I really don't know what 'combat' means in these circumstances, but I suggest we postpone it as long as possible and go full steam ahead with the mission. If they try to interfere or come too close, we'll have to stand and fight but we might be able to get a lot accomplished first."

"No," said Cobi, remembering the sudden loss of Ana's hand and arm, "I can't just wait for someone to attack me unexpectedly. I say we should seek them out, blast them now and be done with it."

"You have a good point there," said Ana, "if we go on the offensive, it might surprise them by taking them off guard."

"Whatever you two feel comfortable with," shrugged Biltar, "I'm for whatever will get those energy devices distributed across Miraba as soon as possible."

"Sometimes the best defense is a sudden offense," Edyn added.

"That's right," said Anadia, "we can't have someone out there trying to kill us while we're completing our mission."

"Let's get on it then," Biltar replied, "just tell me what to do. I'm a complete novice, as you know."

"Me too," said Edyn, "I learned a lot among the Frahza but combat wasn't on the curriculum."

"Keep watch," said Ana.

"Be good observers," added Cobi.

Over the horizon, at low altitude above Tarsenay, Colonel Tordine adjusted his instruments and monitors. "Just scare them," Lance had said - and that's exactly what he intended to do.

This is going to be fun, he mused, I'll zoom in toward them, fire a couple of shots over their heads and chase them around a bit. Being inexperienced women they will panic at the first sign of any danger.

Colonel Toridne moved his craft in closer.

Cobi did a quick scan to pick up the energetic signatures of the threatening craft's occupants and said, "Ana, it's Colonel Tordine and he is alone."

"Oh, Colonel Tordine, is it? What an evil bastard he is. He was laughing when Lance thrust my arm into the meat grinder."

Ana and Cobi decided to use the hologram trick again. This time, they produced a hologram around the scout craft, threw up

their full shields, cloaked and escaped out the back way. Before Colonel Tordine realized that the real ship was gone, it uncloaked right in front of him, dropped all its shields and prepared to fire. The Colonel scrambled to fire his energy cannons - but it was too late. A blast exploded in front of him throwing his craft up into the air and out of control. It came down hard on Tarsenay. All the monitors and communication instruments were knocked out and the craft was slightly damaged but still intact and functional.

Both Kultaki women rippled with flames of color and shrieked with victory.

"Good shot, Cobi!" shouted Ana, "you burned his ass but didn't kill him! Now, Lance will know we mean business but won't feel obliged to take vengeance!"

"Fantastic work!" Edyn exclaimed.

"Really magnificent," said Biltar, "I'm sure glad we're on the same side!"

Everyone laughed as they streaked toward Miraba.

Colonel Tordine was glad to be alive but very afraid. It took him thirty zeronos to stop shaking. Then, he changed his soiled pants, doctored the huge bruise on his forehead and headed his scout craft back to rejoin the others and reluctantly give his report to the Ambassador.

"Oh ... the vacuum of space next to bare skin," he whispered with a cold chill.

Forty Nine - Friend Fryd

Cobi beamed Biltar down in Penyat and he went looking for Fryd. Conditions at Penyat weren't too bad and he was able to find several people who knew Fryd. None of them had seen him but told Biltar to check back after they'd done their own search.

Groups of them set out in different directions looking for someone who might know where Fryd was. Finally, he was located in a make-shift hospital. Biltar was flown there by lifterwhirl.

"Biltar! Biltar! Is that you?" Fryd was trying desperately to get out of bed but didn't have the strength.

"Oh Fryd, I'm so glad you're still alive," said Biltar, rushing to embrace him. "I have so much to tell you. Everythings going to be okay! The energy devices will be distributed! And we can work together when you are well!"

"I knew you'd find me," said Fryd, "even when I was in my coma, I dreamed of it. Biltar, you are the best thing I've seen since I came around. I'll have to stay here awhile to recover but I'll be ready to go."

"When I get the devices distributed, I'll be back for you. Now, let's catch up."

Fryd looked grave. "I've got some bad news about Rysen."

"Oh no, what?"

"The NSP arrested him and his whole family. They tortured them to death, Biltar ... the whole family ... but Rysen never told them where the PSGs are."

"Oh no ..." Biltar was grieved. "I'm so glad that insane regime is done forever ... there's such a big price to pay for freedom."

Fryd nodded sadly.

They talked for awhile remembering their friend and his lovely family. Fryd informed Biltar of Rysen's harrowing escape after their meeting that night at the pub and the days that followed before he and his family were taken into custody by hard-core surviving elements of the NSP, after they had made it through the cataclysm.

"I found this out from a friend who has a short wave," said Fryd.

"What a story," said Biltar, "Rysen fought with all he had to the very end. I don't even want to think about what he must have gone through. It makes me all the more determined to complete this ... and do it well. What happened to you?"

Fryd told of his own ordeal during and after the cataclysm. He had just been making plans to take his aging mother out of the city when an asteroid struck destroying everything. Fryd only remembered a huge explosion before he lost consciousness. When he came to, his poor mother was dead, buried beneath the fallen house. He couldn't move and just laid there crushed under the heavy pile of rubble.

"I nearly died, Biltar. I kept going in and out of consciousness and had a near death experience. I found myself in some kind of long narrow tunnel with slimy walls. It was a dimly lit place and there was absolutely no sound. I looked down at myself but couldn't see my body. I could feel the slimy texture of the walls around me but I couldn't see my hands. I was completely at peace. Somehow, I made my way along the passageway, very slowly at first and then a little faster. The tunnel twisted and turned, sometimes going up and sometimes down. Up ahead there was a light. As I got closer and closer, the light seemed to be moving toward me faster than I was moving toward it. Then, the most marvelous thing happened."

"What was that?"

"All at once, I was swimming in the most beautiful light. Indescribable. Mother was smiling in front of me and I began to cry. She looked at me with the most beautiful, tender look I've ever seen. Then, she kissed me on the forehead. Right then, Biltar, I knew she was okay and I was okay. Suddenly, angels ... or some kind of ... beings were everywhere and soft music seemed to come out of nowhere. It was my music. I was ... playing it somehow ... with my emotions. The most incredible colors flowed with the music ... I ... I just can't describe it. Then one of the beings spoke softly but firmly, 'you must return.' Oh, Biltar, that's the last thing I wanted to do."

Fryd cried a little as Biltar smiled. "Oh, Fryd, it's a fresh new start. More wonderful and powerful than we've ever hoped for or imagined."

Fryd was still remembering his vision. "'Go back,' the voice said again, 'you are not finished.' Then I remembered our purpose, Biltar, and what we've discovered and the gift we must give to Miraba and I found myself here in this makeshift hospital. I don't even know how I got here and nobody has been able to tell me yet."

"Oh, Fryd, wait til you hear what's been happening."

Then, Biltar told Fryd, as best he could, what he'd been experiencing. Fryd was amazed and awed. When he became tired and needed to rest, Biltar took his friend's hand and placed it over his own heart. "You are here, Fryd, right along with Rysen. As horrible as all this has been, Miraba has come through. We are on our way to a new life unlike anything we ever imagined. My health has never been better, Fryd. I've never had so much hope. Rest now until I come for you ... and keep me in your thoughts and prayers."

Fryd smiled and nodded. "Every day."

Biltar left the make-shift hospital and Cobi beamed him back into the scout craft.

"We'll have to come back again later to get Fryd," he said, "he's still in pretty bad shape physically ... but he's alive as never before."

"Okay," said Ana.

A while later, Cobi and Ana hovered the scout craft over the abandoned exchange center where the devices were stored inside the vault. With a heat ray, they vaporized the roof and beamed the devices up five at a

time. The cargo hold of the scout craft was just large enough to hold all fifty PSGs.

"Let's deliver these babies," said Ana.

"Where?" asked Edyn.

"Five places," said Cobishandra as she changed Ana's bandage, "Shanveh, Mavira, Quepar, Tacu and Bectalyne."

"Will any of the other nations on Miraba feel left out?" asked Edyn.

"The nations of Miraba are no longer considered to exist," said Biltar, "they were political entities which were destroyed in the cataclysm for ever. Even though there are holdouts who have ambitions to reestablish the old way, the planet will now become a global village. This is inevitable."

Edyn nodded in approval. "Where do we go first?"

"Shanveh island across the western sea," replied Ana, "the geological changes are causing it to rise, so there's no danger of it going under water."

"More capabilities still exist on Miraba than anyone would ever suspect," said Cobi, "all the communication satellites are gone, so several rockets are being launched from Shanveh to put new ones into orbit. Initially, these are to establish computer communications between the five centers where the PSGs will be delivered. Computers will also be put into the hands of those indigenous peoples who already have the PSGs, so they too will be part of the network and be able to proliferate the

wisdom of their elders. These five centers will become hubs of commerce, rebuilding and the exchange of new ideas. The important thing is to get communication reestablished right away."

"Edyn," said Biltar, "Shanveh may be the place for our headquarters. Many of the inhabitants are forward thinking people who have been yearning for celestial contact for years. A few are already in telepathic and dream communication - but they don't have much discernment nor understanding about their experiences. Now, they'll get some answers. Shanveh still has a strong military but, thankfully, they have no heart for aggression. Best of all, that area has a functional space capability. They can launch communication satellites. Their industrial base is damaged but still intact - capable of restoration. Food production will resume with new and improved methods. They will be able to manufacture the PSGs and do research and development. It might be the best place for us."

"You can decide that later," said Cobi, "when you see how things shape up."

"Yes," said Ana, "in the meantime, let's get these PSGs to their proper places and get a feel for the whole situation."

"That's a good idea," said Biltar.

Fifty - Oneness Consensus

On the Firefly, the official meeting was over. Orange, Green, Blue and Violet had insisted on being present to express their views and they did so eloquently. At the end, there was a consensus. All four droids would go to dig out Red's remains. Pheledra was concerned about sending all four, especially Orange, who was missing an arm, but was overruled by everyone else, including Fabby.

"We four together will dig out our brother Red's remains," Violet had said.

Then Blue spoke boldly as the other droids nodded in approval. "Yes, we four will dig out Red's remains. Then we will dig out the safe he was after and bring that too." All the droids nodded firmly.

"Wait," said Fabby, "we can't do that. The Anadine Galactic Council is only allowing us to get our crew. We cannot have anything more to do with the mission." Blue went right up to Fabby. "The greatest honor and respect we can give to our fallen comrade is to finish his mission. We are determined."

Nothing more could be said and even Pheledra was in agreement. "What the Council doesn't know won't hurt them."

She turned to Nel and Nahvar. "When I take you to Biltar and we all say goodbye for the last time, I'd like to put those papers into his hands. A surprise ... and a way of letting him know ..."

"Sure," said Nahvar, "I understand. It's going to be hard for all of us to say that last goodbye."

As the droids prepared for their mission, Nelyani spoke to Pheledra. "I've been trying to pay attention to the gift you said I had. Pheledra, I'm getting some really strong impressions."

"Tell me, Nel. Every word that comes out of your mouth is important to me."

"Thanks, Pheledra. If we are patient and wise, we will delay the droids' mission and fly back up into orbit. The soldiers' interest in the lake area is going to be distracted by activities of the Frahza in a few days. They plan to bring in a large number of ships and materialize into third density in order to fully neutralize the radiation produced by the power plant meltdown. The activity will be quite a distance away and the soldiers will be called there. When that happens, it will be a fairly safe time for the droids to do their task."

"Did the Frahza contact you?"

"No ... I sort of ... found them ... and they were glad to tell me."

Pheledra immediately called everyone back together. "Listen to what Nel has to say."

Nel told her story and everyone knew instinctively that it was true.

"How long before the Frahza do their operation?" asked Pheledra.

"A few days," replied Nel.

“All right. How do you four droids feel about this?”

Blue came forward to speak as a spokesman for all. "Let's get a good fix on this place and go up into orbit and wait. When things clear out down here, we'll just zip back down and do it."

All the droids nodded in approval.

"Somehow," said Edyn, "we all know it's the very best thing to do."

“That's right,” said Nahvar.

Fabby nodded. "I agree completely."

"That settles it then," said Pheledra, "we're on our way back up into orbit. I'm going to spend this extra time attempting to telepath with Wave, if he hasn't already blocked out my frequencies."

The Firefly had to remain in orbit twelve Miraban days before the lake area was safe enough for them to continue the operation to recover Red.

Pheledra was unable to get through to Wave.

Fifty One - Fly On The Wall

On the Kultaki Command Carrier, Ranilla and Petuva had gone to the ladies retiring room. Wave sat across from Lance in the small lounge while the two doctors moved around with their machines giving him a genetic treatment. His thoughts were

competing and he wasn't feeling very well. Nevertheless, he told himself he was doing the right thing.

"When will Petuva and I be going down?"

"When the new communication satellites are up and operating properly," replied Lance, "and immediately after the energy devices arrive in Mavira. Right now, Cobi and Ana are starting at the top of their list - Shanveh island in the southern hemisphere. They'll probably stay there until the satellites are launched and operating. They will also look the place over and establish some working relationships. Next on their list is Mavira. Already, the wheels for your arrival are turning in Mavira. A faction of leaders has already risen up. They are gaining favor by reorganizing the remaining infrastructure and keeping law and order. Those leaders have established some limited contact with the rest of Miraba through short-wave transmissions and have initiated a world-wide campaign to assure people that they are not under an alien invasion. Their priority is the welfare and safety of all citizens. Necessities are being fairly distributed, everyone's talents and abilities are being put to good use. The trauma of the cataclysm has caused survivors to band together in unheard of cooperation. The sky above them is filled with celestial ships and they are eagerly awaiting some direct contact. The stage is being set for you, Celestial Savior. Rumors are being spread about heavenly intervention and guidance. At this point they are yearning for someone to show them the way. The more religious among them are convinced that a prophet is coming."

"What should I tell them?"

"Just tell them the truth. Tell them how and why their situation has come about and give them the solution from a Universal perspective." Lance grinned.

"Like a ... mentor?" Wave was a little puzzled.

"Oh yes!" said Lance, "a big brother from the stars! A wise angel of hope! A super-being of condescension! A savior!"

"What kind of acts of salvation are you talking about?"

"Your first act will be to deal strongly with the former powers-that-be who perpetuated and facilitated our management of Miraba. The vast majority of the survivors have now become aware of how they were duped, lied to, exploited and enslaved. They are becoming cognizant of the fact that there was an outside influence. Hello?" Lance laughed. "The sleepers are awakening - and they are angry. Livid with rage would be a better description - very stressed. They need to be gently put back to sleep so they can rest from their anxieties. Back to the good old days of a pay check, a ball game and intoxicants."

"I see," said Wave, "you're trying to guide them into some order and stability."

"Exactly. Stability means serenity and progress. Four Miraban world leaders have been captured."

"Only four?"

"More to come soon. These are being flown to Mavira by VTL areocar from around the globe because the city of Mavira still has a reasonably functioning structure. They are being brought ... for judgement. They've already confessed. You will satisfy the peoples thirst for revenge - then publicly unveil the anti-gravity technology along with the PSGs, which will have just arrived. The scientists that secretly developed those anti-gravity machines are reluctant to reveal them until things stabilize a bit more. Some of those same scientists will be in charge of Biltar's PSGs. Those scientists are in the habit of keeping their technology secret and they are still hesitant to let the knowledge out. However, a few of my key Miraban ... colleagues ... stand ready to blow the lid off with a public demonstration. All you'll have to do is announce it and my colleagues will bring the technology forward for all to see. Wave, they'll think you gave it to them!"
Lance threw back his head and laughed.
"When you appear before the good citizens of Mavira, we'll shift you a little out of focus and make your voice echo. They'll think an angel has come into their midst." Lance laughed again.

Wave smiled, "I'll convince them."

"I know you will. Tell them what they need to hear. They're going to be all right and the new world order will offer them protection and opportunities beyond their wildest imagination. Point out to them the importance and critical value of the anti-gravity machines. For the short term, Mavira will provide the only means of mass transport available on the planet. Nothing big moves without our approval - and we

can only approve of an attitude that recognizes the need for authority, leadership, stability and order."

"You've got some good principles there," said Wave.

"And you know and understand them, don't you."

"Starting to. I'm just a beginner."

"But you're learning fast," smiled Petuva as she and Ranilla returned from the ladies retiring room.

"I'll bet," said Lance.

The two girls had obviously been fighting. Petuva's gown was torn and Ranilla daubed her nose with a tissue to wipe away a small trickle of blood.

Lance looked at them and laughed. "Been at it again?"

Lance turned to Wave. "You need to take Petuva away from here soon. If this goes on very much longer, I'll have to tie one of them up."

"Aren't you making my job too easy?" asked Wave.

"Just leave the details up to me," replied Lance, "all you need to do is be there and show your great wisdom and justice."

For the next few days Lance and Wave spent a lot of time together. Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken presented Wave with his own

thought machine and taught him how to use it. He practiced with Lance by his side.

"I like this light weight tan cap," said Wave.

"You look great in it - like me!" Lance adjusted his own tan cap. "Dr. Draken will accompany you down to Mavira to help out with your mind-machine. This technology allows you to be selective and independent ... and remain anonymous. Those who are still gullible need a wise father-figure to guide them. Oh ... and they should never find out how you accomplish your miracles. Let them apply a mystical explanation for now.

"Fairy tales are necessary for the proper development of children into useful adults. We knew that long ago when we introduced the worship of an exterior Supreme Being upon Miraba - in several varieties, to match various cultures and tastes - along with go-between priests, rituals, dogmas and doctrines for proper spiritual communion.

"Now their 'God' will take form before them. You - who can pass righteous judgement - salvation or damnation. It is the most useful tool ever invented to keep Mirabans in line. It kept us in power for millenia. We set the standards so high, no one can meet them. Then they all feel like sinners on their way to eternal torment and relinquish their freewill to a non-existent pie-in-the-sky 'God'. When they really believe that their eternal soul is in danger, they quickly learn the benefits of obedience, and the severe penalties for disobedience. In fact, every bad thing that happens to them in life seems like a penalty for disobedience. This will make them very

useful. Our many millenias of experience has already proven that to be the case."

"I suppose its the old principle of the abdication of personal responsibility to an imaginary disconnected higher source," said Wave.

"Exactly," said Lance as he smiled, "and that imaginary disconnected higher source has lots of professionals to spread and enforce the officially sanctioned stories and doctrines. They are still respected for the most part, until they publicly give way to their lust and greed. Which they often do. But the people forgive them and still do as they're told. Management considers this to be the necessary disempowerment of naive and rash adolescents using their own ignorant delusions of separateness. This is for their own protection as well as to teach them proper conformity to the Universal Pyramid Heirarchy - and its representatives, of course. Everyman is a source unto himself and yearns to be on top of the heap. It prepares them to make their third density spiritual orientation selection for self-service."

"A bit of evangelism on your part?" asked Wave.

"Not really, just channeling them into reality."

"I see."

"Let's take a little trip."

Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken performed their ritualistic adjustments to the thought machines and soon, Lance and Wave

observed Ana, Cobi, Edyn and Biltar as they began distributing the energy devices on Shanveh island. The PSGs were delivered to a complex that was already prepared to receive them. Other lightworkers had already been at work.

Biltar was reminded that this operation was only a small portion of the overall assistance to Miraba. He and Edyn conferred with the excited scientists and made many new acquaintances while Ana and Cobi hovered the scout craft providing additional security until Biltar and Edyn could complete their survey and disclose all the necessary information.

Five black lifterwhirls suddenly flew into Shanveh and special forces tried to break into the complex to see what was there. Cobi and Ana materialized into 3D and fired stun rays. It laid the soldiers out on the ground. When they came to, they saw the looming scout craft and ran away in a panic to board the lifterwhirls and fly away. The holdouts from the old control paradigm were fast losing heart.

The two doctors brought Lance and Wave back to the Kultaki command carrier.

"Look at those girls!" declared Lance, "I have to admire them. First, they literally scared the shit out of Colonel Tordine and sent him packing. Now, they have spooked a whole contingent of soldiers who are running around the country with the erroneous idea that they are under an alien invasion. hahahahah Those two are true Kultaki and will never be anything else. They abducted Nahvar, vaporized the roof off that exchange center to get at the energy

devices and are willing to shoot first and ask questions later. It's in their blood! We Kultaki are wired to be assertive."

"Yes," said Wave, "but I can see a definite influence of positive polarity upon them."

"How's that?"

"Well ... they could have killed Colonel Tordine, put his head on a pole and sent it back to you but instead they chose to spare his life. They could have vaporized those soldiers but only stunned them. I think they're getting soft."

"There you go," said Lance, "believing the lies you've been told about us. Let me give you a little reality check. We are not out to kill people ... at least not in this case. We are only interested in establishing order and progress. Cobi and Ana have been well taught. They've managed to deceive Pheledra into believing they're on her side. I'm going to get them back before this is all over. You'll see."

"Well," said Wave, "if Pheledra is deceived, it won't be the first time. But, she does know how to read a person's soul and discern its intentions."

"Let's take a look at her," said Lance and he nodded to the doctors.

As they observed Pheledra secretly, Wave wondered what might be going through her mind. He dared not touch that mind because if he did, he'd be in communication with her and he didn't want that. His ability to use natural telepathy was waning due to lack of use and he was inclined to rely more and

more upon the incredible mind-control technology of the Kultaki.

Those genetic treatments are doing something to me, he thought, I wonder how much this is changing my overall outlook. How can I be objective?

Wave moved his mind through the Firefly and found Nelyani. She was on the control deck playing with Boots. He was pouncing on a catnip mouse she had tied to a string. Wave followed her as she ran up the ladder to the observation deck trailing the catnip mouse behind her. Boots scampered after her. Pheledra was busily engaged with the psychotronic adjuvant and Nahvar sat in one of the observation chairs. Nel picked up Boots and sat down next to him.

"What are you thinking about Nahvar?" she asked.

"Well, I'm feeling a little insecure, you might say."

"Why?"

"When I first saw Pheledra she was like the Goddess to me. I viewed her initially as being beyond the human frailties and problems I experience. Now I see that things go wrong even on her high plane of existence. Nestingwave was part of her crew from the beginning. He is a fifth density lightworker like her and yet he's been deceived and drawn away by negative forces. I find it discouraging to think that even at their high level of evolution, backsliding can occur. My belief and hope was that such vacillations of perspective would become a thing of the past once a

person was grounded in loving service. I just can't understand how Nestingwave could take such a downward spiral."

"I know how it looks," said Nel as she petted Boots, "but I still believe in Wave. Inside, he may be experimenting, whether or not he realizes it yet."

"Experimenting?" Nahvar questioned.

"Yes," said Nel, "experimenting with his free choice."

"I hope you're right," said Nahvar, "the whole thing really has me perplexed ... and very unhappy. Of all the good folks I've met on this adventure, Wave is the one I'd most like to get to know. Like me, he's an older man and I suspect we could share a lot of common life experiences, even though he comes from another galaxy and a different plane of existence. I can understand, for example, how he could be attracted to one of them Kultaki girls. They have an energy that makes them ... oh, excuse me, I shouldn't be talking about that with you."

"It's okay, Nahvar," said Nel, "what encourages me about it is the things that make us human do not evolve out of us and even when we move into fifth density, we still make choices."

Nahvar hesitated a little. "Yes ... we still make choices ... and experience the consequences of our actions - negative or positive."

Wave quickly moved his mind away from them. It made him uncomfortable to overhear a conversation about himself. He

wasn't used to invading people's privacy. *I don't think I can ever feel comfortable with that.*

Lance hadn't heard the conversation because his mind had been down on the power deck watching Fabby put a new arm on Orange. Soon, the doctors pulled them both back.

**"How does it feel to be a fly on the wall?"
Lance was exuberant.**

"Very interesting," replied Wave.

Fifty Two - Uncommon Valor

Pheledra watched Biltar's progress through the psychotronic adjuvant. She didn't dare communicate with him for fear that the Council would intercept her thoughts and reprimand her for disobedience. She saw that things were going well. Biltar and Edyn were carefully checking everything out. Biltar had met up with quite a few old acquaintances from years past and had decided that, indeed, Shanveh would be a good place to set up their headquarters.

"Don't decide for sure until you've seen the other locations," said Ana.

"You're right," Biltar agreed, "but it sure would be comforting to be around people I already know and trust."

"That's important," said Cobi, "but what will the rest of our journey bring?"

"Mavira is next," said Ana.

"A jewel in the former superpower of Shaluma," said Edyn, "but I like it here on Shanveh island. It would be a good place for the Frahza to bring my hybrid children."

"How much longer do you need to stay here before we go on to Mavira?" Ana asked.

"A while longer," Biltar replied, "The new communication satellites are going to be launched over the next few days and we need to stay here until they are up and running. Once a grid of computer communication is reestablished, everything will be easier. We can contact our points of distribution and find out about their situation directly."

"Good," said Cobi, "we'll continue to stand guard until you're ready to leave."

On the Firefly, as Pheledra watched through the psychotronic adjuvant, she found herself feeling disappointed because of the Council's restriction. Regardless, she was encouraged by their progress and knew she'd done the right thing by trusting the two Kultaki women.

As the days passed, she saw the new communications satellites being launched into orbit from Shanveh. Nahvar was thrilled to see how the instruments and monitors on the Firefly kept perfect track of the rockets as they successfully deposited their payloads into orbit. "It's so good to see communications starting up again."

"Yes," said Pheledra, "now, the critical exchange of information and ideas can begin to unify the planet."

Nelyani was excited too. "People have to talk with each another for anything good to happen. Now, everybody can hear about you and the other lightworkers and all the help we're getting and be happy because the future is going to be so good."

Pheledra gave Nel a big hug. "And you and Nahvar and Biltar are a very important part of it. Someday, you and others who have experienced contact during these troubled times, can tell your story to the whole world. What an encouragement that will be for those who almost gave up hope."

"I'm happy," said Nel.

"Me too," said Nahvar, "when I'm not completely overwhelmed with emotion."

Pheledra smiled. "Your happiness and hope for the future makes all the problems and set backs worth while."

The droids constantly watched the lake area but it was still a hotbed of activity. Finally, on the twelfth day, Blue came to her and said, "it's time for us to go get Red. Just as Nelyani predicted, the soldiers have been called to another sector where the Frahza are active. Also, we've seen the water in the lake recede enough that the place where Red went down is now above water."

"Let's go," said Pheledra.

The Firefly streaked down. They came in above the lake, remaining in fourth density, and saw that the water was slowly draining out. Red's remains and the steel safe were now well above the water line but buried in the black mud under the heavy wreckage.

They could now see that the wreckage was a microwave tower which had collapsed.

"Pheledra," said Orange, "I suggest that you beam us down on the shore at night. We will wear our camouflage covers to hide our lights, just in case someone is still watching. We'll attach cables to the wreckage in order to move it out of the way and use our cutting torches if we need to. Then, we'll dig Red out and get a cable on the safe to retrieve it. When we get everything done, you can beam us up."

"Okay," said Pheledra, "I'll send you down right after sunset. Fabby will handle it and I'll observe the operation and provide any kind of emergency back up you might need."

Inky and Ginger were happily curled up together on the observation deck. They felt much better now that Boots was back with them and they were somewhat proud of themselves for having been able to contribute something. All in all, though, they preferred rest to vigorous adventure.

Boots was well recovered from his previous ordeal, having undergone treatment in the Protoron. He had been having the time of his life playing with Nelyani. She was so much fun. While she was taking a nap, Boots strolled down to the power deck where Fabby and the four droids were making their preparations. Fabby was whistling an intriguing melody which was gentle yet full of martial heroism.

"We'll beam down from here," said Green, "Fabby, you can help us if we require assistance."

"Anything you need," said Fabby.

Blue checked out his cutting torch. "It's far too dangerous for the Firefly to step down into third density and mess around with cables, so Fabby should manipulate the tractor beam to pull the heavy stuff out of the way."

Fabby interrupted his song. "I'll be glad to do that."

"Thanks, Fabby," said Violet laying out her camouflage cover.

Each cover was being removed from the pouches attached to the droids' center ring and each droid was preparing to put one on.

Boots saw the empty pouch around Violet's waist and found that his old lust for adventure was fast overriding his desire for security and comfort. Besides, all his other adventures, up until now, had merely come as a result of him getting himself into trouble.

For once, he wanted to do something important, not just be a burden on those with a big enough heart to rescue him. He wanted to be a rescuer. He wanted to do something noble and helpful, not just be a cat in the ointment messing up the works. And too, he'd already caused so many problems that he felt a need to make amends. He owed it to Pheledra. Love is a two way street.

Fabby began whistling his song again. It was wonderful and even inspired the droids who began to dance while they multitasked.

Orange worked on his new arm. It was a little stiff, being brand new. "Violet, would you hold this lever back while I try to loosen up the sliding rod?"

"Sure," said Violet putting aside her camouflage cover. She had to use the strength of two mechanical hands to hold back the strong lever.

Fabby's tune had become very lively and the droids were caught up in the excitement of the rhythm. As Violet leaned over to help Orange, the cover pouch around her waste bounced around as she moved to the beat. Boots was enticed beyond control. He crouched down as if about to pounce upon prey, balanced himself with his tail, wiggled his hips back and forth and, on a bounce that came near, lept quietly into Violet's empty pouch.

"What was that?" Violet looked around, "I thought I felt something. Is one of you fooling with me again?"

"No jokes today," said Green, "you probably bumped into something."

"May be, may be," said Violet.

Just after sunset, Pheledra beamed the droids down onto the shore of the muddy lake bed. They materialized in third density. Boots didn't like the heaviness of third density and wanted to stretch a little, but he restrained himself and quietly waited for an opportunity to do something. He had no idea what he would do but knew he should not make his presence known until some kind of opportunity came along. The droids checked the area with their sensors to be sure it was

safe, then flew out over the mud to the spot where Red had gone under. They moved with efficiency and in perfect coordination. Red, Blue and Green attached their cables to the wreckage and began pulling it out of the mud, while Violet flew around the perimeter keeping watch. Boots stuck his head out of the pouch but couldn't see a thing because Violet's camouflage cover was in the way.

Often, the tangled steel of the water tower had to be cut and the droids used their plasma torches. Finally, they encountered the main body of the tower and it was far too heavy for them.

"We need the tractor beam, Fabby," Blue said.

"Back off some and I'll activate it," came his reply.

The droids moved back out of the way and Fabby activated the beam to work the big tank back and forth and free it from the mud. All this activity was creating quite a bit of noise and the light from the torches and tractor beam caused them some concern that the operation would be discovered. Violet was being very vigilant but they all knew that if anyone else was around they'd surely be alerted to the activity.

Finally, Fabby had moved the big tank enough to free it and lifted it straight up with the tractor beam. He set it far over to the side and it sank back down into the mud. The droids moved back in and probed for Red's remains.

"Here he is," said Orange. The others came over to the spot.

It took the combined heat rays of all four droids to vaporize the remaining mud covering Red before they could reach him and attach a cable to pull him up. They flew him over to the dry shore and set him down.

"Poor Red," said Blue, "look at him. He's smashed almost flat. His body is completely ruined."

"Let's just hope that his central processor and memory is okay," said Green.

Violet bathed Red's body with a probing scan to see if the processor would respond. "I can't tell what condition he's in. We won't know until we disassemble him."

"Okay," said Blue, "Fabby, beam him up for decontamination. Later, you can operate and remove the central processor. We won't know until then if he can be restored."

Fabby beamed the lifeless droid up to the Firefly.

"All right," said Orange, "success so far. Now let's get the safe."

"Excellent, you guys," said Pheledra as she watched the operation unfold.

The four droids flew back out over the muddy lakebed and used their combined heat rays once again to vaporize the mud, drilling a hole down to the steel safe. It was turned upside down at an angle and Blue was able to get a cable around two of the rollers. They worked the cable back and forth to loosen the safe and pulled it up out of the black mud, then flew it back to the shore and set it down. The droids set to

work cleaning off as much of the mud as they could.

"Okay," said Violet, "the steel safe is ready to go up."

They all stepped back out of the way while light engulfed the safe and it dematerialized.

All this time, Boots was becoming more and more frustrated. He'd been very successful stowing away in Violet's pouch but wasn't getting the opportunity to contribute. Suddenly, he smelled something. It was that same smell he had encountered before. It spelled danger and always came just before those terrible flashes across the sky. In a micron of inspiration, Boots tore out of Violet's camouflage cover and shrieked as loud as he could.

"Boots!" all the droids shouted in surprise as the cat launched himself off Violet and went right into the muddy lakebed with a splat. All four droids rushed instantly to save him as he began to sink. At the same instant a tremendous particle beam blast, from the satellite overhead, exploded right where they'd been waiting to beam up.

Boots, and his headlong dive into the black mud, had saved them all.

Green snagged Boots by his hind paw just before he went under and Blue yelled. "Get us out!"

Fabby, in a state of total surprise, quickly recalibrated.

Blue, Orange, Violet and Green, holding the muddied cat by the scruff of the neck,

dematerialized and reappeared on the power deck of the Firefly back in fourth density.

"Ohhh," Pheledra exhaled loudly, "that's the bravest thing I've ever seen!"

While they decontaminated on the Firefly, the droids could not find enough kudos and thanks for Boots, as they scrubbed off the black mud and happily passed him around from one to another for hugs and petment.

When the decontamination was over, Pheledra, Fabby, Nel and Nahvar were joyfully waiting to congratulate Boots and the droids for the fine job they'd done. The jubilation quickly ended when bright flashes reminded them that the particle beam weapons were still shooting blindly hoping to hit something in fourth density by chance.

"I've had enough of this," said Pheledra as she quickly sent the Firefly on its way back into orbit. "Fabby, take care of both those weapons. But don't kill anyone if you can help it. That satellite is unmanned and being controlled from somewhere on the ground. The weapon near the lake has a crew but you can prepare a strong telepathic message that will be delivered by one of the droids informing them of the imminent destruction of the weapon. They'll have time to evacuate."

"Do you think the Anadine Galactic Council will interfere?" asked Fabby.

"I don't think so," Pheledra replied, "the Council said the Mirabans must be returned to Miraba when it is safe to do so. I do not consider it 'safe' to take anyone back down

to Miraba as long as those scalar particle beam weapons exist. No doubt, there are others that we don't know about but those which brought down our recon saucer and fired at us are definitely a continuing threat. It may be stretching the allowance of the Council, but I'm willing to take the chance. It will definitely be in our favor if we don't kill anyone taking the weapons out."

"As good as done," responded Fabby, "Green, get ready for a mission."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Green prepared himself and zoomed down to the planet. He materialized in third density right in front of the weapon crew before they even knew he was coming. There was no doubt in their minds that the aliens they feared now had the upper hand. The weapon crew was surprised and astounded at the bright green diamond and amazed to hear a voice speak strongly inside their heads.

I am an extension of those who come from afar. Your weapon is a threat to all life on this planet. Vacate your post immediately to avoid death.

They fled in terror as Green headed back to the Firefly. Fabby fired energy blasts which simultaneously destroyed the ground installation and the satellite as well.

"There," said Fabby.

"Mission accomplished," Green announced, as he came back on board.

"That was incredible!" exclaimed Nahvar.

"Yes," said Pheledra, "occasionally, we find it necessary, and do not hesitate to apply overwhelming force."

Fifty Three - At Mavira

Pheledra watched the proceedings unfold in the city of Mavira. She used the psychotronic adjuvant and was careful to restrain herself from telepathic contact with the Kultaki women or Biltar, due to the restrictions placed upon her by the judgement of the Council. By now, Pheledra had been able to discern Lance's intentions with Wave and knew all about Wave's new mind-machine and Lance's plans to use him as a means to regain control of Miraba for the Kultaki. She tried again and again to telepath with Wave but there remained a strong blockage which shut her out completely. Her heart yearned for their former fellowship but she would not give up hope.

During this time, she was rather preoccupied and didn't talk much with Nelyani and Nahvar. They were getting to know each other as they played with the cats and spent time discussing the future. Fabby taught Nahvar and Nel how to play chess and Nahvar taught them the Miraban game of chimpto. It wasn't long before Nel was able to beat them at both games. She was just a little girl but at times she was uncommonly wise and mature. No doubt Aramanda had used Nel's advanced gift of telepathy to speak words of wisdom. Pheledra was thankful and determined to never again allow her own personal doubts and feelings to create such blindness and restriction. It had been damaging to her and

to others. The mission was proceeding smoothly and for that, her heart was grateful to the two marvelous Kultaki women who were now a part of her forever.



Just as Edyn had stated, the city of Mavira was indeed a jewel in the former nation of Shaluma. Everything had been well prepared for Biltar's arrival.

In a dressing room inside the palatial complex, the two Kultaki women were taking a break from Biltar's reception party. The energy devices had already been distributed and this was a special celebration. Cobi and Ana were in their familiar element, effortlessly pouring out all the charm and grace carefully learned and practiced since they were children.

Ana looked at herself in the mirror. "What a reception!"

"These people are certainly hospitable," said Cobi, "can you believe these beautiful gowns they presented to us?"

"Amazing," replied Ana, "I think our appearance shocked people at first. I noticed them staring but Biltar really did a good job of preparing everyone for our arrival. They're treating us like royalty!"

"The new communication system really paved the way. How's your arm, love?"

"A lot better. The stump still hurts at times and I still have those phantom pains in my lower arm and hand. I really look forward to

the time when I can get an artificial limb or, better yet, find someone with the technology to grow a new one."

"I've learned to have hope, Ana. I believe it will happen but we've got to finish the mission first. These people in Mavira are really happy to have us here ... but all those questions ..."

"I know. Just because we have color shifting scales, red eyes and normally live in fourth density, which is very hard to explain to Mirabans, they think we should know everything about the universe."

"Well, don't be too hard on them, Ana, they're just curious, like you and me. But we have learned so much from being around Pheledra and so much has opened up before us about what the Universe is and our place in it."

"I guess we represent a completely new perspective to them and they're excited."

"A lot like us, huh?"

Ana nodded her head in wonderment. "Just turn on the charm, girl. That's what we're really good at."

"Ha ... that ... and shaking things up!" Cobi smiled.

"Situation suspensfully sizzling," Ana said, then laughed.

"I feel like so many eyes are watching our every move," said Cobi. "I'll admit that I'm feeling a bit shy."

"Yeah ... shy ... like when you burned Col. Tordine's ass!"

They both laughed and Cobi playfully pretended to bite Ana on the neck.

There was a tap at the door and they heard Edyn's voice. "Hey, are you two ready to rejoin the party? Biltar is about to give his little speech."

"We'll be right out," said Cobi as she finished putting the final touches on her makeup.

As they returned to their seats in the crowded hall full of excited scientists and engineers, many eyes followed them and they heard the physicist, Syntal ap Dakleen, finishing up his introduction of Biltar.

"... and here at the beginning of an entirely new paradigm, we have more than we ever hoped for. We have the blessing of having survived the worst catastrophe in Miraba's history, we have face to face contact with celestial neighbors who know more about us than we do, we have a new anti-gravity technology which will shortly be revealed to the whole planet and we have an incredible new energy source which will transform the way we do everything. Now, I'd like to introduce the discoverer and inventor who has blessed us so much, not only with working prototypes of revolutionary energy devices, but also with charming friends from a hitherto unknown race ... my friend and colleague ... Biltar ap Dyn."

There was a round of applause as he shook Biltar's hand. Biltar stepped up to the podium as Syntal took a seat. "Thank you so

much, Syntal and thanks to all of you for your kindness. We will be leaving tomorrow to distribute more of the energy devices throughout Miraba but I hope to see you all again soon. With all due respect to Syntal, I want to make it clear that the PSG does not represent a new energy source. There is only one energy source. There has always been only one energy source. Fire, chemical reaction, electricity, nuclear reaction ... life itself... comes from only one energy source. The PSG is simply a way - one rather primitive way - of directly tapping that source. That source is the Universal Energy Matrix. This is just one name for it. It has been described by many names. It underlies everything and is the source of intelligence and consciousness as well as raw power. Therefore, it must be approached with humility and profound respect. It could turn Miraba into a cinder ... or ... it could open the gates of eternal heaven in our midst. Our choice. It is now becoming available for our practical use because a significant number of Mirabans have already made the proper choice. The choice for evolution, transformation and ascension. The meaning of these things will still be unfolding a thousand millenia from now. With this revelation, war is no longer an option. We will learn beyond any doubt that to kill our fellow men and ruin our planet is exactly the same as killing ourselves. Our age of insanity is now over ... washed away along with with the toxins of our former existence. Peace be to you. May the One who gives us life and purpose, bless us all."

As a tremendous round of applause filled the hall and Biltar bowed slightly and stepped down from the podium, Lance and

Wave moved their minds through the crowd. Their movements were independent of each other because each had his own mind-machine.

Lance listened to private whispers and thoughts and tried to look up women's gowns, while Wave was more interested in hearing Biltar's speech and observing Cobi and Ana to see if he could pick up any deceit.

It's exactly like being here in my body, Wave thought, as he saw Cobi and Ana mingling with the crowd of excited scientists and trying to answer their questions.

"Have you two heard about the predictions and prophecies that are circulating among our people?" asked a physicist with thick glasses.

"No," replied Ana.

"Well," he said, "some are saying that Biltar might be the expected celestial prophet and ..."

"Nonsense," interrupted Cobi, "Biltar is just a Miraban scientist like you."

"That's right," said Ana, "your people should be careful about such religious speculations. For too long Mirabans have been looking for some outside source to save them from the bad situations they brought on themselves through laziness and abdication of personal responsibility. When real celestial intervention takes place for the sake of positive evolution, transformation and ascension, it is always to empower the people and encourage them to open and

trust the source of infinite life within themselves. The very source that Biltar just spoke about. Just as in the raising of children - to do everything for them makes them weak, spoiled, irresponsible and dependent."

"Of course," added Cobi, "indeed that was the purpose of those who perpetrated your Miraban religious, scientific and political organizations. We know, because our people - the Kultaki - the family we left for the sake of truth - used this technique secretly as their primary control over the minds and souls of Mirabans for thousands of annoms. While it is true that the visions of truly spiritual men and their writings inspired those religions, they were soon hijacked by others who never had your best interest at heart, only their own political gain."

"Well," said another scientist who was overhearing the conversation, "I disagree. I think it is sometimes necessary for those who are more informed, and spiritually pious, to adjust and guide others into the proper understanding of higher wisdom and spirituality."

"No," said Ana, "like all your spiritual teachers have stated, the spirit is within you, the very source of your being, and you have no need of outward control by others with their own personal agendas."

Dr. Vagila and Dr. Draken brought Wave and Lance back to the Kultaki command carrier.

Lance was all smiles as he spoke to Wave. "Wow! Did you see that fantastic girl in the red gown? What incredible breasts! What an

ass! I'd like to slip off her pink panties and taste a little of that. How 'bout you? Did you see her?"

"No," replied Wave, "I was listenin' to a conversation."

"Ah, forget that silly jibberish! Tomorrow is the day of freedom for you! Tomorrow you and Petuva head for Mavira! Like that?"

"Sure."

Fifty Four - Pious Fraud

A crimson dawn broke over the city of Mavira. The sky was filled with dark clouds but the atmosphere was generally good. Mavira had fared well through the cataclysm. Cobi, Ana, Biltar and Edyn had already departed in the early morning while it was still dark. They had set out for Quepar, the next distribution point on their list.

In Mavira, many people were astir with excitement. The scientists and engineers from Biltar's reception party were still awake, talking together and sipping drinks on the high balcony outside the hall where Biltar had spoken. They'd been up all night. A handful of them knew what was about to happen but would act as surprised as the rest of the population.

This former NSS complex looked like a palace with its marble columns and floors. The top portion of the main building, directly beneath the aerocar landing pad, had quickly been converted into residential suites and plush new furnishings brought

in. Some were puzzled by this and wondered why, but most of the population took it in stride and assumed it was being prepared as a center for law and authority now in the aftertime.

Vast amounts of property throughout the nation of Shaluma and the whole world had been destroyed and there were few buildings like this one left intact.

In front of the complex, a quadrangle with fountains, now inactive, overlooked a vast terrace and garden. There were no flowers because winter was approaching and even the small amount of black rain that had come down over this city had poisoned the soil. That old soil was being dug out and sent for decontamination while new soil was being brought in for next year's garden. This building was obviously intended to be one of the hubs for the new Miraban age.

On the high balcony outside the hall, Syntal ap Dakleen watched the emerging dawn. He turned away to pour himself another drink when he heard a shout. "There! There ...look!" When he turned back he saw a light. It lit up the distant sky several degrees from where the new sun was rising. Miraba had shifted on its axis 33 degrees to the west during the pole shift. As the mysterious light began to draw the attention of more and more of the scientists and engineers, Syntal's anticipation grew.

"What it it?" someone asked.

"I don't know," said Syntal, "but its getting bigger."

"Oh no," a woman reporter cried, "please God, don't let it be another disaster ... please God."

The light grew in size and intensity until it almost covered the horizon. "Whatever it is ... its huge," someone said.

Everyone stood aghast as a huge glowing triangle came rapidly toward them.

"It's a space ship!"

"Aliens!"

"An invasion!"

"I don't think so," said Syntal, "probably friendly beings like the two Kultaki women who brought Biltar and Edyn."

As the huge craft loomed in the sky, a few onlookers down below began to fall on their knees. "Celestial Savior," they shouted, "Celestial Savior. The fulfillment of the prophecy!"

By this time, much of the population in the city were already standing outside gazing upward. The huge craft rotated as it flew and slowed down as it came in over the city. It was clearly some sort of space craft under intelligent control. The triangle had smooth silver skin and was slightly concave. It had a groove around its perimeter and colored lights could be seen blinking on and off. Suddenly, out from the bottom emerged dozens of brilliant lights. They appeared to be smaller craft and went into formation around the huge ship as if to escort it in. A low hum began that grew louder and louder until the shouts, exclamations and prayers

of the people were completely drowned out. The hum became so intense that it was painful. Many in the crowd put their hands over their ears. Some ran away in panic, others lost control and began to scream. The gigantic specter slowed and slowed until it hovered directly over the building where the wide-eyed Mirabans stared in awe. There was a blinding flash and waves of energy rippled over the entire city. An intense beam of light shot out from the bottom of the craft directly onto the aerocar pad at the very top of the main building. In an instant, the escorting ships zipped back in under the huge triangle and it shot away at incredible speed toward the horizon. A pulsating light still remained on the aerocar pad as the confused crowd gasped. Many, who had fallen down got to their feet.

Syntal ap Dakleen and three of his friends ran into the building and rushed up the stairs emerging onto the roof next to the aerocar pad. Everyone else was too frightened to move. The pulsating light subsided and two vague figures in white garments could be seen. Their materialization was far from exact and no details of the forms could be discerned. The ones in the crowd who had been expecting a prophet began to bring forth gifts and place them around the foot of the building. Syntal and his three friends could be seen by the crowd standing within close proximity of the mysterious figures. Then the four stepped even closer for several moments and seemed to be having a conference.

Up on the aerocar pad, Syntal spoke to Wave barely moving his lips. "Just stand there for a few moments and when I wink,

you and Petuva go down that stairway into the building. Someone will meet you there to take you to your apartment. I'll take care of these true believers."

"If they weren't before, I'm sure they are now," whispered Wave, trying not to move his mouth.

Petuva pursed her lips and stifled a giggle.

On the observation deck of the Firefly, Pheledra perceived the whole thing through the psychotronic adjuvant. "My my ..." she said to herself, "Wave, you have gone completely insane."

She took off the headpiece and buried her head in her arms. "Ohhh," she groaned, "the hologram technology of the Kultaki. I feel like blasting them all out of existence. Patience ... patience ... allowance ... mercy ..."

"What's going on?" said Fabby over the communicator.

"You don't want to know."

"Trouble?"

"In the theater there's an ancient theater term for it ... ham ... no ... in this case ... ham and cheese."

"What are you talking about, Pheledra?" Fabby was perplexed.

"Give me a few zeron, to put my eyeballs back into their sockets, and I'll come explain it to you."

Pheledra didn't perceive, nor want to perceive, what happened next.

Syntal and his three companions took a few steps backward and the two glowing figures seemed to float out of sight as they went down the stairs. Technicians suddenly rushed out from the side and began setting up a public address system with large speaker units and aimed them toward the crowd. They brought a single microphone and Syntal stepped forward to speak. "My fellow scientists," his voice boomed, "citizens of the right and citizens of the left in the great city of Mavira, the astounding event you have just witnessed is a visitation from highly advanced celestial beings ... fifth dimensional lightworkers from another plane of existence. They are the physical manifestation of the primordial 'It'. They are called ... Nestingwave/Petuva ... duality manifestations of Divine oneness. They have been sent on a mission to save the survivors of Miraba by bringing justice ... and enlightenment. Tomorrow, as you already know, four heinous war criminals are scheduled to be flown here for swift judgement. They are the first of many. Mavira was selected because our infrastructure is still somewhat intact after the terrible cataclysm. The judges and legal assistants have already been here for several days in preparation. Now, plans have changed. We have been given a message from the Celestial Savior Himself. The Divine wisdom has pronounced an edict. It is essential that judgement be passed and carried out by higher authority so that all Mirabans will know the comfort, love and wise guidance that is constantly poured out from on high ... with no strings

attached. So ... by grace ... Nestingwave/Petuva has come into our world. And now, our own judges have humbly conceded to them, having complete confidence in their righteous judgement from an objective point of view without prejudice. The male half of this divine being, known as Nestingwave, will preside tomorrow. The female half, Petuva, will preside later over ... civil cases. The judgement of Nestingwave will be broadcast across Miraba through our new communication satellites which only became operational a few days ago. Due to the small initial size of this new network, knowledge of what is unfolding here will be severely limited for now but in time, these events will become known by all, first by word of mouth and later by replay as the communication network expands to every Miraban survivor. As the days move on, more war-criminals will be brought here, until the indignation of Miraba is satisfied and our planet can forget the past and move forward."

There was mixed reaction. Most of the people realized by now that this was a hoax and were very dissapointed that the new Miraban age was beginning like the old Miraban age ended. However, there were a few religious zealots that believed Syntal spoke the truth. They out shouted the disgusted majority and caused a spectacle of emotionalism.

Most people ignored the whole thing and just went home. However, all the citizens of Mavira were mystified by what they'd seen. They had no idea that hologram technology could simulate reality that well. When it

came right down to it, almost everyone would view the proceedings. Thousands of computers and satellite dishes, which had miraculously been undamaged by the cataclysm, were now being distributed for free in the hope that communication and commerce would quickly spring up again.

When Lance's mind returned to the Kultaki command carrier, he roared and roared with laughter.

"Don't strain yourself, Your Excellency," said Dr. Vagila as he tapped an interactive screen.

"Take it easy, darling," said Ranilla, "you just aren't taking proper care of your heart. You mustn't forget your delicate condition. I don't want you to suddenly drop dea..."

"Shut up!" Lance shouted between spasms of hilarity, "this has got to be one of the funniest debacles in Miraban history! Look at those idiots! So many actually believed ... give me a tissue!"

Lance coughed and wheezed as Ranilla produced a tissue and held it for him as he loudly blew his nose. "It's going to be great! Wave will wow them tomorrow! Four brains splattered against the wall right in front of the public! They'll never forget it and eagerly watch reruns for the next fifty annoms. What a thrill party!" He laughed harder than ever and finally almost choked in his glee.

"Lance, you're impossible. You're going to blow a valve!" said Ranilla.

"Shut up! I never had so much fun in my whole life! I'm going to contact Wave!"

Fifty Five - Boom Boom

Down in Mavira, Nestingwave/Petuva were escorted to their apartment by religious devotees in white robes. They all bowed deeply and left. Wave pulled a small device out of the inside pocket of his white tunic and turned it off. The field around him, which made him appear vague and mysterious, disappeared.

Petuva got out her device also and played with it, turning it on and off while she gazed at herself in the mirror admiring her white gown. "I do look like an angel!"

Dr. Draken was waiting to give a genetic treatment.

"How did you get here so fast?" asked Wave.

"Beamed down while no one was looking," replied the Doctor.

Wave and Petuva quickly took a tour of the apartment. Naked statues, flowing fountains, gold fixtures and advanced Kultaki technology adorned every nook and cranny. Wave's mind-machine was already set up in an elaborate office next to countless instruments and monitors. The tan cap was neatly hung on its little stand. Wave put it on.

"Here is your new home for awhile," said Dr. Draken, "like it?"

"Oh, it's darling!" exclaimed Petuva as she rushed into the bedroom to look in the closet for her new wardrobe.

"It will do, for now." said Wave, seating himself in a plush executive chair.

Dr. Draken rolled in his equipment from the next room and began the genetic treatment. As the Doctor moved around him, Wave heard Lance's voice in his mind.

Hello Wave. Like your new apartment?

It's okay ... for temporary quarters.

We've installed a huge spa, a wet bar in every room, a ball room for parties and heavily padded doors for ... privacy.

You've thought of everything.

Oh yes ... and ... I had another bit of inspiration.

What's that?

I'm sending you a puncture blaster.

What for? Oh ... I think I know.

Oh yes you do. Oh yes you do. Remember Dhati's suggestion? I want you to do the deed, Wave ... not just leave it in the hands of some military underlings.

You want me to execute the war criminals, right?

After you've pronounced judgement, of course. Just stand them up against the backdrop we will provide for you. Oh ... and no blindfolds. We want to get the facial expressions. Aim the puncture blaster at the temple - at a slight angle so we'll get good color on the backdrop - and pull the trigger -

boom! If by some miracle they're still alive, you can boom boom again. You have ten shots in that peace-maker in case you screw up. Do them one at a time and ... take your time. We want maximum tension and anticipation. Those films will be shown for generations and you'll be immortalized.

Well ... why didn't I think of that?

A few more of those genetic treatments and you'll be sharp, like me. Tomorrow's it. See you.

"Yeah," said Wave under his breath, "tomorrow's it."

Fifty Six - The Epiphany

A large VTL aerocar delivered four prisoners. It was during the night for the sake of security. They were taken immediately to prison cells inside the complex and were given the opportunity to sleep. All of them declined, believing they only had a short time to live. Chaplains were provided to offer spiritual comfort according to each individual belief system. A well prepared meal of their choice was given to each but only one of them was able to eat. He was the tall bearded man, with bluish skin and beautiful piercing gray eyes, who had been the leader of the violent fanatics and was ready to die, having been indoctrinated with a religious belief system that assured martyrs the most ecstatic of afterlives. He came from the land of Tacu and had starved in his youth until he made secret business alliances with some of the most powerful politicians of Shaluma. They used him and betrayed him. The other three

were the former political leaders of Shaluma, the Premier, the Chairman and the Chief of National Security. All four names were never to be mentioned again and the prisoners would only be referred to by their numbers.

The legal teams worked through the night to make final preparations for the review and judgement to take place. The reams of evidence and testimony were gone over as well as the detailed confessions which had been given by all four voluntarily after the cataclysm when they were taken into custody. The death penalty was expected and the lawyers wanted to make sure that all legal loopholes had been covered and everyone was in agreement. If everything was carried out properly, the survivors of Miraba would regain confidence and respect for the rule of law, after seeing it used so many times for the special interests and whims of those controllers at the top of the political pyramid. Now, some of those very men would taste the justice they had denied others.

A special day had been declared in the former nation of Shaluma, and many other places throughout Miraba, to provide the opportunity to witness this important historical event. The few short-wave stations left on the planet would carry the broadcast. Written transcriptions would be printed and distributed where possible. Most of Miraba still had no communications but the written transcripts, printed into every language, would eventually become known to all.

Far away from these happenings, Cobi, Ana, Biltar and Edyn had already arrived in Quepar and were taking time off from the mission to view this special event over the

new communication system. Biltar used his time to write. He was trying desperately to recover in his mind the papers he had lost when his dome and everything in it went under.

He didn't know yet that the steel safe had been recovered.

On the Firefly, Pheledra awoke before anyone else and went into meditation. Afterward, she carefully adjusted the psychotronic adjuvant to enhance her knowledge of the event as it happened. She was sickened by the whole thing. She too would watch on the monitor but would be gaining additional knowledge about Wave during the proceedings. She continued to attempt telepathy with him but to no avail.

A courtroom inside the building was being prepared. Cameras and microphones were set up to capture every nuance. On top of the building a large altar of fire was ready to signal the inhabitants of the city who had no access to the new satellite communication network. Colored smoke from the altar of fire would announce the beginning and end of the judgement, as well as the execution of the criminals one at a time. Black for the beginning, red for each death and white for the finish.

In the morning, Wave took a bath in the spa and put on the his white tunic. He saw his tan cap hanging on its little stand and started to put it on but stopped and shook his head. Not today, he thought. He took the field generating device out of his pocket and looked at it for a moment. No way I'm going to look vague and mysterious in that courtroom, he thought, except maybe ... He

put the device back into his pocket and went quietly into the kitchen to fix some herb tea.

Petuva was still asleep in their new bed. She rumbled in her sleep. A black mask covered her eyes to keep out the light. Ambassador Lance had instructed her to remain out of sight until some days later when a special unveiling of the Goddess could be arranged. "Goddess ... Goddess," she mumbled between snores. She had planned to watch the event on the monitor but that wasn't likely to happen because she'd been up most of the night admiring her new wardrobe and was now enjoying dreams of grandeur.

A messenger tapped at the door and summoned Wave to meet with the spokesperson for the legal teams before the proceedings. He was taken to a small office and the man bowed deeply before him.

"Lord Nestingwave, the time has come for you to apply your sacred duty and mission. This is the most important event to take place on Miraba since the cataclysm. There will be twelve judges seated behind you in the gallery. According to the ancient custom, they will wear expressionless masks and will remain unnamed."

"Why expressionless masks?" Wave asked.

"To give the appearance of ... objectivity. This ancient custom will probably be done away with in the future because it has no real purpose or value. However, it will be followed in this instance to give traditional Mirabans a sense of continuity."

"And that's what Miraba needs right now ... continuity ... right?"

"Right," the man grinned and cleared his throat. "You will be seated upon the judgement seat above all. The prisoners will be brought before you one at a time and the charges read by one of the twelve judges who will rise from the gallery. The documentation of each case will be placed in front of you for your review. You don't have to read much, it's just the custom. When the charges have been announced in all four cases, you will say 'please rise'. The entire court will stand and you will pass judgement. Speak as long as you want but say something ... catchy. Of course, the death penalty is expected by everyone. These four are considered to be equally guilty and will receive the same consequences for their wickedness. Judgement will be pronounced upon them as a group."

"That sounds easy enough," said Wave.

"Oh ... and I've been asked to give you this." The man pulled out a large puncture blaster and handed it to Wave who stared at it for a moment, then slipped it into his belt.

"Is this the way justice is normally done?"

"No, no," said the man, "usually, in capital cases involving National Security, the prisoner is simply escorted into a court yard and put before a military firing squad or hanged by the neck until dead. However, because of the symbolic nature and meaning of this event to all Mirabans, these executions can be carried out only by you - the Celestial Savior - showing all Mirabans

that even the loving God hates these vile criminals."

"Isn't this ... kind of ... grisly and messy?"

"Yes ... that's the point. A thick white bulletproof backdrop will be wheeled out at the proper time, so you can have each prisoner stand in front. Of course, their hands will be cuffed behind their backs, but there will be no blindfolds ... so their faces can be clearly seen. The cameras will provide closeups and various angles to preserve the details for history. The backdrop will absorb the projectiles and the images of splattered stains will remain with all Mirabans forever. The brains, which conceived such deception and evil, will be out in the open for all to view and revile. We want this to be final closure of the old way and the beginning of unfettered hope for the future."

"I see," said Wave, "I'm doing this so your planet can resolve the past quickly and move forward without bitterness."

"Exactly," said the man.

Wave nodded slightly and was escorted by one of his female devotees into a private chamber. He declined her offer of fellatio and was handed an expressionless mask.

"You want me to wear one of these things too?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "it is the traditional custom."

"To give the appearance of objectivity."

The woman nodded and left him alone as he put on the mask - and waited.

After a while, she returned. "It is time."

Wave nodded and she escorted him to the side door. He entered the packed courtroom and heard one of the expressionless judges say "all rise." Everyone got to their feet as Wave took his place upon the judgement seat.

A woman's voice spoke. "May the light of truth penetrate us! May the wisdom of a child speak out from us! May justice be balanced! We are gathered here today for judgement in four cases. The peoples of Miraba versus number 4703, number 5605, number 9876 and number 3567. Their names will never pass through human lips again. Venerable judges ... state the charges."

One of the judges rose from the gallery with a folder and walked to the front. "The peoples of Miraba versus number 4703. Bring the accused forward."

The tall bearded man from Tacu was brought to the front by two armed guards and the faceless judge continued. "Number 4703, confessed guilty to mass murder, robbery, extortion, fraud, conspiracy, narcotics trafficking, cannibalism, spousal abuse, child molestation and stealing pencils."

"What?" Wave asked in a whisper to a court transcriber nearby.

"Pencils of refined heavy elements - for atomics."

"Oh," whispered Wave.

The judge reached under his mask to scratch his nose and returned to his seat while the prisoner was returned to his. Another judge came forward. "The peoples of Miraba versus number 5605. Bring the accused forward."

The Premier of Shaluma was brought. He held his head down in shame. "Number 5605 confessed guilty to the murder of innocent civilians, using biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction, genocide, conspiracy, false flag terrorism, slavery, torture, pedophilia, narcotics trafficking, false advertising, corporate embezzling, environmental vandalism, civil rights violations, pandering, swindling, election fraud and sorcery."

"Sorcery?" Wave whispered again.

"He was the high priest of a secret covenant group which practiced human sacrifice," whispered the transcriber.

Wave nodded then shook his head as everyone went back to their seats.

While the other two were brought forth in a similar fashion, Wave glanced through the papers and documents before him. There was heavy evidence against all four and there was no doubt that they were the worst of criminals. Wave was tired of hearing the list of vile offenses and began to focus instead upon the countenance of the criminals. As the accusations of rape, murder, torture and every offense known were read off, Wave began to stimulate his natural telepathic abilities to better

understand the minds and souls of those offenders. It felt good to use that ability which had lain dormant for too long, even though what he found were broken men full of fear, self loathing, despair and confusion. As he plunged deeper into their psyches, he found other things and felt his old feelings of compassion returning.

Finally, the former Chief of National Security was taken back to his seat and there was silence. Every eye was upon Wave. He waited a long time before he rose and stepped down from the judgement seat, then walked to the very center of the court.

"Keep your seats," he said, as he removed his expressionless mask and flung it aside.

"I am not here to pass judgement on anyone. I am not a 'Celestial Savior' nor am I a prophet."

A gasp filled the room as Wave continued. "That is false advertising and propaganda spread by those who do not have your best interest at heart - those hidden forces who hope to continue as your puppet masters. But ... since I'm here and have yer full attention, I'd like to make a few suggestions and offer a different perspective. Take it or leave it." All the people in the room were asounded. Syntal was terrified as Nestingwave began to speak again.

"First of all, get rid of these silly traditions and customs. Overhaul your legal system. How about a fresh approach? A new way of thinking. A new paradigm - not a makeover of yesterdays deadend vanities. Within the collective consciousness of your planet, you have a deadly parasite which has been your

main problem. It is a non local disease that can crop up anywhere in anyone who has forgotten who and what they really are. On my planet it was named Malignant Egophrenia. It has kept Miraba in a doublebind. It continued and thrived because you fed it in your sleepy forgetfulness which deceived you into believing that you alone were righteous, holy and justified and 'they' were the problem. 'They' felt the same way about you. Each side felt that the other was fully evil and claimed exclusive right to 'Gawwd'. This increased polarizations. You murdered one another in the name of that 'God' through terrible wars and crusades. You could not see that your enemy was just a mirror of yourself.

"That cancerous virus within your collective consciousness - Malignant Egophrenia - fed your victim/abuser mentality. Victim/abuser is two sides of the same coin. The abusers become the victims and the victims become the abusers. No one wants to deal with the dark shadow within their own being. Instead, in blindness they deny it is there and project their own evil outward pointing the finger of accusation. This is your sorry history ... and my own recent history with the very people I love most.

"For millenia you have practiced revenge and punishment - but, think about it, when everyone demands an eye for an eye - blindness becomes universal. This doublebind will continue as before unless you wake up and change it. You now have that perfect opportunity ... and so do I."

The audience seemed to stir in silent amazement.

Wave nodded his head and moved his hand in a sweeping circle. "Move all the crap out of this building and put it somewhere else, like the trash bin. Refurnish it nicely but not lavishly. Turn it into a maximum security ... hotel ... with armed guards around the perimeter and electronic technology to absolutely insure that no one can escape. Imprison these four offenders here and the others who will follow. They are dangerous to the world and should be separated from it. Keep them here until they die a natural death. Do not allow them to be visited by anyone from the outside ... except their families and friends who are well screened. Do not allow any of their writings to be published ... until after their death. Watch and monitor their psychological conditions carefully. Research and document their life stories ... from their own points of view ... and from the points of view of others. Learn from it. Explore and discover the great benefits ... of mercy.

"Find out what their soul always longed for but never achieved. Provide them with the opportunity for that achievement. Offer them healthy things that bring peace and bliss ... books ... gardening ... music ... writing ... studying ... hobbies ... sports ... pets ... and so forth. Every human being, throughout the universe, only wants one thing - to love and be loved. Learn by experience what others throughout the universe have already learned - love and mercy brings healing to all - revenge and punishment brings only unhappiness, separation and death. Resentment is totally self destructive and never justified.

"If you do not take this opportunity, if you continue to feast on revenge, it will continue to poison you and you will become what you hate. If you take their lives ... if you kill them ... you kill yourselves ... and sooner or later you will find yourselves once again the victim - because victim and abuser are two sides of the same coin. And the coin spins. Just say no. Refuse to play the victim/abuser game. Find the meaning of allowance. Stop grinding the ceaseless mill of the doublebind."

Wave took out the field generating device and held it up. "Can you discern the magician's tricks?"

He turned on the device and hundreds gasped as his form became obscured by the field. He switched it off and returned to normal. "Magic? Angelic? Mysterious? Hardly. Just one more cheap trick, after a millenia of tricks, to insure your continued enslavement. The Kultaki who deceived you for so long are still at it. But their time is at an end. Just say no ... and they'll go away. They'll run away - because the only power they have is the power you give them. Take it or leave it. Choose fear and slavery - or love and freedom."

There was stunned silence as Wave walked out of the courtroom. In the foyer, an angry group of religious zealots tried to block him off and tear him to pieces but others restrained them and pulled them aside.

Tears poured down Pheledra's cheeks. The Firefly was already on its way down through the Miraban atmosphere. No thoughts and no words needed to be exchanged.

"I'm not surprised," said Nelyani.

Nahvar wiped his eyes. "Oh, bless you child."

"Now see, you guys," said Fabby to the droids, "things have a way of working out."

The droids responded with a show of dancing lights.

Inky and Ginger stretched and left their pillows to drink some water.

Boots raised his hind leg and licked his behind.

Fifty Seven - Shoot The Messenger

On the Kultaki command carrier, Lance had gone beserk with rage and was smashing everything in sight. Ranilla and Dr. Vagila had barely escaped his wrath and were hiding in the retiring room down below.

Throughout planet Miraba, a cheer, unlike anything before, resounded into the entire collective consciousness of astral space.

On the scout craft hovering above Quepar, Cobi, Ana, Biltar and Edyn were astounded. Their hearts danced with joy beyond words and they quickly turned off the broadcast and went back to work on the mission with new energy. They didn't find out until later about the horror now poised to descend.

When Wave returned to the apartment, Petuva was still asleep. He pulled the puncture blaster out of his belt and set it

down on the table. Then he wrote Petuva a note.

Dearest Petuva, I made a terrible mistake. I chose lust over reason. Our relationship can no longer continue. I must go. Please forgive me. Love, Wave.

He then walked out of the apartment into the crowd of well wishers and made his way up to the roof. The crowd followed. He intuitively knew that Pheledra and Fabby were on their way. All of them wanted to get near him and show their appreciation. He stopped occasionally to answer questions and talk with them. Finally, he came up the stairs to the roof and waited on the aerocar pad still shaking hands and often hugging those who came to touch him. White smoke poured from the altar of fire.

Suddenly, Petuva shot up through the stairwell in a blind rage. Her red eyes were caldrons of boiling fire. Wave gasped as he saw the puncture blaster in her hand. She fired wildly. "Die! Die! Die you fucking piece of shit!"

The crowd scrambled out of the way as the loud blasts tore chunks out of the pad, blew off the head of a statue and shattered glass skylights. Petuva screamed, "I hate you! I hate you!" put the weapon to her own forehead, rolled her eyes up and slammed backwards as a final explosion tore the top of her head off. Blood and brains spewed as her lifeless body tumbled all the way back down the stairs.

The dazed crowd began to get to their feet. Some were shaking and crying. Others stared at the aerocar pad.

**"Nestingwave is dead!" shouted someone,
"Nestingwave is dead!"**

He lay in a large pool of blood. His glazing eyes were open and a slight smile adorned his lips. There was a gaping hole through his heart. A tiny little girl broke free from her mother's hand and placed a single rose upon him. She had just stepped back when the body dematerialized in a bright light - and was gone.



"He's dead, Pheledra," said Fabby, "there's no bringing him back."

Pheledra held Nelyani close to her, protecting her eyes from the awful sight. They stood around his body, sobbing inconsolably. Everything else stopped as the remembrance of this precious soul filled their minds. No one could speak. Through the tears and anguish they comforted one another. Nahvar wept and held onto Fabby whose human half was fully stimulated. He too cried. Pheledra moved Nelyani away from the body over to a comfortable chair and helped her sit down. The poor little girl was devastated and her chest heaved with great sobs. Pheledra could hardly stand it, but she knew she had to be strong. The rush of memories was so powerful, she had to sit down next to Nel to avoid fainting. She gripped Nel's hand. They cried and cried together.

News of the tragedy travelled rapidly and soon all Miraba mourned. The collective sigh that went up into the astral zones also contained an incredibly strong

determination to enact every word Wave had spoken. The planet of forgetfulness would always remember.

This moment was the turning point in the transformation of Miraba.

Fifty Eight - The Consequences

Find me quickly Treprestas ... find me quickly. The deep voice seemed to emerge from all directions. Inside a misty bubble of permutating geometry floating in space, Lance shook from head to foot. "No! No!" he screamed, as he stumbled over the strange assortment of objects scattered across the floor.

Yes, yes Treprestas ... find me quickly ... find me quickly.

"No! No Dhati ... please ... please ..."

I'm going to make love to you like you've never been made love to before ... find me quickly Treprestas!

"No Dhati! Please ... oh please ..."

I know you're anxious Treprestas ... let's dispense with the foreplay.

Suddenly the wizened Kultaki in his white robe popped out of a broken mirror laying on the floor and loomed over the Ambassador.

Lance's eyes grew wide and suddenly his countenance was a rictus of agony. He grabbed his chest and struggled to breathe

but it was too late. His heart had already stopped beating.

"A little heart problem, Treprestas?"

As Lance expired with his mouth wide open, Dhati flung aside his robe and ripped off the Ambassador's tunic. The last bit of life drained out as the distorted figure vented his twisted rage, sexually violating the dying Ambassador.

When it was finally over, and Dhati had peeled away what remained, he pushed the body into a hatch and ejected it out into space.

"Too bad you had such a weak heart, Treprestas - you could have had such a good time. I did."

A passing Frahza ship found the mangled body trailing its entrails. They discussed what to do. They would not try to return it to the command carrier because the Kultaki simply wouldn't take it. So they put it in stasis until it could be properly dealt with.

Fifty Nine - Super Prize for Cruelty

The mixed indigenous people of Quepar lived in the high mountains of the southernmost continent on Miraba. Even after the pole shift, they were in good shape. The cataclysm had claimed many lives but the hardy people took it in stride. Disasters had come many times before in their history but they always got through. Now that the planet had tilted 33 degrees on its axis,

there was a warming trend and increased growing season in these mountains. Their ancient ancestors had used a highly successful method of terrace farming that was once able to feed the entire continent. For many annoms they had been in the process of restoring this ancient farming system which depended upon water from the high mountains and a system of canals and lakes. Fish were prolific in these waters and the people followed their ancient ancestors' methods of harvesting, which kept the fish population in good balance. Although the villages of Quepar had little modern technology, the people were wise and industrious.

Cobi, Ana, Biltar and Edyn were enjoying their visit when they received the news about Nestingwave's murder and Petuva's suicide. It came from the one man in Quepar who still had a working monitor and generator. They immediately went into his sheltered dome and watched the rerun which was being aired over and over. A somber mood fell upon them but, although they were saddened, the deep significance of the event inspired their determination more than ever.

While Biltar and Edyn continued working with the small group of elders and educated men who had received the PSGs, Cobi and Ana took leave and beamed up to the hovering scout craft. They hadn't landed on the ground because aftershocks were still expected.

"I guess Petuva got herself into a trap," said Cobi, "I feel sorry for her, even though I never liked her because she was so smug and vain."

"That's true," said Ana, "she was especially venomous toward me."

Cobi nodded in agreement. "But, we can say one thing on her behalf. She sure went out with a bang - Kultaki style."

"Oh yes ... she was loyal and true to all she'd been taught."

The two Kultaki women looked into each others eyes. It was a mutual recognition of deep longing.

"Will we ever find a home?" asked Cobi?

Ana smiled as they embraced. "Yes, love ... I believe."

Later, when monitoring the secured Kultaki wave lengths, they learned of Lance's demise.

"What will our people do now, Ana?"

"Head out to the edge of the solar system to be picked up by another starship. Now that Lance is gone, they are free to go. There is hardly any danger left to us, as long as we stay far away. Col. Tordine won't go out of his way to come get us but, if they ever capture us, they'll kill us because they consider us traitors and a dangerous security risk. I'm glad Col. Tordine has taken Lance's place. He is a coward compared to Lance and just wants to move on, like most of the others."

"Yes," said Cobi, "and he's tasted all he wants from us. If he comes after us again, he'd better bring more than a change of pants."

Ana laughed. "I imagine Ranilla is much happier with him. Although he's a cruel dunderhead with a poker up his ass, he's considerably kinder to women than Lance ever was."

"Lance should have been awarded first prize for cruelty."

"You're right there," said Ana, moving her stump around in a circle, "the only Super Prize for cruelty goes to Dhati."

"What do you think he'll do?" asked Cobi.

"Stay on top of his brood and scope out new territories ripe for exploitation - what else?"

Sixty - Mother Miraba's Rebirth

In the workshop, Fabby was preparing a burial capsule for Wave's body. It consisted of two halves hinged together and was made of durable synthetic. The parts were spun up in the replicator. He assembled them and carved an engraving on the outside by sending out a small lazer from his forehead.

Nahvar and Nelyani were on the control deck playing chimpto with Blue and Orange.

"You win again, Nel," Nahvar exclaimed.

"I just enjoy playing." Her face was radiant.

The two droids flickered rainbows in admiration.

Up in the observation dome, Inky, Ginger and Boots were curled up together taking a

nap under the stars. Pheledra watched the mission unfold through the psychotronic adjuvant, but she was preoccupied. Thoughts of Wave flooded her and made any other focus difficult. It would take a long time for the mourning and sadness to fade. Self examination only provoked an inner struggle between guilt and allowance. Just as with Helaah, her quick tongue and negative attitude had once again contributed to the death of a loved one. Would she ever learn? Would she ever be able to forgive herself?

As she struggled on with this dilemma, three Frahza ships appeared alongside the Firefly. She heard their voices in her mind. With her permission, they soon came through the walls of the observation dome and floated around her as they delivered a telepathic message.

As you prepare a funeral for Nestingwave, perhaps you would also do the same for Ambassador Felance. We discovered his broken body floating in space.

Pheledra was surprised. *I didn't even know he was dead. What happened to him?*

Death was due to a heart attack aboard Dhati's ship. Dhati raped him while he was dying - then dumped him out into space.

How horrible. How sad!

We do not disintegrate the incarnation vessels of other races, only our own, and the Kultaki care nothing for any body once the spirit leaves. Would you take the Ambassador's body and dispose of it according to the respects of your custom?

Of course, we'll care for him.

Thank you. We also have a possible solution for Anadia and Cobishandra. There is a fourth density reptilian race similar to their own but of positive polarity with which we often interact. We will show that race to the two Kultaki women and if they agree, we will take them there. If they find lack of compatibility, we agree to relocate them - take them anywhere they'd like to go. We have permission from the Anadine Galactic Council and full support from all the lightworkers and beings of light who so greatly appreciate what they have done.

Then I am in accordance also, if Cobi and Ana agree.

Thank you again. We will contact them at the proper time so as not to interfere with the last part of their mission.

Pheledra was pleased. They will be happy to know they have such opportunity and support.

The Frahza returned to their ships. Fabby asked Nahvar and Nel to go up to the observation deck with Pheledra while the Ambassador's body was beamed onto the control deck. The Frahza ships flashed a farewell and departed.

Fabby prepared the Ambassador's body and replicated parts for another burial capsule. Then, as he'd done before, he used a small lazer beam from his forehead to carefully engrave words on the capsule's side.

When the time arrived to commit the bodies to the deep, everyone, including the droids,

gathered under the observation dome. The droids floated in silence while Pheledra, Fabby, Nahvar and Nel sat together for 20 zeron of meditation, then stood with silent tears as they remembered the souls of the two departed.

As they watched through the transparency, the two capsules slowly left the Firefly side by side and began the long journey home through the endless ocean of space and time. Two empty soul vessels in the rapid process of dissolution. One had been of negative spiritual polarity and the other a searching soul who in the end remained true to his highest being. Pheledra held Nelyani close as they quietly wept. Nahvar prayed and contemplated the great principles of love, sacrifice and service to others.

Fabby whistled a lovely melody to the accompaniment of the Ehnala drum voiced by Violet. The three cats gave their full attention to the solemn moment. The song ended and Fabby spoke.

"Nameless One of countless names. Beyond - yet within all that is. Universal Father/Mother. Open our consciousness to perceive who and what we are. Immerse us in love with joy unspeakable. Radiate from within us as we become instruments of your peace. We commit these soul containers to the deep - remembering that no life is without profound significance. On the left hand path of the endless journey lies the body of Kultaki Ambassador Treprestas Blastahdus Shaleedas Felance. Upon his burial capsule the epitaph is engraved: 'Sometimes Mother Nature herself has the final laugh.' On the right hand path of the endless journey lies the body of

Nestingwave - fifth density lightworker - our dearest friend and colleague. Upon his burial capsule, the epitaph: 'Only love prevails.'"

They stood in silence, celebrating the lives of the two who had passed.

"We're all relatives in the end," Wave would have said with his infectious grin.

The two capsules faded out of sight and Pheledra turned the observation dome to face the planet.

Miraba shone and spun. Her emerging new countenance reflected the unfinished carving Biltar had seen on Nahvar's workbench. It would not remain incomplete forever. This elegant sculpture would come to be revered in following generations. They would call it "Mother Miraba's Rebirth."

Sixty One - Beyond Words

As the Kultaki scout craft moved rapidly toward Tacu, Biltar and Edyn talked of the past and future.

"I know how you miss Sinya," said Edyn, "when we settle at Shanveh we'll have lots of friends. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you met a fine woman and remarried."

"Not a chance," said Biltar, "I've already met the finest woman in the universe - and she reminds me of Sinya. I will never be able to stop loving either one of them. It wouldn't be fair to someone else."

"No," said Edyn, wishing he'd said "yes" for the sake of discussion, "Pheledra is from a plane of existence as yet unknown to us; otherwise, I could see you two together."

"I know she loves me too and that's what makes it difficult."

"Biltar, fifth dimensional lightworkers are love itself personified, even though occasionally, like Wave, they go temporarily blind, apparently for the sake of tasting variety. Perhaps when they take that sojourn down through a black hole, they spring out on the other side with more positive energy than ever."

"After seeing what happened to Wave, I think you're right. But that dear soul paid the price with his physical vessel. Now, he'll have to start over from scratch in fifth density."

Edyn thought for a moment. I think that, subconsciously, Pheledra was attempting to do the same thing as Wave. I'll bet she allowed herself to fantasize about you even though she knows its impossible."

"Really? You may be right. You know, Edyn ... I certainly fantasized about her. I am lonely just like she is but in reality it cannot be."

"Perhaps in a million annoms?" Edyn and Biltar both laughed.

"Perhaps," replied Biltar, feeling a little embarrassed.

In the front of the scout craft, Cobi flew the ship while Ana watched all the instruments and monitors.

"Tacu, here we come!" said Cobi, "it's becoming cold after the pole shift."

"Not good for us at all." Ana faked a shiver as she spoke.

Edyn came up behind them and sat down. "So, what is this place we're going to next?"

"Tacu the cold," announced Ana.

"What does Tacu have that Shanveh doesn't?" asked Edyn.

"Blue people," Cobi answered.

"That's what they call their race," added Ana.

"Tell me about them," said Edyn, looking very curious.

"Well," said Ana, "they are from an ancient tribe that developed astronomy and mathematics. For millenia they were nomadic but for the last two hundred annoms they've been confined to industrial settlements run by the big corporations of Shaluma. They have lived in utter poverty yet produced all variety of goods for Shaluma and the rich nations. They were paid slaves wages and treated as sub-humans in every way but their industrial base was almost untouched by the cataclysm. PSG devices will be quickly developed there."

"Praise the One!" said Biltar as he took a seat next to Edyn.

"Praise the One!" everyone else shouted spontaneously, then laughed at themselves.

Tacu was cold indeed but they didn't stay long. A reception committee was waiting and quickly took the PSGs into a prepared facility and began immediately to take one apart to see how it could be reproduced. Meanwhile, Biltar and Edyn talked to the scientists who were a little upset for not being presented with text, diagrams and plans.

"I'll have to rewrite them," Biltar said, "as soon as that's done I'll get them into your hands."

"That'll be a great help," one of the scientist said, "in the meantime we'll go ahead and do the best we can."

Cobi and Ana remained aboard the scout craft trying to stay warm and exercise patience. When Biltar and Edyn returned, they immediately took off for the last place on their list - Bectalyne. It was near the new equator and its people, the Bhenuze, were very artistic and metaphysical.

The four stayed many days and enjoyed themselves. Cobi and Ana were the constant focus of everyone. Most Bhenuze lived simple lives but all seemed to have a burning desire to know the true history of Miraba and themselves. This was in spite of their state of mourning for those who had been killed when an asteroid blasted a hole in the middle of a highly populated area. The

people who survived were still somewhat in shock but recovering.

The scout craft left Bectalyne and headed back to Shanveh. Now there was no question in their minds that Shanveh was the ideal place to establish headquarters. They would stop at Penyat to check on Fryd and pick him up, if he was well enough. Then they would go over to Shanveh and settle down to begin their work.

"Those Bhenuze can be pretty wierd," said Edyn, "I saw one who thought he was carrying on a conversation with a PSG. He got down on his knees and talked to the thing. He seemed satisfied with the other end of the conversation. I couldn't hear it - guess I'm not quite crazy enough."

"To their point of view, they're not crazy," said Ana, "many of them believe consciousness can energetically interact directly with everything in existence, even so-called inanimate things."

"Yeah," said Cobi, "they believe the parts of a machine have perception of each other and can communicate."

"Well," said Biltar, "they're onto something. They have developed a technology using sound to effect atomic structure. They use extra low frequencies produced by their own voice as well as special horns and instruments. They have been reputed to move huge stones around."

"I heard that too," said Edyn.

"They do it all the time," said Cobi remembering her downloaded information.

"That's right," added Ana, "but it's secret and they aren't telling yet."

"They will," said Biltar, "once we show a real desire to learn from them instead of telling them what to do and enslaving them like the former control paradigm."

Edyn nodded. "I'll tell you the real reason why they haven't shared their sound technology. They say our Miraban science is completely reversed. The Frahza say the same thing."

"Reversed? How?: Cobi asked.

"Well," said Edyn, "our science has attempted to take the universe apart in order to see how things work and get to finer and finer levels of energy. The Bhenuze and others insist that this is a counterproductive approach -splitting the atom, cutting things open, removing organs and so forth. They say we should explore the source first and then move outward with knowledge experienced into wisdom. Then we know the whole inside story - and there is no need to take the universe apart. They consider our orthodox science ignorant vandalism against Nature."

"We'd better learn from them," said Biltar, "because they're right."

Edyn was emphatic. "The big question is how to experience that source."

Biltar nodded. "I think they can help us there too."

When the four reached Penyat, Fryd was well enough to travel with them.

They happily arrived back in Shanveh and their friends greeted them.

The mission completed, Ana immediately telepathed with Pheledra and easily found her yearning consciousness. They had perfect communion. They basked in each other's souls and shared everything, including things normally hidden deep inside their hearts.

"I'm bringing Nahvar and Nel," said Pheledra. The Firefly was already on its way down to Shanveh.

In the meantime, Ana and Cobi contacted Col. Tordine and told him they were ready to return the scout craft.

"Keep it!" he said, "We're getting out of here fast and the scout craft is a gift from me to you - that you may never forget where you've come from. Tell me if you ever want to come home. I could still use a couple of helpers."

"Thank you," said Ana.

"Yes, thank you." Cobi was truly grateful and very surprised.

On the way to Shanveh, Ana explored her increasing gift of natural telepathy.

Her consciousness fell upon the Frahza and they immediately spoke to her and she had a strong vision. They instantly gave her a block of thought forms and she conveyed them to Cobi, Biltar and Edyn.

"Cobi and I have a possibility of sanctuary and reintegration into a society of reptilian

people who are like us," said Ana. "Positive Polarity. The Frahza already took me in my astral body. I met them and felt relaxed and very compatible. The Frahza say they will be glad to take us there for a trial period and give us all the time we need to decide if we want to stay. They also told me they would be glad to transport our scout craft also. There's only one problem ..."

"What? What?" Cobi's rapidly changing hues telegraphed her excitement.

"They will have to swap out our propulsion system. Quantum fission is not allowed within their galaxy. Tachyon power used by travelers is permitted but suspect. They use a lazer/sound drive for their own starships and all smaller craft."

"Since they allow tachyon energy, Pheledra can visit us!" said Cobi.

"Right."

"Wow!" Biltar interjected, "will they let you leave their galaxy with that lazer/sound drive?"

"No," replied Ana, "but the Frahza promise to take care of that, if the need should arise."

"You can trust the Frahza," said Edyn, "they have never lied to me. Even though they seem strange and don't fit into our social structures, they can be the most charming of hosts. You can really practice your natural telepathy!"

"Let's do it, Ana!" exclaimed Cobi.

"All things with caution, discernment, and contemplation," said Ana.

They all agreed.

Pheledra arrived at Shanveh. She hovered but did not land and immediately invited everyone to the observation dome of the Firefly for their final goodbye. Everyone was beamed up, including Fryd and Edyn. They were all together again.

Then, a strange and wonderful thing happened. No one could speak. They no longer needed to. Each soul embraced the other, freely exchanging thought forms, experiences and emotions in an energetic interchange beyond words. No tears flowed in spite of the overwhelming joy. Pheledra presented Biltar with his papers and they embraced with a kiss. All the Mirabans embraced her with kisses like a shower of petals. Ana and Cobi radiated like living jewels.

Suddenly, Pheledra was there with Helaah and Sevret in her last moments. She heard Helaah's voice ... *Oh Sevret ... what can I do for you? What can I do for you?*

Sevret answered, *If, by some miracle, you live through this, tell Pheledra how much her wonderful friendship strengthened me and got me through my doubts. Tell her ... I died happy ... and so in love with all of you.*

Pheledra felt as if she would explode but did not cry. She watched as Helaah's lightship pulmeted toward the blazing fire and heard his last words. *Pheledra ... Pheledra ... love of my soul ... forgive me ...*

Her soul broke open like an oyster and she found herself there with Helaah. *Oh Helaah ... Helaah ... how I love you ... I forgive you ... and I forgive myself.*

The sweet tears poured down her face as she came back. When her sight returned, she saw Fabby holding up Red's processor and memory bank. Everyone completely understood that Red, at the last moment before he was completely crushed, had scanned the safe and retrieved all the information within it. Red's processor and memory bank were intact and Fabby would begin right away to replace all the damaged parts including the crushed Red shell.

They all bid farewell from heart to heart without clinging to one another and beamed down to go their individual ways.

Pheledra was moved beyond emotions. She washed her eyes and face. Aramanda's clear voice echoed in her mind. *It is none but I! See to it!*

Inky and Ginger looked around to see where Boots had gone. He strolled up to Pheledra and sat on her lap as she stroked him. A deep and satisfying silence prevailed.

Boots twitched an ear, meowed and groomed himself for whatever adventures lay ahead.

Fabby smiled and began to whistle the most beautiful song Pheledra ever heard.

The Firefly shot into space while they plotted a course for home. They would travel back down through the wormhole and into their normal time configuration, around the

**rim of Mother's Milk, to a fifth density world
out on the far edge of the Galaxy - to an
emerald blue world named Tara.**

Finis

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