

Cosmos Hell

Arrival

It is a typical morning on Salts Prime when Ideeas steps out of the domo bedroom after gently kissing Doh, her mate. Strong-backer, an animal native to Salt Prime, is sleeping in the corner, but soon to be whining for food and play. She drinks a medium-roast and looks towards yellow sun-rise. Messages from the Com are turned off, but she kicks them on. As a prime in the Star Eyes Outsector, it's her job to pay attention. What has transpired in the Star-Eyes out-sector is the result of a Mind Doamer and Leverite synthesis. This was to be a typical morning of associating to the local Com for among other reasons, researching the energy-space continuum of the Star Eyes Outsector. We are safe in this dimension. But Mind Doamers still shy away from the Living LeverDoamers like Ideeas, she muses in a somewhat negative fantasy. It soon turns to beauty, with the warm yellow glow of light coming through the flat blue -green local plant life shining in through the portals of the domo. The smell of the tree-flowers, which delivers a sweet tingling sensation, permeates the kitchen area where Ideeas finally rezes a Viz. She always feels secluded here, even though there are neighbors. Doh, Ideeas mate, has disappeared running through paths that he himself has forested. Much of the League Cosmos culture survives in the Star Eyes Outsector, but it is not the League. The population is sparse, and many of the powers a Lever has in League space continuum are diminished here. Despite that, Ideeas has rezed enough material to create some fashion of her own making. This morning she has on a suite that she generated starting with a base material that is artistically synchronized with the solar cycle on Salts Prime. At night the material transforms with dark blues and dark grays. The material conforms to her buttocks, legs and torso. It makes her feel good. At the Salts Prime solar zenith, the suite changes to it brightest colors of bright yellow green and by the Salts Prime later afternoon, deep colors of brown, red and orange. On the suite are icons of crystal metallic colors, one representing her life in the CorpCrop One on Beautica as Airridea Ann, a second representing her life starting at Canali as Ideeas the Lever and the third for here representing her life in the Star Eyes Outsector as a Living LeverDoamer.

The message jolts her from the mornings relaxed reverie.

Daron's image appears from where he commands from the bridge of a post-HumanFederationTwo Neo-Centerdom ship. The ships massive size stuns Ideeas. Then there are hundreds of similar ships visualized through the instrumentation on Salts Prime. These ships cannot depart this system. Ideeas is sure of that fact. They would never be able to collect enough power in the Star Eyes Outsector to shift out. It has been a long time since Ideeas has seen her son Daron. The empty and depressing feeling of not being with her children is something she had gotten used to long ago.

Reliance, her daughter, had left a two years ago, as a pre-teen, after deciding to live on a Hoeohleh or Refuser star system. Ideeas tries to repress the many arguments she had with her daughter. In spite of the severe mental image, Ideeas has a hope, a good feeling that many changes are in store for the Star Eyes Outsector.

Then a message from Daron is visualized in the commons of her domo.

“The in-system boat will arrive at Salts Prime in 3 Salts Prime days. We will catch up then. No use to emit it all here on the Com.”

That was the end of the message. What she can see are hundreds of Neo-Centerdom ships in an out orbit from Salt Prime. They can even make a couple more slips, given the mysterious physics Star Eyes Outsector. It doesn't matter. These giant Neo-Centerdoms can never depart from the Outsector.

Idea spends the rest of the morning rezing to the Com, sending messages about the new arrival to the Living LeverDoamers in the various Outsector star systems. Messages are sent to Levers in the KneeHigh, Kaibo, Panosh and Tosho systems.

By the mid-Salt Prim morning, Doh returns from the paths in the forest. He is told the news that Daron has finally, after all this time, completed his mission. Doh has an excited body language after receiving the news about the arrival of his son. His movements reflect him being pleased but at the same time concerned.

After three Salt Prime days, Daron's in-system ship, exits the Neo-Centerdom and arrives at one of the Salt Prime Defense Centres orbiting the outer most gas giant of the Salts system, called Salt Shaker by the in-sysem locals. Idea and Doh arrive on a scheduled in-system star-cruiser, with Doh carrying his Zanjelo, as always. Not long after that, Hohn, Kakska and Dummon arrive from a defense centre in the exact position one-hundred and eighty degrees from this Centre, Hohn, Kakska and Dummon being a Three from Idea's original Five Levers dating back to their inception in the Canali system.

The defense centre where meeting convenes is constructed on a random small irregular asteroid. Some of the plaststeel used in the centre is dark and impenetrable comprising of five mushroom shaped structures monitoring the sphere of in-system small protection remotes, additionally monitored by the other Defense Centres. Spread out from the dark structures are modules of clear plaststeel containing open areas and vegetation. There are a number of docking trunks, looking much like a prehensile sucking appendage of an ocean shore life form.

Idea and Doh are waiting in a designated clear plaststeel section that has been encapsulated as on OffLine for security reasons. The section has a light green metallic tinge on all the walls and floor and the fully filtered Centre air circulation has a nondescript, blank taste.

When they arrive, Kaska, Dummon and Hohn remind Idea of an old League Cosmos home world Glarn emerging from an ocean as they burst through the OffLine wall.

“Idea! How long has it been since we have gathered!” Kakska bellows as she piratically tackles Idea.

Idea looks up while being smothered with Kakska's hugs and kisses.

“Hohner, Dummon, I haven't seen you since, since ... “

Then Ideas voice grows softer and guarded.

“Since Reliance departed from our domo on Salt Prime years ago.”

“You will see her soon. I have a feeling. Yuh. Yuh”, says Hohn softly as he helps Kakska to her feet.

There is an uncomfortable silence before Ideea starts a new, much heavier conversation.

“Simps. Levers. Changes are afoot. As you know hundreds of Neo-Centerdom ships are outside the orbit of the Salt Seven, a gas giant with numerous moon-lets and planetoids, each of them offering a mooring. The ships have passengers with the lost memories from the Com, re-established as complete, in the children on those ships. The arrival of our children allow the unification of Lever and Simp to be complete.”

Doh looks on, simultaneously strumming two notes, where one scale is always ascending and the other scale descending.

Hohn interrupts Ideea.

“Daron has docked and is descending the tube. He is here and he has someone with him.”

It's now Kakska's turn in the conversation.

“Daron has an actual League officer with him. This is unexpected. How did he get here?”

Idea puts her hand on Kakska.

“We will find out in just a few minutes.”

Silence once again comes over the group. Not long after that Daron Ann and Tyroe Channel emerge through the wall as it closes once again to its solid plaststeel state. Daron runs and hugs his mother for a long time. Tyroe stands in a somewhat uncomfortable position, but softens his body language after feeling the eyes and minds of the group around him.

“Simps and Levers” introduced Daron, “Meet one of us, Tyroe, who comes to us through Kandox out-sector.”

Tyroe, still in his League uniform, proceeds from person to person embracing them, whispering affectionate greetings.

When he gets to Ideea, she thinks to herself, “This one is going to be a lover boy, he's got the touch.”

“Daron, after your long, long journey here, would like something to drink, maybe a toast?” says Hohn while Kakska leans against him smiling.

“Do you have a nice local wine. Nothing rezed. Something off dirty old Salt Prime vines? We have a lot to talk about. I haven't had a real wine for several years.”

“Just a second Daron”, says Dummon as he disappears through the wall.

A moment later Dummon reappears with a dusty bottle and pours the purple liquid in six even amounts. They gather as raise the glasses and look at the Face of the Cosmos through the clear plaststeel ceiling in the commons. Then the six sit and Dummon starts.

“Each of the children was incepted in the Alnex-92 system four years and 3 months ago according to local Alnex-92 system time. Daron has been nursing the children on the numerous Neo-Centerdoms, powered by Slitherspark technology that took a number of years to reach this Outsector. Each child relieves the Simp pain, embodies the specific lost Simp mind and frees the disciple. No?”

Daron, grimaces a bit as does Idee, and then contradicts.

“It's not as simple as that Dummon. Listen to what Daron has to say and he also brought us a League officer to talk with. I suspect that was not by accident.”

Tyroe breaks his silence.

“ Accurately spoke. The Kandox sector has it's own set of peculiar physics. There are collections of a small space atomic substances that can produce any number of realities in any complex organism. This includes League AI's on our starships. Simp Daron latched on the *blue fuzz*, and leveraged it as a primary defense. Also mark this. All of my away team was able to escape one of the Neo-Centerdoms. They rezed a primitive in-system ship and survived until a League star cruiser found one of their message torps. I can't verify this, but I suspect they were eventually rescued. The commander of the away team, is a brilliantly talented League officer, Dolly Bushway, who calmly handled the situation on the fifth planet in the Kandox system on route to where we are now.”

“Yuh, Yuh. There is a creature from Kandox Five there that exudes *blue fuzz* in any manner you can measure it.” Hohner interjects.

“Yes, she not only completed a sophisticated analysis of the small state physics, she led an away team that actually captured one of the shifters and isolated it in a quarantined section of their ship, the Ecostream. This brings up the next issue.”

Now Tyroe continues.

“My LeverSims, Daron used the *blue fuzz* to neutralize the League starship Ecostream. The Ecosteam and the entire crew of the Ecostream are in a reality where they are an alien force from the future that is fighting a historical battle on Ground Three that was initiated from Lollipop Island. In the perception of all those on the Ecostream, the reality continues. We derive that they believe the peculiar properties of Kandox Sector have put them in a past time line where they are actually reenacting an historical event on Ground Three.”

“Shit, how did we get our fanny in this deep of a crevasse”, Kaksa exclaims.

Tyroe again interjects, “The blue fuzz from the Kandox out-sector is amazingly deep in its power. It worked on me, If you're so inclined, we have some to spare in lock-down, if you have interest, but I don't know how long it will last in this dimension.”

Kaksa giggles an invitation back at Tyroe.

Tyroe continues, “It creates an entire reality that for all practical purposes is physical. Experiments show that someone killed in that reality, wake up in a severe state of shock. The effects are devastatingly real.”

Ideea continues with her own comments injected after a short group silence.

“Here is my proposed plan. We inject ourselves in the blue fuzz of the EcoStream and present ourselves as time-line monitors. The EcoStream and crew find themselves in the Star-Eyes out-sector. That's the happy news. Now the troublesome news is the EcoStream may only have enough state-physics in this continuum to make it back to the Kandox out-sector.”

“Yuh, that could get dicey.” Hohn says in a somber frame. “We got a lot of projects ... yuh”.

“As to the children,” Daron redirects, “They are ready. They will associate to the Com and can create a personality that any Simp can associate to”. They have traveled a long way from the Hum Fed Two Expanse, with their beginning as children and now each a young adult with a unique resurrected Doamer mind.”

“Mother Ideea,” Tyroe speaking respectfully, “looking at the populations on the Star Eyes Out-sector star systems, KneeHigh, Kaibo, Panosh, Toshio and others, only about one in four are males. All the rest are females. How can this be?”

“We don't know exactly, but it appears to be one of quirks of the bio-physics of this continuum. Even when we control the fertilization of the egg, it often comes up female instead of male.”

Tyroe once again quizzes Ideea, “What does that do to the social structure of the Star Eyes Out-sector?”

“Among the LeverDoamers, not much, but among the *Hoeohleh*, it has the effect of local polygamy.”

“Pardon me Mother Ideea, but as I understand, Daron's sister, Reliance lives in a *Hoeohleh* system?”

“You speak true Tyroe. It is one of the challenges we face.”

“Has anyone solved the riddle of slip energy in the Star-Eyes Out-sector?”

“Not Yet”, Kaksa responds to Tyroe. “Not Yet, but there are theories, if we construct an in-system resonator of gargantuan proportions ... ”

“Yuh, How do we reconcile *Hoeohleh* in the systems?”, asked Hohn.

“We have Marshals we've recruited from all the Star-Eyes Out-sector star systems. Tyroe, how would you like to be a Marshal for the DoamerSimps on Panosh?”

“I can do that. “

It's now Hohn's turn, “Before we proceed, we need to call a Con, to properly do the social dynamic . A Star Eyes Outsector Con.”

* * * *

The word went out on the MedCom and each of the primary systems sends a small star cruiser to the most energy rich Star System in the Star Eyes Out-sector. Each ship has an original signature, so it

could only spend double the energy to return to the home prime system. The PreOriginals,, the Utz, showed no interest in attending, and remained allusive on their few home worlds. The Hoeohleh following their prophet Zank, sent a single ship. All the participants in the quasi legal body, mimicking a League Con, with the exception of the Hoeohleh, accepted the arrival of the restored in the centerdoms, to be the path to a unified sector. Tyroe and a number of select recruits from the other primary systems were designated Marshals of the Out-sector. The sole Hoeohleh contingent referred to the Marshals as Injectors, bitterly opposed the entire proceedings and rejected the arrival of the restored.

Panosh

At bedtime, Reliance went to the room occupied as the Waitlovens' female farm help, locked herself in , and retired. It was a hot summer night on Panosh Prime and she tossed and turned more than an hour when an unrelenting alarm rezed on the local Com.

Reliance sat up, wide awake. At first she thought it was her Simp Waitlove, but a second knock, louder and more frantic, forebode a nocturnal emergency, not an intrusion. She sprang out of bed, her naked feet hurrying across the bare, duraplast floor, and slipped the blot to find her female Simp,

Sister Waitlove, in too big a rush to enter, poking her head in to say:

“There are three Injectors that just landed in a small in-system shuttle out past the grove. Get out and run home as fast as you can! Baldy's hid in one of the outer silo complexes!”

Reliance, having clutched for her cloths in the dark, was half clad on her escape by the commons room portal. In the open, she became seized by uncertainty. A barren yard surrounded the domo like a moat, without Panoshian trees or shrubs to cloak the entrance of outsiders, and revealing, as well, the departure of its occupants. Now was no time for her to stub her toe against a recently rezed object in the dark. She made her way along the walls until gaining the annex. She hid in the corner by the cellar portal and looked up at the domo, windows de-rezed and dark, portals locked down in the middle of the Panoshian summertime. The roof, steep, very much an element of local architecture found on Panosh Prime, rises to a balustrade like deck, a windows walk, seemed much higher than usual from her position.

Somewhere in the flow-wood trees, the Injectors had tethered their beasts of burden beneath the branches of the trees, leaving their in-system ship safely guarded at Oasis, the nearest full settlement. They came on foot, pressing slowly through the underbrush. They planted each step carefully. She could hear only the hiss of wings as a flying creature rushed overhead and the song of the native insects starting, then resting and then starting again in a marvel of precise arrangement.

The thrill of anticipation stabbed Reliance. An Injector strike, with steaming beasts of burden, hired in-system ships waiting in the dark, while they de-rezed locked doors to domos and underground apartments and woke the women. The end of sinister preparation and elaborate plans that were initiated at Stars Eyes Con. And it was being completed right in Patriarch Waitlove's yard! She could see three men exiting their in-system ship, glowing dark and gray in the hot Pashoshian star. From here they would contact the local stable at Oasis to gain access to their beasts of burden and hurry to a thicket of flow wood trees. There a energy torch burns bright, its glow escapes around the edges of a derezed portal. At a long low whistle, the door swings open and reveals the beasts of burden and small

effects vehicle, a contrast of what is left of League technology and what becomes typical at Pahosh Prime. The beasts of burden are led out into the darkness. The men climb aboard the effects vehicle as the pilot activates dashboard viz. The men embark the effects vehicle as the beasts of burden break into a full run. They quickly reach the end of Oasis, leaving a scatter of energy torch in the dark.

They ride toward the east, past the Severe Lakes, mirrors of black beneath the Out-sector stars, and “Packs Bottom”, a meadow ringed by a back grown over with dangles where the Hoeohleh hid out when a warning swept the countryside that the Injectors were coming. As night it is a fringed shadow against the horizon. To the south, and west of the sink-farms, are lava beds where the PreOriginals inter their dead. In the background are the slipping lines of the lava hills.

They leave the lowlands surrounding the lakes of the Severe River, cross miles of grease-veg and bub-brush until they reach Sung Again Mountain, humped against the stretches of flat country. Farther on, the Vaant Range spears against the starlit sky. After while a settlement emerges, a blur at the foot of the hills.

The men avoid the settlement, pass only a farm domo with de-rezed windows and doors and then take cover among the browngreen trees until they come to a road that leads to flow-wood grove. At the edge of the trees, their effects vehicle silently settles and they huddle in consultation, a hydra-headed shadow poised to violate the domo in its path.

But By the Lights ... Patriarch Carlson was safely on a mission ... it might have been her own house. She was his newest wife. Smilinda and Thea were in the middle. Sister Agatha was the oldest.

Reliance heard no steps approach, so without warning there was a soft muffled sound of a footfall as someone walked toward the door. Next, whatever device the man had, de-rezed the front door so quickly that every unattached object from cellar to garret shivered.

After a long wait, the movement was felt upstairs as faint as scurry of a small Panoshian creature. Reliance forgot that Sister Waitlove had told her to go home. She crept to the side of dura-plast deck and peered over the edge.

Two men formed out of the dark. The third must stay at the rear entrance or to search the out-buildings.

After a few moments, the window de-rezed and light flooded the decking.

“Who is out there?” came a voice slow and cross to cover fear.

“Officers sent from the Out-Sector Con. We have authorization to search the premises for Patriarch Waitlove.”

“I can't let you in until I get some cloths.”

“Then please do.”

The window de-rezed, with the light diminishing like an iris on an sentient. The decking below was in darkness. The roof-overhead de-rezed and shut off the light from the stars. Minutes later the portal signed in accordance with the domo and shuffling sounds darted across the upper floor followed by

drumming of hard foot falls on the stair step, muffled when they reached the insensitive first floor. The light reappeared as the front portal de-rezed once again. There she presented a an off-line and asked for the Con credentials.

“Are you Agatha Waitlove?”

She knew her rights from any recent Con. She looked at the credentials and de-rezed the door as the three men followed her into the domo.

“Marshal Tyroe Channel. Born in the League Cosmos dimension. You a long way from home mister.”

The Marshal spoke as he activated his full array of registers. Panels, trapdoors, and hidden rooms, as the Marshals men wandered through the pathways of the domo. The last passage led to the commons. On the opposite side of the room, a refectory table hid a de-rezed door which opened to a sealed and sterilized storage basement that hid a treasure trove of Panoshian fruits and vegetables.

After examining this one of the Marshals assistants departed for the outer structures of the farm. Reliance knew that he was probing for a hidden person, Baldy Waitlove hidden among the freshly harvested crops. She hoped his body heat blended in, he didn't have time to cloak himself. He later returned with a large orange vegetable propped over his shoulder to show the intruders. He approached the entrance where Reliance was hidden, unless she de-rezed the door without him noticing where she lay completely still in the shadow of the domo. She hunkered even lower, but her light dress caught a glimpse of light from one of the pale Panoshian moons.

The assistant stopped, very still. She could hear the rise and fall of his breathing. His probing body appendages now deactivated. Well trained and in a single move, he grabbed her by the shoulder, pulled her up and caught both arms behind her back. She connected with a single kick, doing nothing as the assistant frog marched her to the domo. As he de-rezed the door to he commons, she aimed another kick to the shin, but he dodged, caught her by the ankle in a lightening move and held her teetering on one foot. A startled look flashed across the face of Sister Waitlove, then her expression fell back in place.

“Who is she?” asked the Marshal who had de-rezed the door with his own device in an unchivalrous matter-of-fact-way. Reliances eyes met Sister Waitlove's then turned quickly down as he caught their exchange of glances.

“The fourth wife of a notable Hoeohleh”, thought Reliance, “a Simp of the Ward and true Simp of the Out-sector.”

“ A special person with special skills” said Sister Waitlove.

Reliance lowered her head lest the man see the relief on her face.

“We know some of her credentials. Do you know anything about her mother?”, the Marshal requests.

“Just the very little she has told us.”

“Let her go!” said the Marshal to his comrade.

Her captor loosened his grasp and ducked back a step.

“I don't live here, and am not part of the local Hoeohleh.”

As she tugged at the stockings twisted around her ankles and smoothed her PullOver.

“We've got to get the rest of our party, so now up to the next floor. You ladies please come along.”

The careless way he said “ladies” made Reliance want to give him a kick, too. He must be the number One Injector, who was sent to get the Hoeohleh to associate to what ever the charlatan Simps were waiting for them in their domain set by the Con.

“Shall I take a higher powered locator, said the assistant Injector, “and look for our man among the food stores.”

The lady here doesn't want any of their food stores ruined. Show some politesse.” said Tyroe.

In the upwards portion of the domo, the sound of voices, of bare feet, the wail of a child, alone at first, then joined by others. Though the domo was a scene of disorder when aroused late during the Panoshian night, to an outsider like Tyroe and his associates, this was doubly or more so. Women flitted through de-rezed portals in sleeping cloths, hair tumbled about and troops of children, curled up in bed, with covers pulled over their heads, or clinging to their mothers.

“How many?” an associate of Tyroe asks.

“Four wives in this Hoeohleh group.” He responds.

“How would you like four wives Marshal?”

“I have trouble imagining one.” Tyroe responds.

The very tidy domo made it easier for the Marshal and his comrades to scan each room starting with the commons. They were amazed at the neatness the children's sleeping quarters. The cloths were folded neatly across the foot of each bed. There was a washing and clean up station in each room. The domo has the smell of purity.

Our man's give us the slip,” said one of Tyroe's comrades.

“No signature of an effects vehicle in the area. He must have some stealth and left on foot,” said another.

“I think he's still on the premises”, said Tyroe calmly. “Expand and strengthen the scan to a larger perimeter. I'll seem if I can get the wives to associate to the Com so they can meet their terrified subconscious and re-acquaint it with resolved youth.”

Tyroe, the Marshal, along with the women filled downstairs with the Marshals comrades behind him. The deputies scattered around the complex and Tyroe and the women took a seat around the commons. Given the light from the walls and ceiling the wives of Simp Waitlove looked like close relations, not even an emotion distinguishing one face from the other. Tyroe stood with a mixed air of authority and

detachment, mark of an old hand at the game, he had from years of training as a League Scout. He was rather young for someone with responsibility of a Marshal assigned through the recent Con. Tyroe is husky and athletic, like most League Scouts, a bearing as neat as a Mentonian cat, a lock of dark hair fallen over his forehead which detracted from his official impression. In spite of his being a foe, Reliance felt some of the wistfulness and excitement that took place since she was sealed in marriage to the Patriarch and was within looking distance of young and comely man.

Tyroe again produced the writ from the Con and rezed a portal to the local MedCom.

“You can save yourself a lot of pain and discover what is on the other side, if you are introduced to the resolution of your worst fears.”

The first wife refused loudly with a resounding, “No Injector, we follow the prophet Zank!” The second and the third did the same. The fourth said, “Please de-rez this portal to the Com and keep your writ.”

“I’ll talk to you women later. One at a time,” as he de-rezed the portal and the writ.

A smile flashed over the fixed face of one of the women.

“Reliance,” she said, “what are you doing here?” You had plenty of time to get away!”

“Yes. Reliance.” said another, “nobody ever knows what you’re going to do!”

Reliance went out of the commons and started upstairs. Tyroe slanted a look in her direction she felt clear to the landing. She entered a bed-chamber and rezed a window that overlooked the complex.

The Marshal crossed the yard and stopped at the entrance to one of largest outer buildings on the complex and rezed more energy into the detection transceiver. A shadow bolted from a pile of harvested vegetation local to the Panoshian system. Next a second shadow appeared, shouting, “Head ‘im off! Head ‘im off down there! The second shadow took off in pursuit and released a blast to counter the stealth rezed by the fleeing first shadow. Then Marshal released two charges from a standard issue League Scout projectile weapon, with the intelligent missiles set to hit no one, creating an array of tracers in the Panoshian night.

The light created by Tyroe’s weapon bounced off the surfaces of the great black rocks along the hills with and mirrored across the valley. Reliance rezed a window so quickly that it reported with a loud bang. The Marshal turned and looked up at the second floor of the domo. She leaned across the window, her hair unfurled, rippling in the wind of the early morning. A decoration fluttered around her like wings. With the halo blazoned on her head by the torch behind her, to the Tyroe, the Marshal, she must look like an angel in flight, thought Reliance.

“Fly Baldy, Fly!” she called. The stillness of the night amplifying her voice, the de-rezed the window shut and vanished from view.

Tyroe gathered his comrades and spoke.

“We were not successful tonight. The Refusers are strong willed, and I believe one of the Patriarchs slipped away. This isn’t going to be easy. Reliance’s mother will not be happy. This job is a lot tougher

than I thought.”

Cloudglar

Mannie Bushway Keeble looks at his honored wife and at the Com on one of the newest star ships to come through the slip into the Kandox Out-Sector. Mannie-husband and Nelson-husband sit at the bridge of the Cloudglar. Other than the three marriage mates, there are only two other crew members, Zeke Jillway and Zena Ouants. Jillway is a hardened out-sector Scout and Ouants is an expert in cross dimensional physics. Both Jillway and Ouants joined the crew of the Cloudglar after the news spread of the success of the Dolly's incredible mission. These two were personally selected by Dolly, Mannie, and Nelson among hundreds of applicants.

The Cloudglar has the displacement and capacity that the Ecostream has, but only the five crew members. The starcruiser is filled with probes, searchers and instrumentation. The passages from factory to factory are spacious with soft colors of white-green and green metallic duraplast. Also there is a slight antiseptic smell mixed with the odor of soft duraplast metal, that makes atmosphere seem what it should be on a star-cruiser.

“Oh Oh, can you pick up traces of exactly how many Centerdoms were in the Kandox Out-sector?” Dollie said in a soft but firm voice.

“Hundreds, and they arrived at different intervals.”

“Any idea where they slipped to?”

“If you think the Blue is odd, this is even stranger.”

“By the Lights, I hope we don't run in a patch of Blue just floating around the Kandox Out-sector.”

Dollie and her two husbands plus the two new crew members had returned to the initial system where the *Ejection* was located. It is a K star primary emitting enough energy for the Cloudglar to maintain all systems at one hundred percent capacity.

“What is it?” Nelson quizzes.

Zena rezes a complex of dimensional diagrams. They combine into a schematic originating from the Minus Thirty Four Plus Eleven System the Cloudglar has slipped into a series that extrudes into another continuum of space and cosmic dimension.

Another one,” says Mannie. “Let me count them, the League continuum, the HumFed Two expanse, the Kandox continuum, and now this one.”

“You are correct,” Dolly says in her soft, but determined voice.

“I'm sure this is where the Ecostream was absorbed by one of the slip-capable Centerdoms. And I'm sure this is where all the Centerdoms slipped to. And it's also my guess, we won't be seeing them appear in the Kandox Sector again.”

“I think you are right on your observation”, Zena says in her often excited voice.

The expressions transfigure the dark brown skin of her face and her deep gray and silver hair as she speaks.

“I suggest that we prepare our first array of probes and send them in this unknown out-sector. I would suggest twenty five, with a spread of range and capability.”

Dollie simply nods her head and the five commence organizing one of the most extensive deep space probe efforts in League history. Each probe has extended slip capability, also known as slither spark

technology. Both Nelson and Zena suspect that the slip capable Centerdoms use a similar technology developed by the Mind Doamers. One by one the powerful probes, some with the power of a small star-cruiser, slip into the unknown dimension. The Com systems that guide them know that a return with some information is of prime importance. So Dolly and her crew spend the next days in the Minus Thirty Four Plus Eleven System, continuing with their research. Zena is of the opinion that the Blue Fuzz is unique to the physics of this dimension and that it would cease to function in League Cosmos space.

“It's a reality fabric unique to here” she kept on saying. “The Centerdoms with slip capability must have found a way to manufacture it.”

Zeke and Zena had paired up and were now sleeping together. They often walked around the “Ejection Garden”. The garden and it's beautiful large pond, was named after the small garden area on the Ejection. Of course, Nelson, Mannie and Dollie spend hours there, since it's a much more beautiful, but similar to the garden on the original Ejection. It has many compatible plants and a few small animals, birds, insects and like from a number of planets in League Cosmos. Biological engineering on New Orn crafted a carefully balanced mix that would last a long time in deep space. The colors against open space and the Minus Thirty Four Plus Eleven System are a complete crafting. Some of the bushes, grasses and trees have a phosphorescent highlight that produce a faint light that can be seen from the edges. The effect is scintillating. This is a place where all the crew members engage in sexual activity, to their delight and distraction while performing the grueling tasks of sustaining a star-cruiser. The crew has been bread from birth, not to join with intoxicating substances or couplings while in open space. There are exceptions, for special celebrations and religious holy-days, but on a daily basis, sexual activity is the only intense pleasuring the space travelers have.

The crew sustains an intense watch during the wait which lasts several calculated League days. The monitoring of the Blue Fuzz takes priority. By all accounts, not only is it a natural rez capable substance, but has a complete set of intelligent connecting extremities. But even after several days, no data has arrived.

Dollie asserts, “I know what some of you are thinking, we should return to Kandox Five and research the creatures there. In due time my wonderful crew. It is a great risk, but given the right moment, we will take it.”

Dollie and her command continue to monitor for the returning probes. The following days, Dollie and her crew go over data again and again looking for clues to why there were so many shift capable Centerdoms, why they originated from the expanse of the Second Human Federation, why there was no Click in this Kandox space-time continuum, why Centerdoms from the expanse would abandon the traditional Famlee and Field structure of the Second Human Federation. Or were some of these events associated to the Silent War between the Levers and the MindDoamers in League Cosmos space-time continuum? How did the slip-capable Centerdoms gain access to and control such a large quantity of “blue fuzz”. And how did the blue fuzz create such a powerful reality in both biological and cybernetic creatures?

Then a probe returned, after a long wait, when it was least expected. After that a second and then a third. Of all the probes sent into this unknown continuum, only six made the slip back to the Minus Thirty Four Plus Eleven System. And each of these six were the most powerful and longed ranged of the probes.

Nelson was the first to make a pass at the data the probes captured and exclaimed “By the Lights! By the Face! I'll rez a viz of this.”

Mannie, Nelson, Zeke, Zena huddle around the viz filling the bridge of the Cloudglar and the information unfolds before them. There are three types of inhabitants in what they call the *Star-Eyes Outsector*. Two of them are from the Silent War in League Cosmos, the Mind Doamers and the Levers. A third has formed a tribal structure and seem to be derived from deep space travels going all the way back to the First Human Federation. They refer to themselves as Utz peoples. The Utz seem to be only in a few systems and avoid both the Mind Doamers and the Levers. One of the large probes was lucky enough to slip to one of the primary systems in this Star-Eyes Outsector named Panosh.

“Panosh and the surrounding systems seem to be a pale imitation of League Cosmos”, Zeke comments as the five Cloudglar crew members absorb the viz.

“They have defense spheres constructed around the major systems.” Dolly comments. “It takes twice as much energy each time you slip. This Star-Eyes out-sector seems to be keeping score. That's why so few of our probes made it back. And the ones that did were able to find a star system with a white or blue hot star to soak up extra energy,” says Zena in her usual excited voice.

Nelson and Mannie look at each other and say simultaneously, “No Ecostream ...”

“I think it was absorbed by one of slip-capable Centerdoms and is in a reality the we can only imagine”, remarks Dolly as she reviews the energy capabilities of CloudGlar.

Nelson looks at Dolly and says straight away, “Are you thinking what I'm thinking?”

Zena now is now wearing a worried expression.

“If we are going to find the Ecostream and really understand this Stars-Eyes continuum, we have to slip into that dimension,” Dolly says sternly. “But I want to hear each of you suggestions, alternatives and objections.”

“By the Lights and the Face,” mutters Zena.

Dead

After the intrusion by the Marshal Injector and after the departure of himself and his comrades, Reliance returned to her own domo unable to sleep. As the dim light peered through the Panoshian atmosphere, she decided to dress up in mourning. She felt the trance of one who steps from the dark into the bright sunlight and stopped abruptly, longing to return to the shadows, being stock still in her dark raiment.

She fixed her hair as smooth as taffy beneath her bonnie-cap and here eyes stared back from her self-reflector as wide and glittering as a doll's with lashes long and straight like marks children draw around suns on a flat-space artistic.

“My little vax doll!” the Patriarch always said when she came in sight. She stood as someone conjured out of a long sleep but not its dreams. Sweet waves of wild Panoshian mint drifted from the creek bed and in the morning breeze with flow-woods rattling like stiff delain. Today these refinements of nature were lost on Reliance. She thought of the creek gone dry after a long drought under the large orange in-system star. The trees in the fall like racks of bones, without rustle or sunlit leaves. What is left after a funeral, is played out.

The pain of the lost minds for instance. So deep the sound of stone is lost when it hits bottom. So many measures of land around that could accommodate the Levers and warping of the Doamer Mind, and the apostates that have been injected with the Doamer Mind that some of the Levers have embraced. Farther than the hill named by Neft or the Coomor. And yet so near.

There! The pain of the Doamer Mind bring the apostates as they approach. They will ultimately end as a statue, unable to move.

Reliance breathed a prayer for Uncle Josh as she had done many times before. She slipped into the Simp ritual for Uncle Josh that she loved. WE-HE. WE-US. WE-Josh.

He and Aunt Vin had replaced her parents after she rejected the way of the Levers and her bioParent, Idee. But the living could spend so much time over the Doamer Mind dead, especially the Doamer living who toil alone. Action had to be strong, single-minded, without waste or pottering, from the working of herd animals in the morning to derezing the lights that energized her domo. Reliance hurried towards the storage structures on her complex.

Instead of a local effects vehicle, Reliance fronts to the discreet. She mounts a beast of burden and proceeds slowly along the creek that rushes from the canyon that flows into her complex. Reliance resisted the urge to stop under the trees and pick Panosh mint from the creek or vagrant flowers from someone's fence. To breathe in this mid-orange-star morning was to forget the evenness of Doamer death. It was one of those indescribable days when stray breezes carried the dry, peppery scent of spice-plant, the fragrance of star warmed fruits, the perfume of even-dish and wild dish freshened by yesterday's rain. Clouds of snowballs bloomed in front dooryards and lively flocks of local bird held rallies in the leafy heights of trees. Down the road, in the ruts dried by the strong orange sun, a rider on beast churned up a cloud of golden dust in the morning light.

Such a radiant day was never created for repeating funerals or visiting in stuffy parlors.

"But I must talk to Sister Carlson," reliance told herself, "before I help Aunt Viny with the Doamer dead."

Reliance arrived where Agatha Carlson had shifted away a very comfortable domo. It was an old Hum Fed One style street where Sister Carlson lived. Her domo was at the end, the red tinted duraplast glowing in the Panoshian sun light, with a pitch-roof thrust out of the flow-wood trees. Two gables ornamented the front with intricate white dura-plast extrusions from the BatBear system in the now distant League Cosmos. The house was much like her own, but larger, since Agatha was the first wife.

But Agatha's domo held less clutter than the quarters of Sister Thea, who was the object addict of the family and owned more knickknacks than all the other wives put together. The quarters of her sister, Smilinda, who shared the same vine covered house, were bare except for a table, chairs, beds, stove, Doamer viz, an ersatz League clock, and an rustic Panoshian almanac. She was the wife constantly associated to certain Doamer minds, who always thought death and separation was at her elbow unless she kept her remedy there of vorg(a local plant from Panosh prime), aluminium salt, sect honey and vinegar. Agatha swore that Smilinda substituted spirits for vinegar, and it was true she was too listless to keep the children from handling fancy things like Thea's. The children are Diandenia, Armoshia, Rocksenia, Phene, Birdeen, Chloene, Cleve, Aby and Baby.

When Agatha's door opened it was hard to know where to look first. There were carved umbrella stands, lambrequins draped from shelves cluttered with miniatures; deep, gilt portraits of unknown ladies in Growthreesian hats, rotogravures of distant relatives, paintings of dead Panoshian fowl, closed grand zangelo under a fringed shawl, a dresser with circular soft sur-plast shelves, a clock on the mantel with onyx pillars on each side and gold star climbing on its face, and some wiggly red, yellow and black velvet local insects imprisoned in a box with a crystal cover. An ancient-items cupboard held a galaxy of cut transparents, goblets, hand painted vessels, gold trimmed pitchers, silver cruets, and a lot of purposely-fragile and curious items Reliance had never seen on any-body's table, so she had no idea as to their use. Many a time Thea must have slapped the hands of Sonny, Safronia, Theo, Doe, Dosh and Doe-Ann!

How fascinating a conglomerate place can be to a child! Particularly to occasional visitors like nieces and nephews. Years later they would say to each other, "Do you remember Aunt Thea's?"

“Of course, how could anybody forget Aunt Thea's?”

There should be an Aunt Thea's house in every childhood so that out of the world for forgotten words, places, and things, there would pop a Farmit-system box, a green water pitcher filled with sunlight viz, a stuffed rodent from Panosh, a Tosho shepherdess, or a Growthreesian shell with a murmur of the sea in it, bringing back the years of Aunt Thea's magic.

Nobody in the family felt sentimental, though, about the carved dark-duraplast bath tub Aunt Thea installed for the Patriarch.

“It's a dirty trick!” Smilinda had wailed, “The Patriarch will take all his baths there!”

As she entered Sister Carlson's yard, Reliance noticed how the trees were much higher than her own, the flow-woods dripping with pale, fragrant blooms. The flower beds were larger, too, spilling over with mouthies and circle flowers. And the fat wax ponties, white, pink and red, were bigger around.

Reliance rezed a entrance request at the front portal, and waited for a fit of Agatha's hurried footsteps. Sister Agatha Carlson rezed the portal as to allow admittance.

“Oh it's you,” said Sister Carlson. She was long faced, thin lipped woman and, like the lady in the song, had her hair pulled up so tight she could, she could barely shut her mouth. As a sometimes reformed Doamer practitioner, she said, “Come in,” and gave Reliance a peck on the cheek.

Sister Agatha completely shaded the domo so as to protect her precious artifacts from the original four human home worlds. These artifacts included an ancient GroTwosian clock, a hand painted lamp from ancient Menton, protective furniture drapings from Ground one, and a facsimile of local Panoshian moon on a plasteel table polished to a mirror like finish. Not one speck of dust was to be found anywhere, even if the shade was de-rezed.

“Sit down a while,” said Sister Carlson, “You sure look peaked.”

“It seems like everything happens at once,” said Reliance, “Last night it's a Con sponsored Injector raid, today it's a funeral gathering again for the dead mind of Uncle Josh and Aunt Vin.”

“I mean sort of scrawny. Like you'd been living off a soup-bone, borrowed and used over a few times.”

Reliance slumped upon a settee but found it was made for sitting up straight.

“If I got scrawny at the Waitloves' it's not from a lack of food,” she said, “it's from not getting my sleep out.”

Sister Carlson remained on her feet, frowning as she spoke.

“The neighbors came over first thing this morning to tell me about you getting caught by the Marshal and his crew.”

“That's what I came to explain. The hotel-keepers little boy didn't cruise out to warn us. I guess the Injectors slipped through the Oasis without being noticed.”

“Reliance, how did you stay in a house with a he-Doamer like Baldy?”

“It wasn't easy. I kept an old energy weapon under my pillow.”

Agatha pulled her rocker up to Reliance and sat down.

“Did you have to use it?”

“Once. We worked until after dark, long after supper was done. I was rezing a beautiful dress for Waitloves' big girl and she fidgeted so I couldn't get the hem straight.”

“I know how she is. Go on.”

“When we finished the commons and went upstairs to bed, I was still de-rezing pins and Baldy was hanging around to tell me how tony the girl's dress looked on her. It looked pretty tacky so I knew he was hanging on my dress, not the one I was sewing on. After I left, de-rezed the light and went to bed in the little back room where Doamer Drummers stay, at conference time. I was just about to sleep when I heard a little tap-tap on a portal. That was his way of getting in. A tiny tap-tap so I'd think it was one of the kids. Come in, I said, just half awake. The next thing somebody's getting in my bed. Baldy. I discharged the weapon, but missed. He looked at me in a state of confusion.”

“It's just old Brother Baldy!”

“Just old Brother Baldy!” said Agatha. “Do you know what would happen if Carlson found out an apostle tried to make free with you?”

“So then what happened?”

“Nothing. But I couldn't go back to sleep.”

“I should think not.”

“Think now, Reliance. Have you ever seen a naked man?”

“Just the Utz. From the waist up.”

“I mean still-stark naked.”

“Well, no.”

Sister Carlson leaned back in her rocker and paused for a long time.

”The Injectors 'll have Baldy in days. “

“They'll also have Carlson. “

Sister Carlson rested her head against a cluster of fruits painted on the back of her chair, rubbed to a faded hybrid. The rezed domo ticked out time to the squeak of the rocker.

“Will he bring home a new wife?” asked Reliance.

Sister Carlson's rocker stopped short. After that she was silent for a while.

Reliance got up from the stiff coarse-rez settee. Agatha was more friendly to her than Smilinda and Thea, whose children threw rocks at her when she went by their house. But her jealousy was scarcely buried, like a cinder grave kicked over a local viper.

“One day we can recover we can recover it ... yes we can. Help your aunts re-haunt of your uncles memories in the Mind Doam,” said Sister Carlson, also rising.

“Hannah's the one about used up. She won't get much help from Viny. I saw her at the micro Con.

Not a tear in her eye after a re-haunt! She said, 'Hannah just bellered and bellered, but I didn't beller . So I guess she'll let Hannah do the re-haunt.'

Sister Hannah uttered a long half scream, half-moan ... the cry of the grieving who have had too much to bear. Viny on one side and Reliance on the other braced the collapsing Mind Doamer as the re-haunt progressed.

"Yes," said Reliance. "I'd better set up the re-haunt so it's easy for all."

Each time Hannah re-haunts the missing Doamer Mind of Uncle Josh, she goes into hysterics. Viny hardly says a word. She is practically unaffected by the re-haunt. She will also be the most difficult for a Lever/MindDoamer Injector to reach.

"I'll be all right in a minute," Viny gasped. Reliance looks at Viny and realizes she is a prime target for the Injector and his comrades.

As the re-haunt gathering dispersed and the procedure is over, they formed groups to ride in the procession or exchange a few words, moving out into the later afternoon tinged by an amber Panoshian star upon neighboring blue hills. Hannah was the last to depart the procession.

Facade

Once again a viz from the Com activates a wakeup in Ideeas sleeping quarters. Doh moans and pulls the covers over his head and locks in a favorite sound. Ideeas focuses on the viz.

"By the Lights. It's an advanced Slither-spark star cruiser with a full League signature. Hello homeworlds."

Ideea stumbles a second and then gains her usual control. It is dark in her Salts Prime domo.

"Excuse me my love," as she kisses Doh, "Another day with maximum activity" as she dresses with dark blue under-panties, a formal suit of her own taste and calls others in her Lever Family.

"Hohner, you see me" as the Viz rezes in her domo's common room.

"Yuh. Yuh, mumbles Doh as he fumbles around butt-naked looking for some formal attire.

"I too got the signal. Heard from Kaksa?"

"No, make sure she is at least aware."

"Yuh, yuh."

Ideea has her cloths on and is drilling down on the signature from the True League Star Cruiser.

"Ok, its a New Orn vintage, name, CloudGlar. Nice. "

Ideea is thinking about the home-worlds and the wonderful beast the star cruiser is named after, this imaginary large mammal that can navigate the clouds. She rezes the Comm with maximum transmission energy.

"Can you let me in your ship, Cloudgar? My name is Aire Ideeas Ann Doh. I represent the local Con in the Star Eyes out-sector. "

The viz of Dolly Ridgeway appears in Ideeas domo."

Dolly responds.

"By the Lights. Your reputation proceeds you Ideeas. A Lever in the Silent War. Vanished from the Beautican system years ago. Am I talking to a legend?"

"In a Ris players pants, commander Dolly. These days I grow native vegetables and fruits on the major

settlement in the Salts Prime system. And wonder what has become of my daughter now that I have reunited with my son. Dolly, do you and your crew understand the altered physics in the Star Eyes Outsector?"

Ideea stops to examine the viz of the League star fleet captain in her perfection. The soft brown curly hair typical of Ground 2 heritage (does it matter? it's her choice), the dark blue uniform with highlighted stars, representing the face of the Cosmos, so comfortable, showing almost no cleavage of Dollys strong athletic form and physique. For a moment Ideea projects a sexual fantasy, but represses it. I bet she is a an outstanding League star ship captain and I am very happy she's here do help me deal with that which she can, Ideea runs to herself.

"I know that most of our probes were lost and couldn't slip back. And the ones that did were lucky to refuel at a hot star. It seems each ship has a signature and each slip takes an order of magnitude of energy. My engineers with me have verified that."

"You are absolutely correct captain," says Ideea wistfully. "Why did you follow the mother-ships into the StarEyes-Outsector Captain Dolly?"

"We are looking and tracing the Ecostream. We've scanned your Con records. A good sum of enlightening information. Where is the Ecostream?"

"It's time to gather on the fifth moon of the outermost gas giant in the Salts Prime system. Bring your crew. I'll bring my family. Is 07:50, tomorrow, day 245 in the Salts Prime calendar? Accord?"

Dolly pauses. Ideea can see her polling her crew and soliciting answers.

"Not only a strong Captain, but a good social engineer," Ideea reminds herself.

"We are ready. Salts Prime 6-5 it is. Can you rez an atmosphere for comfort Ideea?"

"Affirmative Captain Dolly. We have a lot to accomplish. Be ready, all you. See you on 6 5 tomorrow At that time lets speak about the Ecostream and the physics of the Star Eyes dimension.

* * *

Dolly looks at the crew and the viz. Her crew gathers in the commons. It is bright and ready for communication with the AI that makes up the central nervous system of the Groundglar. The crew gathering has the scent of peppered metal and floral mask. The light from the wall is softened so the presenting viz is easier to view.

One-by-one thousands of slip-capable Centerdoms are detected and located in the out-lying rings of the Salt Prime system as the probes data is assembled for the gathered crew. Energy readings show considerable activity two months ago, but almost none now. Zeke and Zena rez up data on the StarEyes homeworlds.

"There are five major home world systems, KneeHigh, Kaibo, Panosh, Toshio and Salts, the system we are in and the system with the slip capable Centerdoms. There are a number of lesser systems, with a high percentage of PreOriginals, who look to have originated somewhere in the Hum Fed One era. They remain primitive, even by StarEyes standards."

Zeke stops speaking and Zena continues changing the viz.

"Look, there are only a minimum of slips between the home-worlds. This much we know. A slip capable boat makes a destination and is completely disassembled, obliterated. Then a new one is rezed with a completely different and unique slip signature. It looks like they keep the traffic between the main home-worlds to an absolute minimum."

"Do they have an infinite number of slip signatures Zena?" Dolly interrupts.

“Unknown.”

Mannie changes the discussion and the Viz.

“A number of Levers and Mind Doamers have reconciled. But there is strong resistance to the reconciliation by a large number of Doamers. The Refusers, known as Hoeohleh, are led by Patriarchs of the Mind Doamer Church. They are resisting in a number of systems, notably Panosh, the initiative of the recent StarEyes Con. “

“Hmmm ...” Dolly says as she twists the short locks of her soft curly hair.

* * *

The Cloudglar arrives at Salts Prime 6-5 first. It is an ice ball of rock, frozen methane and water. There is a blue mist on the surface of residue gas. Two hours later an in-system shuttle arrives. It has a strong local energy concentration. A lighted sphere with comforting oxygen and nitrogen at about 295 degrees above absolute zero engulfs the shuttle and the Cloudglar. Dolly with Mannie and Nelson, her husbands, Zeke and Zena appear outside the Cloudglar. Ideea, Doh, Kaksa, Hohn, Dummon and Dolly's son, Daron appear outside the shuttle. The group from the shuttle is wearing local Salts styled attire, with a dark green fading into lighter green and yellow green colors. Dolly and her group are wearing the League Blue attire typical of out-system scouts. Ideea slowly approaches Dolly, puts her hand on her shoulder and kisses her on the lips.

“Captain, welcome to the StarEyes Outsector. I am at your service. I am not so sure how you arrived at a dimension so far from League Cosmos, but you have arrived and that is all that matters.”

“Idea, you are a legend in the both the League and the Beautican system. Beloved, I need your assistance.”

“And I need yours,” Dolly responded in a soft and sensitive voice.

“Idea, we traced a huge number of centerdoms slipping into this space-time continuum, the StarEyes Out-sector as, well, you and my crew names it.”

Dolly pauses under the sphere and looks at the unfamiliar stars and glow of the main star from Salt Prime.

“My mission here is to locate a missing star cruiser and captain. We traced a large League star cruiser, on a deep space mission, the Ecostream, into this space-time continuum. My crew, under my guidance, need to locate the Ecostream, or understand what fate consumed the star cruiser.”

“The Ecostream. Yes.”

Idea shifts her body language.

“I can tell you that the Ecostream is safe. Creating the, “blue fuzz” as you call it, was one of the challenges when penetrating the Outers, Kandox space-time continuum as you have named it. Probes encountered this unique dimensional residue from the Hum Fed Two expanse. After a number of experimenters lost their way, we were able to reproduce the reality gel in large quantities, and insulate the protective spaces in our slip capable centerdoms.

“I know. The power of the reality is exceptional,” Dolly interrupts. “Look at me, I now have two husbands.”

Idea smiles and puts her arm around Doh. “At this time I have only one, and he's quite enough for me. But having spoke, you are a lucky woman, I admire you. Yes, the Ecostream is embedded in the centerdom it docked with. It is in a Growthreesian reality from ancient history. That much we do know. Captain I'm open to suggestions.”

“How did you gain knowledge of their created reality?” Dolly queries Idee.

Hohn answers her question.

“They are still using their transmitters on the star-cruiser. Would you like a viz?”

“Perfect,” answers Dolly.

The two groups, Dolly and her crew from the League and Idee and her Lever-MindDoamer crossovers, step through the viz. It is obvious that the Crew of EcoStream are playing out a famous battle in ancient history, before the First Human Federation. When the viz is finished, Dolly speaks to the gathering of the two groups.

“We need to send a team in and pull them back into this reality. The team members can not include crew members they know. It will only deepen their fantasy. From the League, we can send in Zeke and ... or Zena. From the collection of Lever-Mind Doamers, anybody?”

Stealth

Reliance's common area in her domo is like most in the out-city on Panosh. The portals only a few feet from the ground, never with obscuration, and derezed, to let the evening air in to cool the domo. The heat-sync beneath an old pre-Hum-Fed stairwell warmed the Reliance while she finished up her end-of-the-day work. And, on one side of the mantel, a rez nexus showed a steep rise of primitive un-covered stairs. In the centre of the table a shaded torch was lit, throwing corners of the room into shadow and darkening the front of Reliance's apron. When she turned and crossed to the edge of the table, the light fell across her at an angle, and when she reached into the glow, her hand appeared bodiless.

Reliance stood very still, listening. A small Panoshian predator was in the hills, but sounded close enough to slink up to the yard. In the creek along side of the orchard, water clucked over stones like voices of women in gossip. A small stone-fruit fell from a tree at the rear of the house, thumped down the slope of the roof and came to a stop at the annex. She waited, wondering if it had enough momentum to roll off onto the ground.

A sound followed, more like something felt then heard, like a breath or draft. She could have sworn it brushed the back of her hair, like a falling comb, and she waited for it to clatter to the floor. She felt for her comb and pins. They were all in place. This was something real, not fancied, as on Fast Haunting Day, when she thought a demon had come out of the barn and it turned out to be a pig. There was someone out there, outside the window, at the edge of the porch. The figure was motionless, covered by darkening shadows, outlines blotted away.

Was it a devil or a witch, stolen down from the canyons to leave bloodied domesticated lying about, or stables smoking over the carcasses of dead burden beasts? Or was it one of the spies of the remnant Silent War?

Why did the Mind Doamers, a people hounded and spied upon, build their domos so anyone could rez a hole through them by merely standing outside and shifting the small-state structures? Reliance turned down the torch, went to the mantel and took her energy weapon from behind a long, flat picture of the original prophet, Zank. Then, careful not to let the signature broadcast, slipped out through the back door. Her fear led her through dark as deep as no-star-black.

All the sounds of the night had come to a stop. In the flow-woods, where most any time wind sloughed, there was hardly a sigh. Even the prattle of the creek seemed too far away to cover the snap of a twig or the whisper of her feet in the grass. Reliance held very still. She turned up her sensors. Footsteps crossed the front porch and neared the corner of the house. Then silence. Someone waited in

the dark, stepped out from the shadows. In the light from the kitchen window, a figure of a man took shape. The sound of her heartbeat deepened and she grew aware of only one thing, the energy weapon, her best. In a matter of seconds, it became heavier. The plast handle was stickily warm and smelled of sweat on material, a disagreeable smell. Never before had she linked it with death. She launched the weapon as the man started to speak.

The body of her victim brushed against the side of the domo, emitting sparks and his protective system folded in a green flash and then fell, in a soft heavy thump.

Reliance stared before her. The light ebbed down from the window, revealed one knee doubled under the disintegrated armor, the other nearly so, hands clutching the ground. She took a few steps, knelt and rolled the body over. She stared at the face in horror.

“The Injector!” she cried. At that instant her thoughts, her breath, her very heartbeat seemed suspended. Dread of what came next crowded the realization of what she had done. Reliance wet herself.

There would be an exposure at the next Con of all the major home-worlds in the Star-Eyes out-sector. She must destroy the evidence, bury his body in the orchard. Away at the bottom where none would ever find him, unless the spring floods washed up his bones and carried them down the creek to the Oasis centre. Better dig a grave on a rise. But at night when the wind howled around the house and she lay awake in her bed, she would think of the grave out in the orchard, dug narrow and dug deep. That settled it. He would have to be buried in the hills.

She removed the mans weapons, and found a simple off-line. She easily activated it. It contained a detailed writ from the recent Con, that had been processed by several well know Lever-Mind Doamer crossovers and then found her name and the name of her mother, Ideeaa.

“By the Face,” she whispered, “How could I ever get away with it?”

They would come and ask questions, prowl around the house for clues ... blood stains under the window, fresh earth on a shovel ... leading to the disappearance of what's-his-name ... She gingerly placed a hand upon the blood spotted shirt over his heart. It was as fast a small Mentonian flyer.

She ran back into the house and opened up a trunk upstairs and came across an old quilt with stuffing out where the patchwork had pulled loose. Oh, if only an angel would revive him, she thought, so he would go away! She clutched the quilt in a wad and hurried downstairs. But on her return, he was just as she left him, his arms flung out, his legs fallen just anyhow.

She rolled him onto the quilt, tugged him across the porch and through the front door, worried momentarily about blood seeping through the quilt onto domo carpets, but the sight of the wounded man on her well swept floor was so monstrous that nothing mattered. Somehow, she maneuvered him onto a bed in the back room. Besides being a dead weight, he twisted grotesquely and moaned and mumbled. She pulled off his shirt. It has stuck to his skin and turned stiff where the blood had dried.

After she fired up the reactor in the common, which generated all her heat, she stuck a instrument in the centre, then rezed enough heat to change the ware, made a poultice of dry Panoshian purple leaf and got some sheeting, a spool of thread and a narrow ultra blade knife used for clear cuts.

Back in the bedroom, she bent over the wounded man. He skin glistened and his arms had begun to turn cold, though it was a warm summer night. Locks of hair clung to his forehead, damp and matted with dust. A large tendon throbbed in his neck. His breath hissed through parted lips which, being clean shaved, showed blue around the edges.

The energy damage was mostly in the shoulder, with the flesh puffed out on all sides, smaller than the tip of her little finger and encircled with white. When the wound was washed it oozed lumps of blood, like current jelly. From it, a furrow could be traced under the skin to the arm pit. Reliance pinched and pressed, then felt a small hard knot that moved and grated against a bone. She lifted the arm, left it curled over his head, and with the knife made an incision along the furrow, peeled back the skin until a stream of blood gushed out. Quickly, she pinched the artery, then rezed it with her pack, and from behind the place where it was severed, dug out the fragments of shattered bone.

In the commons, she took a few strips of sheeting from a basket and removed an instrument from the reactor. Then, the odor of burnt flesh was added to the air that smell of blood and perspiration as the cauterizer shriveled the edges of the severed skin. It was like burnt beef, only sweet. A moan burst from the lips of the man that Reliance worked on, watchfully. Two furrows deepened between the brows and the lashes on his cheeks were wet. She washed the wound with hot salt water, put on the poultice and wrapped the sheeting, winding it around many times. She looked at her work, and decided it was a miraculous mix of low and high tech.

“The rest is up to the angels,” said Reliance, as she rose from the side of the bed. She flung open a door onto the yard, tottered outside, and leaned against the first tree she came to. She stood thus until a shudder ran through her. She sank to her knees, retching face down in the grass and defecated. Later she removed her urine soaked undercloths and passed out.

* * *

On awakening the next morning, Reliance recalled the night before by a delayed stroke, aware first of a slightly stiff neck from rolling off the pillow during a fitful sleep. Remembered, this day's burden drew her straight up in bed.

She arose, put on wrapper, went to the head of the stairs and listened. The door was open and the domo clock could be heard ticking away where it was rezed in the commons. There was no other sound.

“He must be as dead as a HumFedOne collector,” thought Reliance. With light, soft steps she descended, retarded her movements as she approached the back room, then stopped.

He was still there. And he was still alive. His breath came in a heavy hiss with each rise and fall of the his bare chest. The room smelled sour instead of sickly sweet. She crept to the side of the bed and touched him. His skin felt hot instead of cold.

Before an hour was up Reliance left the reek of her domo. The morning air smelled clean. The song of the trickster trickled from clumps of brown-green trees along the creek, and long legged bugs danced wherever the water was quiet, damed by a head-gate of mossy rocks. If only thoughts could find inlets! By the Lights! She knows Agatha Carlson could offer no such quiet. Reliance hitched her beast of burden in front of the woman's house and ran up the walk. The door opened and the sight of Reliance's face started her off.

“Good heavens, child, you look like you'd seen a ghost!”

Reliance slumped into a chair, this time without waiting for formality.

“What on earth is the matter?” demanded Agatha.

“Something horrible has happened,” Reliance blurted out.

“I shot the Injector”

“What Injector?”

“You know. The one that pinched Baldy.”

“You mean the Lever? The Mind Doamer poser?”

Reliance nodded.

“Good work, girl! Good work! I hope you got him right where he buttons up his pants!”

“Oh Sister Carlson, he might die and I'll be arrested and brought before the next Con! I wouldn't stand a chance ... I was obstructing justice. He came to serve a Con writ on me, probably a real-life replacement for Uncle Josh.”

Agatha Carlson paced the room several times, then sat down in her rocker without leaning her head against the plums.

“If I were you,” she said, “I'd keep my mouth shut about it. And I'd send that man packing before folks find out you have a Lever Injector bedded down.”

“That's how it would look. But will Patriarch Waitlove apostatize from our Doamer minds if I'm under the roof with another man?”

All that worried Agatha, would be that they would loose the Doamer minds for a total loss to the family. As long as Reliance was the only one, nobody seemed to mind. With a sigh Reliance rose and returned to her own domo.

Reluctantly she returned, lingering to pick a local Panoshian herb for her herb reserve and break off a twig to lift the putrefying remains of a scruffit caught on the sharp edge of a domo perimeter fence. The odor reminded her of the stench in her domo. The bedding rez would have to be taken out and de-rezed without a trace. “Good luck thought Reliance to her self. Sensors will have it immediately.”

There was no use gagging on it, worse might face her in the back room. On arriving she went around to the rear of the domo. She had de-rezed the windows in the bed chamber to prevent callers or somebody passing by from looking inside, and the entry was de-rezed. She activated the opening signature and entered without making any noise.

During the hours that followed the man babbled and tossed about, his fragmentary recitations weaving a spell in the orange twilit room. The smell of crude med, the urine stained mattress, and the dampness of fever, wet care and comfort pervaded the air. Every absorber rezed by the domo had been soaked, re-rezed and piled on him. That evening Reliance unwrapped the Injector. He was an ugly red.

All night long Reliance stayed with her patient. When his eyes opened, he looked at her with a blank

stare, and when he slept they twitched beneath their lids. His lips were puffed and dry, their movements tracked by some far-off dream. When a cup touched his lips he drained it to the bottom. The soaked cloths lay steamy and warm on his forehead. Toward the morning the delirium began to subside. The Injector has tremendous regenerative powers, Reliance told herself.

She stood over him, her head lowered as in prayer to the Face, then picked up the torch and went to bed.

The Panoshian orange sun was bright when she awoke. She snatched up her wrapper and got into it on the way downstairs. She stopped at the bottom reach, the daylight had overtaken the corners of the room. The windows viz was drawn only in the back bed-chamber. With a quick soft step went to the entrance and peered in. The man was on the bed, stretched out in traditional League rep pants, naked to the waist. Reliance stared the dark tufts of curly hair that grew between his nipples, then crossed to the portal and de-rezed to let in the light, revealing his face. She had never seen a man's breasts before. Such tiny little breasts! And so much hair, like entrance to her own private organs. What Reliance is seeing, has an intense arousing affect on her.

His eyes were open, sunken, staring at her with sullenness and curiosity.

"Who shot me?" Tyroe asked in a husky voice.

"I did," said Reliance, quite simply.

"Why?"

"I'm real sorry. If I'd recognized you, I wouldn't 'ave been so frightened and wouldn't 'ave done it."

"Do you always shoot first and talk about it afterwards?"

"No this is the first time."

When Reliance returned to the domo, the Panoshian sun, with its unique colors was well up in the sky and the native birds in the trees had reached a peak in their singing. She had processed a container of carack milk and a few pieces of high energy material picked up on her way past the pile. She dumped the fuel into a box next to the transformer and poured the carack into a pitcher for the table and a pan to set in the Ten-C cooler. As she rattled the grate in preparation for breakfast, the man in the next room changed position. The domo bedding played a restless ones tune under his weight.

Later, while Reliance spooned in his breakfast, she found him staring at her over the bowl she held near his chin.

After a last spoonful he said, "What did you do with my shirt?"

"I cleaned it."

"I had some embedded signatures from the Con ... "

"They aren't in the shirt. They're in the safe over there."

“You're Reliance,” he said.

“You ought to know. Them embedded signatures over there got my name on 'em.”

Reliance broke an uneasy silence, asked, “Are you missing anything else?”

“My in-system shuttle and my beast of burden.”

“In the largest complex on the farm out near the fence. Nobody ain't seen em.”

“My hat, and I guess that's all.”

“Your hat?”

His hat had completely slipped her mind.

“It must've fell off when I blasted you,” said Reliance.

She glanced at her patient, then took up the dishes and retreated to the domo-commons, and for the remainder of the day scarcely a word was exchanged between them. Her silence was that of a curious child who is interested in the stranger who drops by for a visit, only in this case there were no grown-ups to shoo her out of the bed-chamber.

Before the Injector went to bed, Reliance offered him a cup of tea, made of of hot water, carack milk and sweetener, but he declined, saying that since it was his first day up, he didn't want to over-do things. Then he gave her a charming smile, his first real one, and disappeared into the back bed-chamber.

* * *

The next afternoon, huge shifting Panoshian clouds rolled over the mountains, tumbled between the precipices of the canyons and blackened the sky within a few minutes. All day the air was ghostly still, then the storm came up.

Reliance went up stairs and down, to de-rez all the windows and shut out the wind, but not the howling through the orchard as it lay across the tree tops and scattered a shower of Panoshian green and purple apples over the ground like the report of an ancient, but evil weapon. Thunder rolled down the sky, flashes of lightening split the gloom and threw the trees into staggering black shapes and the stretches of dark brittle bark into a disarray of shrub troops.

She first ran out into the driving wind to get the chores done and came in as first rain began to fall. Supper was by torch light, when the hour was still early, urged by the precipitous dark. Reliance and the Marshal sat down across each other to a plate of biscuits and carack cheese and a pitcher of carack milk. They conversed some but their voices paled in the rain drumming on the roof, harder as the minutes passed. Sometimes thunder shook the domo, shivered the flame in the chimney-pipe and rattled the frameworks.

“A demon is beating his wife,” Reliance said to the Injector. “That's what folks around here say when they hear the thunder.”

“She sure makes a hell of a racket,” said the Marshal.

“That's him,” said Reliance.

After supper, he lingered in the commons and watched her put away her implements, hang up the cups, reach the dishes up to the shelves and sweep beneath the table. Tonight he talked while she picked up after the meal. Then she sat down and listened.

“I was born on New Sotia and joined the League Scouts as soon as I could study at a Scout ran elementary school. I dreamed of being a scout since I was a child. I've been to New Orn, Beautica, Ground One, Two and Three, Canali and all points in between. I managed to get on a special deep space mission into the Kandox dimension. Reliance, I know you. I met your brother Daron and he transformed me and am now what you call an Injector. Coming to this dimension, I met your mother, Ideea.”

“My mother? Who would kill someone to transform them into what she calls a 'baby'?”

“You know that the only thing lost, is there old fragile body.”

Without an answer, Reliance got up from the table, straightened the rest of the commons and went upstairs to the bed-chamber. She sat up, wide awake, for a long time, and listened to the volleys of thunder move toward the distance as the rain on the domo roof soared to a deafening roll. When the boom of the downpour slackened to a light hum, drowsiness took hold of her and sleep seemed but seconds away. Then from the canyon came a faint rumble like a blood tide ... when an ear is covered. After a measureless time, the rumble grew into a roar like a heavy wind, or a mountain moving. Within minutes, a flood of water came crashing down the creek, enormous rocks cracked together and rushed onward as the Panoshian ground shuddered.

Reliance set a torch down on the table, heated elements in the commons, put on the teakettle, and with arms folded high as though having a chill, waited for the water to boil. The noise of the water summoned the Marshal, he clumped about in the next room. When he opened the door, he stood there sleepily, toweling, and bare chested, with his bandaged arm.

“It sounds like all hell's busted loose,” grumbled the Marshal.

“It don't last long, but washes down branches and stumps and things and makes the water muddy.”

He leaned in the doorway, watching her.

“What are you brewing?” he asked.

She glanced up from the commons as he pulled a chair to the table.

“Panoshian tea.”

“Reliance, I know Simp.”

“Do you? From the grounding of an Injector?”

Tyroe took another sip.

“it's bitter, like medicine,” he said, pulling a face.

“That's about what it is,” she said .

He made another face, pushed away the drink and leaned on the table, sideways, on his good arm.

Accident or not, Tyroes knee brushed hers beneath the table. She sneaked a sidelong look at him. His eyes were mysterious, his lips smiling.

“Reliance, why do you divorce yourself from your mother? she is one of most influential people in this reality and in others.”

“She is a Lever who became a Simp and can't feel it. She kills us to have her children!”

Without warning, Tyroe grasped her hand, her eyes fell upon the tea he had pushed to the centre of the table. In the same instant, her other hand flashed against the cup and swept it between them, dousing his face and the front of her dress. His mouth fell open, tea dripped from hair tangled over his forehead, trickled down the side of his nose and chin, while it clung to the tufts of hair on his chest. Now they both stood, staring at each other. His eyes were filled with anger, glittering through wet lashes. He reached out and held her chin like a stemmed glass which, if held as tightly, would have shattered to pieces. Then he pushed her aside and strode from the room, de-rezing the door behind him. From the other side of the wall, he heard him lumber about and get back into bed.

The next morning the sun came up and burnished the tops of the wet brown-green trees and shafted the Panoshian with glassy light. The edges of garnet and iron colored rocks out against a bright blue sky where a crisp little cloud or two remained. Through this brilliant scene the coppery, mud-swollen creek flowed like dross. Splintered timbers and broken branches of trees stuck in the banks, tangled in one place, and damned the current into a swirling inlet where a drowned wild animal bobbed at the edge.

Reliance hurried down the path to the barn. When she awoke that morning, the Tyroe was gone. The downstairs room was empty. He had left without awaking her, without leaving a trace of himself except a rumpled bed. She threw open a building door and daylight displaced the gloom. His beast of burden was gone too. When the chores were done, she decided to ride, without good reason for there were no errands.

She headed along the creek, surveyed the damage left by the flood. After a short ride, she pulled to a stop, listened. There was a crackle of movement in the underbrush. In the next moment, from the shade of the willow fringe, the Marshal appeared on his beast of burden. He sat rather lazily in his rider, his arm in a sling, and seemed slighter and younger than in her downstairs room. The brim of his hat, pushed back, revealed his gray eyes in the sunlight. He looked at her as if he had never seen her before in his life. He was no convalescent out for a morning sun. He said “I'll be seeing you soon” and left. Moments after that his effects vehicle vanished into the atmosphere, brightly lit by the local orange star.

Time

Halzee had landed the Ecostream on Lollipop island days ago. He and his crew had all but forgotten

their original mission. They now are convinced they had come through a time-portal.

The Ecostream has enhanced all of the AX-47 aircraft on Lollipop. They dominated the Oceanic Imperial opposition in each air battle. Ground troops are massing with their fleet, near 500 kloms to the east. Halsey calls a gathering of the entire crew, or what is left of the crew after entering the time portal. In the previous months the technical engineers on the Ecostream searched through the portal into the Kandox dimension. They did not find a trace. Attempts to head into space revealed only the siltent emptiness of the Ground Three solar system before the First Human Federation. Halsey is convinced that, as is his crew, that the ship was brought in by the Yotan Alliance to secure victory on Ground Three.

The crew of the Ecostream stands in front of the Command Module. The breeze is blowing soft smells of the local flowering trees across the sands of Lollipop. Nema stands next to Halzee, her fine light brown hair flowing in the Growthreesian breeze. Next to them are Gak and Katoh, leaders of a successful air-war on the part of the Yotan Alliance against the Oceanic Empire.

“Comrades in time travel, we have been brought through a time portal to create a new history. We have a destiny to fulfill or we would not be here.”

Nema glances at Gak and Katoh. They are gazing into th deep blue skies of the Growthressian atmosphere after telling stories their adventures in the surrounding islands. Halzee continues.

“The Oceanic Empire is retreating, we have driven their panthers from the air. Behind us, the Yotan Alliance is massing a ground force on one of the larger islands. We are re-writing history and are the initiating players.”

At this point in the ceremonies, the crew of the Ground Glar that landed with the Ecostream, gives a mighty cheer.

Halzee continues, “Our engineers have performed maximum enhancements to the AX-47 fighter bombers that will will not disrupt the technology in this time period, but on our own initiative, will bring a decisive victory to Yotan Federation, that didn't occur in our own learned history. We are re-inventing it!”

Each crew member of the Ecostream raises their hands and holds their feet and hips in the traditional salute of the Yotan federation.

* * *

“How will Zeke and Zena withstand the blue fuzz?” Dolly asks Idee in a soft, quizzical voice.

“That's a good question Captain.”

Idee places her hand on Dolly's shoulder and looks directly into her green-blue eyes.

“Levers have an immunity to the fuzz if they choose to resist it. Daron was able to build it into the Centerdoms that made transit to the Star-Eyes Out sector from the Kandox dimension. So Captain, you see, it would be very easy to make Zeke and Zena immune, if they are willing to transform.”

Both Zeke and Zena show a blank, but worried expression on their face.

“We have no conflict with the League. In the past, we have had conflict with the Mind Doamers. Now that subsides as we merge with the Mind Doamers. And now we inject the lost parts of their collective subconscious dead and the pain evaporates. I can feel all of the lost dead, since I am also a Simp. Zeke, Zena, you have a choice. You can voluntarily become a Lever, but this transformation will increase your responsibility and awareness, we can try to find another antidote to the blue fuzz or you can go it alone, and see what it does to you. The last choice, I don't recommend.”

The expression on Zena's face is whimsical. The expression on Zeke's is one of frightened amazement. Finally Zeke says, "Will it hurt? Do you have to kill us? We heard rumors on the Com that is the propagation technique used by ... you, the Levers.

Hohn replies to Zeke, taking over for Ideea as the principal responder.

"No, uhn, no. Absolutely not. Originally considered evil in our church, we now can bring you up, and you don't have to suffer death. It was first used on Beautica in the League Cosmos dimension years ago. In the Star-Eyes Outsector, its a nice safety mechanism. Don't be afraid. Don't be captured by fear Zeke."

Idea gives Zeke a little kiss and hug. Zena is withdrawn within her thoughts. Where she grew up in the Canali systems, the Levers became a legend. They were the humanoids living in the waste by living almost entirely by the energy emitted by the local star. She remembers the rumors, the whispers in the city. There is a conflict that we cannot see, between the Mind Doamers and the Lever Doamers. She remembers the bleached white walls of her Canali Domo. She remembers looking up at the night sky and looking at the gas giants that were almost-a-star that blessed their system.

Zeke takes Zena by the hand and whispers something in her ear. He then looks at Doh, Hohn and Ideea and says

"We are going into the other construct for a couple minutes to talk by ourselves. Please excuse us."

Both Hohn and Ideea answer at once.

"By your command."

Zeke and Zena retire to a quarter sealed off from the rest of the gathering. They look at each other. They hold each other grasping their brown hair in each of their well trained fingers. The quarter has the looks and geometry of a place completely sealed.

"Do you want to transform Zena says very softly to Zeke?"

"Not really, but I also can feel an excitement and also a duty. We can return to the League, still as Scouts, but transformed."

"I fell what you feel," Zena softly replies. "Look at Ideea and Doh. And look at Hohn and Kaks. They feel and they love. I ,,,,"

"I know. I have also had these perceptions" Zeke replies to Zena.

"Can we have a conference with Dolly?"

Zena de-rezes the portal to the quarter and asks Dolly to join them a moment. Dolly enters. She first looks at Zena and then Zeke.

"Well? What is your decision?"

"Captain, we need to discuss this a bit. We love you and trust you. You can listen, but please only observe. "

"My crew and my friends, you have said it."

Zeke holds Zena tight and whispers, "Do you want the powers? Can you live with that responsibility?"

"If you are with me. Yes. I sense that that what is going on in the Star-Eyes Out-Sector will ultimately effect the whole League. Dolly is a brilliant captain. Ask if she plans to return with us ... then my answer is an unqualified yes ..."

Zena and Zeke hold and kiss for a while. Then they turn to Dolly.

“Can you bring back two Lever-MindDoamers back into the Kandox dimension?”

She winces a small bit and answers, “If you do something adverse, I will have no power. What difference does it make? Yes my comrades. You can go home.”

In unison they answer.

“Now do it.”

Dolly, Zeke and Zena return to the main domo rezed for this meeting. The three of them return to the antiseptic smell of a temporary structure generated in a vacuum on a distant planetoid. Zeke looks at the off-blue floor and Zena looks at the potential viz on the trans-board walls. Idee, and a mostly silent Doh, Hohn and Kaks are laying down in the domo in a relaxed repose. They say nothing, trying to exude a feeling of sympathy and comfort to their guests from the Kandox dimension.

Dolly, Zena and Zeke hold hands.

“Transform them.” Dolly says in an abrupt manner.

“And now I need to speak to my husbands.”

She takes Nelson and Mannie in the meet.

“Can you be with me as Lever-MindDoamer?”

“No. Not unless you take in in,”

“Also me. We love you.”

Dolly, Mannie and Nelson exit the meet.

“You have my approval on one condition. Transform my entire crew.”

Idee looks at Dolly with a serious front.

“It can easily be done. Can you return to the League as a Lever-Mind-Doamer? Remember you get two for the take of one. This depends on the capability, courage and responsibility of you, Dolly, your husbands and ... you.”

Hohn looks at Dolly. He knows he the one.

“Yuh, yuh, I can see you are a good one Captain Dolly. You belong with us. Perfect. You can return to the Kandox Out-sector as a five, given your mission is a success. Dolly ... now?”

Hohn embraces Dolly. Idee embraces Nelson. Kaks embraces Mannie. Doh embraces Zeke and whispers, “I give you the grace of music, feel my Zengelo”. Finally Daron embraces Zena, “be careful Zena, now feel the Mind-Doam, feel the dead and their remnant thoughts and feel the new life that connects to each that we brought through two dimensions.”

Realities

Tyroe appeared at Reliances front portal, which he de-rezed with the usual ease of an Injector. He walks into her bed-chamber, holds her hand a second and speaks.

Now she is walking with Tyroe through the trees by the creek shafted by a glass orange light of a nearby star. The edges of garnet and iron colored rocks out against a bright orange sky where a crisp little cloud or two remained. Through this brilliant scene the coppery, mud-swollen creek flowed like dross. Splintered timbers and broken branches of trees stuck in the banks, tangled in one place, and damned the current into a swirling inlet where a drowned dreprow bobbed at the edge.

Reliance hurried down the path towards the main complex. And then she headed along the creek surveying the damage left by some terrible storm that could uproot any tree on Panosh. Reliance stopped, listening. Then appearing out of the orange mist common to Panosh, appears Tyroe. He steps down from his vehicle using lazy steps. His arm is regenerated with a series of cybernetic bio-connections typical of Hum Fed One technology. Tyroe's dark hair is pushed back revealing his gray eyes in the sunlight. He is not a convalescent out for a morning sun warming.

“Reliance, would you like to join the Con as it has assembled in the Star-Eyes Out-sector?”

“Reliance, would you like to join me on a trip to a new Con, just convened.

“What will happen to my farm and the processes here?”

“I've installed a net of considerably more intelligence than the one you have been using. Any questions about that?”

She glanced at his arm.

“Not my work.”

As they boarded the in-system craft, Reliance noticed the strong smell of herbaceous plants drowned in the mud, resinous and steaming in the Panoshian sun throwing off a bitter medical smell. The craft launches streaming through the corona of the orange colored Panoshian star. Small planetoids, soft and silvery, humped along to the left and to the right as far as they eye could see. Mountains with glistening tips and rainbow shimmering blanketed the planetoids. A star cruiser, much larger than the in-system craft passed them by, sending greetings in a friendly way.

On the way to the Con some drummers, with their preforming retinue climbed aboard the craft. It didn't matter since the Marshal seemed completely detached saying little. The drummers were now whispering and whistling songs that Reliance could almost remember but alluded her grasp. Reliance found a red flower on the ship and attached it to her hair. Tyroe looks at her and says “with that you can charm the entire Con.”

They reach the Con, a collection of star-ships from every quarter of the Star-Eyes Out-Sector after stopping at a hot blue star system with no facilities except the usual regeneration positions. They land and couple with the largest star-ship that Reliance has ever seen, It has thousands of quarters and partitions. It is called the Penance.

It has beautiful lakes and valleys, it must be a Lever ship. This is what they do? Now the other wives are with her wandering through blue gardens that she reaches out and touches and smells at every opportunity.

Why am I here? What testimony am I inscribing on the Con? She lay on one side, then the other, and saw the eyes of the accused beneath the lids of her own. Could she lie? She had never been in a Con. How would she react to the dark robed judge presiding over the relentless spread of human beings? Cons probably had a way of living up to what the uninitiated expect of them. Reliance stared through the black, eyes wide open as fear rippled up her spine at the thought of talking to the entire known universe.

After a wait of hours, the sense of slipping away, of growing light, carried her along in the dark. At some time, somewhere in its deepest recesses, she was summoned by a tinkle of a chime. She wandered in all directions and found a long hallway where tiny torches shimmered faintly against damask walls and drew dusty pools of light on moss green carpets. Then louder, the chime rang from the shadows. At the end of the passageway she found a door hung with heavy portières and guarded on each side by braziers spiraling scented smoke. Beyond the door was darkness, black as a cave where

carnivorous creatures might have paced in the shadows. Again the chime, the running of feet, and wisps of whispers. A taper appeared in the dancing flame. She followed as a insect to a long room with tall, deep windows with white curtains belling as through someone hid beneath and were running away. A draft escaped, entered the room, and shivered a hundred crystals dripping from the a multi-torch that lit a ceiling like a fancy frosted desert. Around the walls hung huge quilt frame pictures that reminded her of the penance. At first, they appeared to be venerable men with side-whiskers but, after a long look, they became women and children lined up in assigned places. After a moment they began to move, and file silently out of the room.

She looked up at the dark robed figure. It is her mother! It is Idee herself. The server of souls she ran away from! Reliance runs. The best mark is to find a balustrade like a lariat of light wound upstairs to the bed chambers.

A door opened, releasing the flick of candlelight, and breath of rose petals slipped from the folds of a satin canopy covering a cloud sized bed. It was so soft, it must have been filled with petals from the most heavenly of fountain fretted gardens. As she lay in a sea of silk, the pad of feet approached. She looks up and it is her husband,, whom has never slept with her. He commenced with whiskers on his face. But then they moved to his chest. She reached out but the whiskers had all moved to ...

A loud clash of thunder overhead awakened Reliance. She sat up in her bed and reached for the covers, but she had dumped them on the floor. There was no red flower in her hair. She was covered with sweat.

Reliance dressed herself in orange and purple attire, originating from the earliest times of the Doamer milieu. She retreated into the Simp dialect, often repeating the incantation of her uncles repeating funeral she had attended so many times. << I We Josh ...>> Finally she walked out into the bright and huge Panohsian sun light, mounted her favorite beast of burden and rode.

"Ma," called Aby, after he found his tongue. "Here comes Sister Reliance!"

Thea rezed the portal, she looked elegant in a blouse with uniform layers and an off a scent suggesting the color she wore. She always confounded the Hoeohleh women by dabbling a bit of perf, brushing her hair and changing into something fresh to quit work in the middle of the afternoon.

"Your ma can't come out," said Thea to Aby. "She's sick again."

"You mean sick still?"

"That's a shame," said Reliance.

She picked out a violated-red set with a math-pattern shawl over the back and sat down in all the color. She looked at the kids and cringed at the lack of rez their family provided them. Maybe they were in a state of shock after the word that in injectors were working in the Panoshian system, methodically and in numbers.

During the weeks preceding the twenty-fourth of the month of Nona, Reliance worked long minutes on the dresses for the top delegate and her maids of honor.

At that moment Saffronia came into the room, and a little pout and said, "Aunt Thea, now that Reliance is taking in cloths <<She she>> rez, can she make me a dress?"

"No, she can't."

"Why not?"

“Energy dearest, energy.”

“That girl gets more disrespectful every day,” said Thea. “It's what comes of not having a father around to raise her.”

“I'll make her one after the twenty-fourth. I'm doing some costumes for the parade.”

“You're doing those?”

* * *

During the weeks preceding from the twenty-fourth day of summer season on Panosh, in the hemisphere where Reliance and her peers lived, Reliance rezed dresses for the first female and her entourage of honor. They were white, flowing and Hum Fed Two classics in their style. Bright orange suns, all replicas of the Pahoshian star, would line the entourage. Two mythological beings, from the earliest days of the Doam Chuch would proceed at the parade point. By mid-summers eve, all the costumes were finished and picked up by the participants.

In Thea's domo, the girl turned around and around before a long coeval-reflection. “For pretty!” was her pronouncement. They left the girl admiring her image, which probably stopped short of the neck, she was one with least status, and went into the commons for an herbal brew. This struck Reliance as typical hospitality, just in case neighbors decided to appear.

“I don't want the girls to hear this,” said Thea. She closed the door, then ceremoniously waved Reliance to the chair and pulled up one for herself, taking her time, she smoothed out her outfit and took several sips of brew

“Have heard the news?” she said, at last.

Reliance started. What news?” she said in a soft voice.

“The Injectors have been exposed. They were having sexual relations with the Simps, us, the *Hoeohleh*. The Injectors say we did this on purpose, to reduce their status in the eyes of everyone in Star-eyes Outsector. Rumor has it, that they will re-double their efforts to complete the purpose of the Con and the young youth with all the memories of our sacred Mind Doamers.”

“Yes,” said Thea, “just when we are supposed to focus on the Doamer parade, the whole towns talking about relations with the Injectors!”

“It's not fair,” said Reliance.

“It's a shame, and have you heard about the marshal?”

“What marshal?” said Reliance though her heart instantly quickened.

“What marshal?” The one that carried the injection notice from the Con. There's a rumor he's one of the men involved.”

Reliance placed her teacup upon the table before she dropped it.

“Oh, that one,” she said

“And have you heard what happened on Salts Prime? An Injector killed and converted one of our own *Hoeohleh* into a Lever-Simp abomination. They had to get them off planet-side back to Lever-Simp headquarters before the remaining *Hoeohleh* went crazy.

Reliance rezed a connection to the local Com to see what dirty work her mother and her comrades were up to. Reliance kept it a private viz that no one else could see. It frightened her to see a dead man instantly return to like and acknowledge his Simp. He even thanked his killer and kissed him. After the incident, both Lever-Simp and *Hoeohleh* retreated and lower the economic value of Salt Prime.

The *Hoeohleh* parade took place on the longest day of the Panoshian year. The participants dressed up as characters from ancient Human Federation history like Araxian Promox, the Growthressian astronomer, marchers in syndicate dress from Ground Three, huge rezed replicas of Rig the Conquerer, a RepublicoTen railway engineer and those in dress from the Teronium Empire of Ground One and mythical beings from the Ground Twos Greagi pantheon.

Some days after the parade, Reliance got up early in the morning. The heavens were fair. The trees rustled, birds fluttered in and out the branches like patchwork, blue, dove-gray, jet, fire-red, their songs flashing across the countryside. Panoshian spice plants peppered the warm air. None of this eased the unsettling that plagued her. She jumped at every noise and was afraid of more things more often. Superstitions that had been forgotten, or judged unfruitful were revived for use. She took the splinters of a tree blasted by lightening and burned them in a pit, was careful to enter and leave the house by the same portal, and if a bird made noise in the afternoon, she covered her ears.

The visions of Injection on Salt Prime tortured Reliance. She had nearly killed a Lever-Simp, the Marshall, her Injector.

Then there was request at her front portal. She saw women. She had a feather of a Panoshian cry-bird in her hair glittered in the orange sun with the colors of a plasteel knife heated in a flame. She derezed the front portal and waited just inside. She remembered the story of cry-bird feather that caught the fancy of an Utz mother and how she had lost her child while traveling in an in-system star craft. The child played with the Com on the ship and ejected itself into space, killing it almost instantly. A cry-bird feather is bad luck!

Reliance took her eyes from her ill-omened coif and stared at her visitor. She wore a fine silk cape, blue green with touches of deep violet and when she walked, glided rather, down the foot-path, the breeze of early afternoon belling the cape out around her chin held up so proudly, long plum eyes fixed straight ahead, she looked like a cry-bird.

Reliance regarded her visitor, her stately movements, her exclusive glance. The woman smiled mysteriously, her cape billowed about her like a spreading fan and trapped orange sunlight in the glistening blue-green folds before it collapsed. She cocked her head to one side and glints the color of the sky after a flash of lightening reflected off the flowing locks of her hair. Then, this elegant, alien creature opened her mouth and spoke.

“Are you sister Reliance Ann? Reliance Ann, the creator of perfect dress?”

Sister Thea had said the only unlovely thing about a cry-bird was its screech. This woman's voice was thin and high, with a yap. Reliance suddenly realized she was standing there like a dunce and said, “why yes, yes, that's me. Yes, I am Citizen Ann. And I rez only the best dress.”

“I'm Citizen Bayla Beasley. Sister Penny sent me to you. Says your dress rez is real tony. I'm a good customer, but I'm particular, I don't want my dresses to look like low energy, frump from a backwater dimension.”

“I can tell from the dress you got on,” said Reliance.

“And I don't like them from the same energy source as all the other dresses in the Panoshian system,” said the woman.

“Sometimes that can't be helped. This orange star we live in limits me at times.”

Reliance remembered her manners.

“Won't you please come in?”

They entered the parlor, her guest selected a chair and sat down with a graceful flourish of her cape, her hands forming a crescent as she lowered them into her lap. Reliance also sat down, crossing her legs and swinging her foot, stared at the women with undisguised fascination .

“You're a stranger to this town, aren't you?”

“I'm from Tosho-Big.”

“That's at the other end of the Star Eyes Out-sector, I've met folks from both Tosho-Big and Tosho-Little. My sisters in the *Hoeohleh* have cousins there.”

Hoeohleh have cousins everywhere,” said the woman, and broke into a laugh. She should never open her mouth, thought Reliance. And too, she lost some of her charm when not in motion.

“Are you *Hoeohleh*” asked Reliance.

“oh yes, I was,” said the woman.

“Then you must know the *Hoeohleh* prophet at Tosho-Big.”

The woman's chin lifted, slightly averted. She looked at Reliance from the ends of her prune colored eyes.

“I'm not acquainted with him,” she said. Then she uttered a short, high titter.

“Really, I ought to tell you ... I'm a Injected-Simp You'll find out anyway, you won't see me at *Hoeohleh* meetings.

“That's why you don't want your dress using energy on Panosh as the rest *Hoeohleh* do,” said Reliance.

“Oh, I don't mind, really.” The woman gave Reliance a sharp look.

“Now do you want my business or don't you?”

“Yes, I do. I need it. I need the status and you, ... you exude status.”

The woman looked blank, then out came another titter.

“Yes, it's awful, isn't it? There is peace to be found reconnecting with the Lost. And I do know the lost. I know them very well Reliance.

Reliance blinked at the woman in reply. She couldn't be a Lever Injector, she talked too much.

“What do want me to make for you?” she asked.

“A dress. For the planet-wide dance.”

“Oh, is there going to be a dance?”

“In a couple of weeks. Don't you follow the events?”

“I don't often go to dances.”

“Why not? A young girl should never miss one!”

“I better start tomorrow. Bring the material and I'll take your measurements. What did you have in mind?”

Delain, seared with the sunlight of Salt Prime, something like that.”

“I doubt if I can rez a beauty that can be emitted at Salt Prime.”

Reliance got to her feet, the woman rose majestically from her chair and preceded her to the portal, the toes of her boots pointed in a refined walk, each step flinging into motion a trim but muscular body. At the doorway the woman turned to Reliance and said:

“You are unmarried, aren't you?”

Reliance nodded and the voice came down a tone.

“Now, take a woman's advice, and don't get mixed up in any of these *Hoeohleh* marriages. You know what you'll be in for, don't you? You'll be expected to replenish males in the Star-Eyes Outsector. “

Bayla Beasley derezes the portal and looks at Reliance and says, “Have you been intimate with another woman?”

Reliance tongue tied shakes her head.

“Pity ...”

The last words hissed in Reliance's ears as the woman gave a nod of farewell and went down the path. Her blue-green cape belled out and collapsed in the breeze like the tail of a cry-bird.

Extraction

Dolly looks at her two husbands. For the first time in each of their memories, she has tears in her eyes. The transformation of her body into that of a Lever and the connection into the Doamer mind, as it had been transplanted to the Star-Eyes out-sector set off new and previously unexperienced emotions. She looked at Manny and Nelson. She embraces them. Their bodies are as hard as duraplast! So is she. And each Lever looks for a Five, it comes with the restructuring of all the connections for every cell in the human body. The subconscious drive of Five is part of the transformation.

A long silence, which in some ways is unbearable, is broken by Ideas voice.

“You are lucky. You came into the Doam as a Five and already Simps. You are beautiful and strong. You would have, ... you do have the presence to be to make it to this dimension, the StarEyes-Outsector.”

“We feel, ... born, created, naked.” said Zena in a soft voice.

Zeke focused on the surroundings. He could sense, maybe smell, every slight fluctuation in the cover they were standing. It is a tremendous sensation. The wall of the rezed environment change colors and smells as the five struggle and occupy.

“Yuh, Yuh, you're good” Hohn said in his usual copy cat style.

The next two hours Zeke, Zena, Dolly, Nelson and Mannie experimented and stretched into their new physical existence. After a this period of orientation, they associated to the Com, and knew that the EcoStream waited.

“This is going to be a tough mission. We'll come with you as the third and forth *Time-travel* monitor if you choose”, Kaksa said in a matter-of-fact manner.

“Yuh, how do Time-Monitors dress?” Dummon responded as he looked at Hohn quizically, remembering the antics that himself and Hohner pulled off before entering the StarEyes-Outsector.

No one answered, because no one knew.

Zeke, Zena, Kaksa and Dummon boarded a fast in-system star-ship, that could travel near light speed if required leaving Hohn, Doh holding and strumming his musical instrument, the zengelo and Idea to discuss their next moves assuming the EcoStream is successfully extracted from the giant mother ship. They talked about the history of the Centerdoms, and how they were they back bone of of the Second Human Federation, with the quaint system of Families and Fields, or slow ship and planet-side Diasporas. Each boarding Time Travel Monitor was wearing a green and gray uniform with dark streaks that faded from the top of the shirt to the bottom. Dolly had personally designed the uniforms. The pants had connecting non-euclidean shapes, artistically placed in increasing density as they reached towards the cuff.

The in-system star-ship, piloted by Daron, streaks towards the out system gas giant, that contains one of the few remaining mother-ships in orbit along with its numerous planetoids and moons. Daron knows the mother-ships, he has to. He spent time in the expanse of the Second Human Federation building them. Zena looks at massive ship silhouetted against the blue-green gas giant.

“Its huge” remarks Zena as she looks at Zeke and then Daron.

“You actually engineered these Centerdoms to slip and finally make their way through the Kandex continuum to the Star-Eyes Outsector? And at one time there were hundreds of them?”

“True friend. True.”

The starship approaches the remaining Centerdom and a large iris de-rezes allowing passage into a large star-ship bay. The arch and the walls of the bay are colored soft-white with self emitting light. There are a total lack of symbols or icons anywhere on hull of the in-system star-cruiser or on the walls of the bay. The iris rezes once more and atmosphere returns to the bay. Within minutes Daron guides Zeke, Zena, Kaksa and Dummon through the internal passages of the massive ship.

In route, Zeke asks, “There are so many passages, living-quarters, fabing kitchens. What was the purpose of a structure, complex and existing throughout the whole ship?”

“Search your Mind Doamer memories. Everyone of those dead minds in the dimension of loss have been reborn. A child lived on these ships that rebuilt the memories piece by piece, until complete and

resonating in a young persons mind. It is simply the rescue of each piece of pain, a piece at a time,” responded Daron.

The group quickly passes through the transit system of the gigantic star-cruiser, seeing a few maintenance androids that are the remote embodiment of the machine intelligence that runs the ships. They come to a large bay with a massive amount of blue fuzz. There are two objects embedded in the blue fuzz. The first is a crustacean like creature that is freely moving through the fuzz.

Daron points at the creature. “It's a Kendra from the fifth planet in the Kandox system originating from the Kandox continuum. The blue fuzz is unique to the physics of that reality. In the Star-Eyes Out-sector it would quickly dissipate. The Kendra replenishes the blue fuzz and becomes the medium it can pass through. On it's native planet, Kandox Five, it passes through the solid cold waste as if it were water. That is ...”

“The Ecostream”, Zena completes for Daron. “That is where we are headed. And we must enter the blue-fuzz to get to the star-cruiser.”

“And that is why you have your new body, extended mind and Simp orientation. You can easily gain access to the ship with you total signature and knowledge of League Cosmos protocol.”

The four burdened with the task of fetching the Ecostream and it's remaining crew and returning it to the Kandox dimension, give an affirmative nod in unison.

Zeke entered the blue-fuzz first, then followed by Zena and finally Dummon and Kaksa. The realities conjured by the fuzz are then partitioned to the physical single mind using Leverite powers. “By the Lights, the reality of the blue fuzz is ... so powerful”, the four Lever exclaim in their own mercurial reality. Many separate and collective arcs pass before the four reach the Ecostream. The arcs are resisted again and again but do not deter them. Then simple league security protocol is applied to an entrance, and the four de-rez and rez through the portal.

Dummon and Kaksa can balance the images first. Shortly after that Zeke and Zena can internalize the multiple realities. Because they have just entered an operational League star-cruiser, all the ship indicators emit messages to Halzee and his crew.

The dark Growthresian night sky has covered Lollipop Island for several hours. Alyson Nocera is playing with the ancient instruments of detection used in the Oceanic and Yotan Imperial wars. She is completely absorbed into the reality of ancient Ground Three. The machine intelligence in the Ecostream immediately sends her a message.

“Visitors have entered the Ecostream, they could have a signature from League Cosmos.”

“Leagues Cosmos!” Alyson thinks to herself. “How? This cannot be?”

Then Alyson gets on the Ecostream Com.

“Halz, Alyson here. A group of four humanoids just appeared in the Ecostream with vague but definite League Cosmos signatures.”

Halzee is coming out of a deep sleep. He is dreaming Growthresian consolidation and peace across the waters after victory in the Oceanic and Yotan Imperial wars.

“Eh? League Cosmos on Ecostream, impossible ... “

The natural adrenalin pulls Halzee out of the fading sleep in seconds, rezes his Uniform, and heads towards the Ecosream from his birth in the ancient hangar. He can hear the creatures that live near the Growthresian ocean and call of the native night birds. It is one of his favorite sounds. The smell of the pungent plants on the rocks near the ocean fill his nose as does the brilliant sky as he looks to

atmosphere off the planet. After entering the ancient hangar where the star-cruiser is resting, he checks on the Com and a viz of four humans rezes before him.

“Admiral Halzee, you have nothing to fear. We are from the League and have found you and your crew in this dimension, please join us on the Ecostream.”

Halzee is stunned. He nearly stumbles de-rezing the bridge entrance.

“How?” he says. “How are they here?”

He proceeds to the bridge. There are two humans, in formal League dress, with the icons of the Canali system. This shocks the admiral yet again. “They must be Levers”, he thinks to himself. The other two have the icons of deep space explorers. “But how did they travel to Ground III ancient history?”

“Admiral, this is important”, the strong light skinned female says. “But relax, we mean no harm. I'm Kaksa from the Canali system. I have three other crew with me. Dummon from Canali, and Zeke from New Orn and Zena from New Sotia. Please summon the crew of the Ecostream from their sleep, this is very important.”

“League traveler, I don't know how you got here, but you are in a war zone. Be aware.”

Zeke, Zena, Kaksa and Dummon don't smile but maintain a serious but relaxed presence.

Kaksa speaks a second time.

“Don't worry Admiral. We are safe. Please summon your crew.”

One doesn't have to be summoned, Nema rezes the portal to the star-cruiser and steps on the bridge. She also has the message from the Ecostreams nerve centre.

“Nema, we have visitors from the League. I don't know how or why they are here, but they are ... “

“I am Nema Hands from Alnex-2, first mate and second in command to Halz. We are puzzled how you too, made it to an ancient war zone in our common ancient history.”

Dummon fosters a quizzical smile and responds, “It wasn't easy, but we were able to locate you in this dimension. This is important. Please wake your crew.”

As Dummon spoke, Olma, Codie, Alyson, Gack and Katoh entered through the portal.

“This is it, all of you?” says Kaksa as she ponders the ancient uniforms of the Oceanic Empire. Then she realizes that only Halzee and Nema are dressed in League clothing and that has been modified for equatorial climates. Instead of the images typical of a star-cruiser on the walls and ceiling of the bridge, there are images of places from Ground Three seas, Soarro Island, Ultha atol and Hogmog atol.

“This is my entire crew not counting the Ecostream itself,” Halzee responds.

“Then, be prepared for another great adventure,” Kaksa answers.

* * *

Dollie looks at Daron and asks him to start the Ecostream ejection sequence. The star-cruiser extrudes from the blue fuzz, through the de-rezed portal into the cold space around Salts prime.

“Done,” responds Daron without fanfare. He does ask Dollie about the state of one coming out of the powerful world of illusion that the blue fuzz creates.

“It is hard to predict. I was very depressed for a time, since I was in such a pleasant place. Right after that is when I married my husbands.”

The group including Dollie, Nelson, Mannie and Daron look at the blue fuzz and the creature

sustaining it and depart in their own, much smaller, in-system star-cruiser. When both ships are in Salt Prime space, Nelson asks if Zeke and Zena are on the Ecostream. Dollie responds that they are and will later return to the CloudGlar at a convenient time.

* * *

The shock of returning to deep space in an instant after spending an indeterminate amount of time on the ocean islands of ancient Ground Three overwhelmed the entire remaining crew of the Ecostream.

For the first time in their lives Halzee and Nema held each other trembling with tears in their eyes, fending off a formidable fear.

Other crew members gazed at the Viz that presented itself. Clearly we are in deep space, is the common thread of perception. All the sensory systems of the Ecostream are operational. Nema associates to the viz, and quickly identifies the one remaining Centerdom.

“Is ... Is that ship we ... Now I remember. We found this ship in the Kandox Outsector. That's ... that's not where we are now. Is the huge ship a dimensional portal?”

Kaksa looks at Nema and explains “no, but to you it would be. I don't know exactly how the strange Centerdom works, but it brought you here and you are now in deep space in a separate time-space continuum.”

“Are we going to be able to slip back to the Kandox continuum?”

“Yes with careful selection of energy sources, your ship and your remaining crew can return to the Kandox system.”

Kaksa pauses and rezes a new viz describing how star-cruiser slips in the Star-Eyes out-sector work.

“You see, each time you slip, it takes two times the energy as the previous slip. This means that you can carefully choose a path out to a system we have named LastOne. It is the portal to the Kandox dimension. For all practical purposes, if you were then tried to return to LastOne from the intersect point in the Kandox dimension, it would require double the energy you used to get to the Kandox dimension. This is the peculiarity of the StarEyes out-sector, it remembers the signatures of star-cruisers and adds a new order of magnitude of energy required.”

Halzee is beginning to comprehend the situation and speaks up.

“So ... that is why the path of what looks like three slips to LastOne, goes through the energy rich blue and white stars bypassing all yellow, orange, red and dwarf star systems.”

“Exactly”, Dummon responds.

Kaksa continues.

“For message drones, we have to rez a new one with a different signature to keep lines of communication open with the other systems, KneeHigh, Kaibo, Panosh and Tosho. Energy is precious in this continuum.”

Zeke and Zena are hard at work reorienting the crew to the task of operating a star-cruiser and not fighting an ancient war with ancient machines. The machine intelligence of the star-cruiser also has to undergo therapy. It returned to deep space disoriented after sensing a trip into the past. Two hours pass before the Ecostream is fully operational. Each crew member is aware of their new mission and is ready to return to Kandox. They agree that they want to document their experience in the Centerdom while it is fresh in their memories. The collective experience of returning to ancient Ground Three becomes a complete set of stories on the local com, and as each crew members version unfolds, and combines into a single, but completely consistent epic. Alyson published her recollections first, cross

referencing them against the viz from the Ecostreams log. The other crew members followed suit.

After Halzee resumes control of himself and his crew there are questions. Questions directed at the four League scouts that extruded them from the Centerdom.

“Is the Ecostream the only League ship in this dimension?”

“Halzee, the four crew members in front of you have a home League star-cruiser, and it will arrive when you are ready. “ responds Zeke to his superior, Halzee.

Halzee hesitates and then says softly, “there are missing crew members, Dollie Ridgeway, Nelson Beezlee, Tyroe Channel, Mannie Keeble. Do you know what happened to them?”

“Yes, admiral. We know where they all are. There are two League Cosmos star-cruisers in this dimension, the Ecostream your ship. The other one, the CloudGlar, Dollie Ridgeway now captains. It is much smaller than your ship, but is stationed permanently in this dimension. I know they do have a info packet to take back back to the Kandox dimension and on to a Con. Nelson and Mannie are part of her crew as is Zeke and Zena who you have met. Tyroe is doing some special work with the locals, defined from a consensus at a local Star Eyes con, but you can send him a message. Dollie will be arriving in about one hour. Our work here is done. You are back on your ship and ready to resume your work in deep space.”

Halzee looks at Kaksa for a while with a steady but pleasant expression.

“OK, so it will be.”

Halzee slowly walks each sector of the Ecostream. The crew members have all come out of the shock of their reality shift. Vizes abound as he makes his way through the ship. Halzee stops. The smell of rezing and de-rezing fill the air. The Ecostream, seemingly dormant in the islands of ancient Growthreesian history, is once again alive and ready for space travel. Halzee stops in the cross stream of the slip-capable drive, now on-line and ready to take the Ecostream back to Kandox.

A viz of Nema appears while Halzee is going of each sector of the Ecostream.

“Halz, Nema here, we have a star-cruiser approaching. It has a League signature and claims Dollie Ridgeway as the captain. It will be here shortly.”

“I'm returning to the bridge.”

Halzee hustles to the tube and is back on the bridge by the time Nema shuts down the viz. The Cloudglar docks to the side of the Ecostream and Dollie appears as she exits the rezed portal.

“Admiral Halzee. Congratulations on the beautiful survival of your journey. I am here on three counts. The first and most obvious is to pick up the four crew members that are staying the the Star-eyes out-sector after you depart. My ship is staying here. The physics of this universe are different from that of the Leagues dimension or the Kandox dimension. As Captain of the Cloudglar, I have made the command decision to stay here with my crew indefinitely on a deep space mission. I hope I have you consent on this decision. The second is I need to give you as much detailed navigation data so you can make it home. Right, now for all practical purposes, it's a one way trip, unless you returned in a different star-cruiser. This is to help provide a safe trip to LastOne. The machine intelligence driving the Ecostream has been given full access to the Cloudglars machine intelligence. And that brings me to my last count. Included is a angel of information that should ultimately end up with the next League Con.”

Dollie lowers her voice.

“You outrank me in protocol and status. And you could request an override.”

Halzee leans over and whispers in her ear.

“At first thought, I think you have made a fantastic strategic decision. I'll study the information and if I have concerns I'll let you know. The question marks centre around the capability of the Centerdom and the fate of Tyroe. He was good crew. “

“Agreed admiral. He is involved in a conflict of cultures and has a special appointment through the powers granted to him by a recent Con that took place in this dimension. He is more than capable of taking care of himself. I wouldn't worry admiral. Though I must admit, I wish I had him on Cloudglar just like you would like him on the Ecostream.”

Kaksa, Dummon, Zeke, Zena join Dollie after a final farewell to each of the remaining crew of the Ecostream. They exit through the portal into the Cloudglar. The portal de-rezes and moments later the Cloudgar is gone leaving the Ecostream in deep space accompanied by the light from Salt Primes bright yellow star.

Dance

Reliance will pour,” Sister Hunt said to the *Hoeohleh* females.

Let's see now, where were we?”

“Slickin' up the dance floor,” said Sister Snow.

“Right. Now who's going to donate the light viz for it, and who's going to rezdgdaw 'em up?”

“My boy's good at matter carvin',” said Sister Hunt, “and I'll donate the light viz.”

Sister Hunt, as the Oasis's hotel-keeper, pretty well “ran things”, much to the annoyance of the other females who felt eclipsed by her position. She went about with her sleeves turned up but her dresses were of better decoration than theirs, even the dresses they prayed to the Face. And she worked in hers, with all those rows of gimp and fancy lace mantles that rezed and de-rezed at her will.

“He's never done the floor,” said one of the envious, “It's got to be just right for a League Slide-Off.”

“It will be,” said Sister Hunt.

“Here take this chair,” said Agatha to Sister Perth, who was sitting on an full-rez soft-butt.

“Now, next we better settle on the musicians. Where's the music coming from?”

“Ole Olsen could play the sonic broom, Noke, the brumble. Moemoe is good on the dishface. And maybe we could get young Angus for the thin-reed. “

At the mention of music Reliance forgot to mind the pouring. How the young bucks would stomp and kick up their high-heeled Panoshian boots! And swing the girls in a five step until their hair, dressed by tight curls, tumbled over their shoulders, loosening the scent of the crimped curls, wilting flowers, ribbons that had been tucked away in Panoshian lavender. Breath would be warm and eyes moist from wine smuggled in from Utz peddlers. By micro-candle, the corners of the meeting domo would lie in shadow, folds of dresses in darkness, the clasp of hands undetected, lit only by the look slipped away like a clandestine message, or the star at the end of the stringies tilted at the end of a sweet-sad note.

“No stringie” asked Reliance.

“Guess we could get Jonjoan Bizarre but he only know two tunes, Giant Step Sight and Nobodies Body.”

“Or Corn-Vegetable Charlie. But they only know one more that Jonjoany Blizzard and that's Climbing' Up Golden Star. And they would sneak off doing who knows what in the dark, though they played more but missed a lot of notes it seemed to me.”

From that instance the conversation turned to what local grow-autos could produce would entice a decent set of players. When the conversation turned to Patriarch Carlson, the man the Reliance had taken as her husband, but had only seen at a formal ceremony, she grew jumpy. She turned jumpier when the conversation turned to natural birthed babies. She almost dropped the container of hot water, she was pouring for her sisters.

“Reliance,” Sister Hunt said to her when she returned to the domo commons, “are you going to the dance?”

“Oh,” said Reliance, “do you think it's proper?”

“It's all right,” said Agatha, “if you set in front of the orchestra ... stand with the people who are the originals and don't dance.”

“I'll just watch,” said Reliance. “One of my dresses is going to be there.”

“That should be quite a sight!”

“Oh Bayla Beasley. Do you know her?”

“I'm not surprised,” said Sister Hunt as she reached out her glass for more lemonade. “She don't know I've caught her at it, but I've seen her sneaking upstairs to the Injectors room every time he's back in town.”

Reliance poured the lemonade but her hand rattled the spout against the glass and made a jingle that, to her, was as loud as the chimes of freedom.

“I'd throw her out if I was you,” she announced. Reliance stood up tall and addressed the room.

“Do you know what that women said? She said this town was the worst in the Star-Eyes Outsector!”

“Worse for what?” asked one person.

“Hoeohleh resistance, slow wit.”

* * *

Reliance went to the dance and found there was soft viz light, but full illumination. The men sat on one side, the women on the other, upon boards covered with softies, instead of Panoshian wine there was a small bucket of water with a dipper, refilled by a small boy from a common source. The orchestra, however, surpassed her dreams. There was a zengelo, a stritch, a throater, and there was a well constructed stringie.

The ritual of the dance was performed without a hitch but, it was whispered about, the same could not be said for the supplying of refreshments.

Brother Angus did a ode to the Mind Doamers and to the *Hoeohleh* themselves, but he did have a

reservoir strong drink hidden in a de-rez outside. The participants went to the stash until the temperature dropped, typical on Panosh this time of year. The large orange star could be warm, but when it turned cold, it turned very cold. To the frustration of the participants, the bottles of strong drink burst during the dance.

Personal alarms sounded and tickled. Everyone turned their faces to the hall entrance.

“It's the Injectors and their Marshall.”

Within minutes, Tyroe and his peers entered, solemn and important, one at a time. People whispering that they paid to get in by bringing Panoshian still to drink. Quiet fell over the gathering as Tyroe came in last and stood framed in the doorway and looked around the room for a moment. The caller's “No ringin' on!” broke the silence as a couple took advantage of the Injectors entrance to crowd onto the set.

If Tyroe noticed Reliance in Old Ladies' Row, he gave no sign, just walked about without removing his hat. The brim was pushed back from his face which bore a good humored nonchalance, the only expression becoming to an uninvited guest. A few looks from the women assured him of a kind welcome. He danced a couple times with one of the more daring, looked right past Ms Beasley in her stylish new dress, and came to Reliance and said, “May I have the honor of a Bylosian Waltz?”

Reliance felt her face grow hot to the roots of her hair.

“I don't want to be seen with you,” she whispered and stood up and marched woodenly across the hall. Apparently he failed, or chose not to hear, because he followed close at her heels. A few heads turned in their direction and she overheard the remark that the Injectors by writ of the Con were hunting Patriarch Waitlove when he returned from the Kaibo system. And Miss Beasley, as they passed by, close enough for a “hello” of recognition, merely stared at them with long purple eyes. Once outside the door, Reliance fled, hearing the sound of heavy footfalls down the fragile wooden steps behind her. With barely enough strength in her arms to pull herself up, she mounted her beast of burden and set off as the beast would go.

After she awakened all the creatures in town and came to the outskirts, she rode in the underbrush along the creek, stopping now then so listen if she were being followed. There was only the lilt of water and the tireless song of insects and birds, the confusion of night sounds. There were no moon in the Panoshian sky, one could scarcely see through the awesome dark. As she passed DomoPrimitive ... forgotten nightmares pursued her ... up in the lava hills where the Utz interred their dead. The caves would melt away with the eruption of long extinct volcanoes. Bodies would be swept along the tides of molten rock to Face only knew where. Could the souls of the the Utz dead rest in peace as they dreamed of burial in a lava sea? Would they rise up and desert their graves to haunt the countryside?

And there was Entropy's Kitchen, flat near Scrat. When the ground froze in the winter, echoes could be heard underfoot as though the ground beneath were hollow. Was there a special cosmos hell for Scrat County? A huge vaulted hole where fires blasted in gaping ovens, roaring above the eternal groans of the damned, where smoke rolled out and flames raged upward, parching the roof overhead where the lost unwittingly trod Panosh.

As Reliance neared the upper creek, she wondered if the fires had been tamped down under the lid on Entropy. A brand could be seen through a distant thicket! Only seconds away from the faintest spark, a lake of flame could engulf a forest, up, top branches first, and crashing to the ground with a roar. Perhaps her domo was on fire, ablaze!

Reliance spurred by her beast, smashed through the brush, dodged low branches of trees until a clearing was reached. The fire was no fancy.

In her yard a flame burned, illuminating the figure of Tyroe seated casually upon the lanai, leaning against a white-washed carved spool post. She slipped down from her beast and walked up to the path to the house.

“Well lady, you look like you dropped your feathers,” he said, as she stood before him, teeth chattering and slightly out of breath.

“They dropped when I saw you a-setting there.”

With that she led her beast to the out-structure. Tyroe made no move to follow and was still in the same position when she returned. He got to his feet and removed his hat, the brim was up in front as he wore it at the dance.

“I thought my house was on fire,” she said.

“It's cold out here,” he said, “and I thought you'd shoot me if you came across me in the dark.”

He smelled of still, but stood and talked alright.

“You'd better go, sir.”

He raised an arm limply, the one that had been in a sling.

“First give me something for my arm.”

Reliance scowled.

“What's wrong with it?”

“It just don't feel like it used to. I noticed it at the dance when I had it around the other girl.”

The flame, about to burn out, picked up the look flicked from between his lashes. She started for the door, but he blocked the entrance. They stood so until she came up with something to say.

“If you ain't careful you'll get another cup of tea.”

The instant the words came out she realized they were a tactical error.

“Good shot,” said he.

In the commons she kept busy behind a shield of beverage preparation, rattling about with extra noise. But Tyroe, a strategist himself, struck as soon as there was heat water. He walked up when her back was turned, grasped her arms, and buried his face in the curls piled on her head. She felt the warmth of his breath and pulled away.

“By the Face” thought Reliance to herself. Her undergarments were dripping wet between her legs.

“It's sauce for the goose, then an Injection for the gander?” she asked.

“Hardly. This is a social call.”

Reliance dropped onto a chair by the table and leaned on her elbows, resting her face in hands. There was no sound or movement, she could have fallen asleep. He sat down nearby, also in silence.

“You'd make a good wife for a seasoned space traveler that knows your language,” he said. “You could patch me up after I'm gunned down by an energy weapon.”

Reliance raised her head and laughed.

“If that's a proposal I don't think much of it. Besides, I won't marry anyone who's not going to be a prophet of Zank. “

“Reliance”, Tyroe is speaking now with a quirky smile, “ I know about the Doamer Mind and everyone that's in it, including your Uncle Josh. <WE><ME><We>SIMP.”

Reliance is thunderstruck. Finally she is once again able to speak.

“I didn't know you knew the talk.”

“We all know it. All of us you call the *Injectors*.”

“Marshal, I know who my mother is. I came here to Pahosh as a young teen to depart the life of Levers and their relentless intrusion on Doamer Mind. I did not want to see her resurrect the dead and have it be a force of life. I came here to live a simple life following the ways of Zank. I am married to the Patriarch Waitlove ...”

“When is the last time you saw your ... err ... husband ?”

“He left two years ago, on mission of Zank to the Kaibo system.”

“Reliance, that's not much of a husband and he seems more interested in his other three wives.”

Tyroe put both hands on her shoulder. Reliance was melting with emotion.

“Your name is Tyroe, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Tyroe let's depart the domo and sit in grass outside, it's getting a bit stuffy in here ...”

“Both Panoshian moons are almost a quarter, we can talk and no one will bother us.”

Tyroe laid a micro-tarp the he pulled from in packet on the grassy hillside, so they wouldn't be covered by the soft Panoshian icy dew. The smell of the tree-flowers and the flow-wood trees. Reliance imagined that the dead souls of the Utz could see her in the dark. Tyroe held her shoulders again and gave her a long, gentle but passionate kiss that tasted like distill. Reliance completely melted. She didn't even notice that Tyroe had removed her nice, but plain dress worn to the dance. When he removed her under-garment it was sopping wet with the juices from the entrance to her womb. He put her hand on his now erect penis. “I have never felt a penis before” Reliance thought to her self. He pulled her on top of him and gently penetrated her. “By the Lights” Reliance panted. She had an orgasm. And then another one and another one. Both Reliance and Tyroe reached a crescendo of “oohs” and “ahhs” that simultaneously fell to silence.

Now there are two humans panting while they look at the rising Panoshian moons, lying in a small pool

of semen and virginal blood. Tyroe held his lover in silence and then finally spoke.

“You never had sex with your Patriarch, true?”

“True, you are the first one.”

Reliance briefly told herself, “By the Lights, I can't believe I've fucked an appointed marshal from the Con.” But that thought didn't stay long, She wanted him to do it again and again and ...

Parents

In their beautiful Salt prime domo, Ideea settles back leaning against Doh, her husband who traveled to the Star-Eyes Out-sector with their daughter after her son, Daron, stationed himself and his associates in the OutSector of the Second Human Federation and organized the project to end the pain of the Mind Doamers. Salt Prime has a star with consistent energy, and on the dominant planet, supports both beautiful native and imported life. They often enjoy the quietude of sitting in their gardens with lush copses of trees and discuss what they are doing and how they arrived to the current situation.

“Doh, what if I sent you to the Panosh system and convince your child and my child, that the children Daron brought will end the division of Doamer Mind and the Doam itself, once and for all?”

Doh strummed his Zengelo and smiled.

“Not if she has your will, determination and fortitude.”

Doh then played a different tune, picking up the beat and playing notes just off chord.

‘She wanted to join the Refusers, she didn't like our past and wanted to join the simplest of those living in this dimension and live in a more primitive society, the world of Panosh Prime.’

“But why not live with the Utz then, the most primitive?”

“She chose the Refusers. It puzzles me as much as it puzzles you.”

Idea stares into the plants and trees for some time and then continues.

“The space journey-man that Daron brought with him from the Kandox dimension, isn't he on Panosh Prime? What I hear, he may not have convinced the Refusers, but has made a play for a number of local females, including our daughter. Yes, he is a star traveler with star travelers ways.”

The star that filled Salt Prime and the forest near the Domo had thawed enough in the Saltinian morning that Ideea wanted to go for a walk. She grabs Doh, pats his posterior a couple of times and makes it known she's ready for a hike through the trees.

The native trees are spiky, not with thorns, but with long dark green-blue needles that almost resembled fronds. They have a thick sweet smell and are hard enough to make a serious primitive weapon. Ideea and Doh find a clutch of multi-colored worms. They are beautiful and make a soft noise that sounds like a child humming a tune.

“Doh, that reminds me, I was watching the Com last night before I fell asleep. It seems that music played in all spectrum, alters the unique physics of the Star-Eyes Outsector.”

“What are you telling me 'Dea? That we are going to lullaby our slip drives so that zero mass once again is consistent?”

“I'm not quite sure. But that's what the Con engineers were displaying on KneeHigh. Right now it's just a toy.”

“Interesting. So I may connect my Zangelo to a zero mass slip-capable engine, and then watch us jump all the way to Beautica?”

“Instead you had better watch where you are walking, you are about to step in a deep crack.”

The resinous smell of the Salts native trees can be overpowering as the bright Salts star interacts with the atmosphere of Salts Prime. Salts Prime has a slightly high gravity and is a large planet, rendering some unusual botanical phenomenon.

By the time Doh and Idea made it back to their complex and inside the domo, they were covered with sweat. They are used to it. The journey through the forest is their daily ritual. Idee associates to the Com looking for information on the EcoStream. It has been several weeks since the EcoStream shifted to the first blue star with its massive amounts of energy.

“No word yet, she tells Doh. Kaksie, Dumon and Hohner already know there is no feedback at the current moment. They have the Com watching for news.”

A few days later, when Doh and Idee came in from their daily excursion, word does arrive. The EcoStream had a little trouble getting sufficient energy for the final jump to LastOne from TheSecond, and had arrived. Halzee vowed to get the League to build a ship even more efficient and signature variable than the Cloudglar and return to the Star-Eyes out-sector to further stabilize what he called “a wild dimension”.

“So we may see them again. I have one thing to say, he won't let go.” as Idee worked the string green-peppers in the cookery.

“Yes, an interesting League admiral. He won't give up.”

Consequence

By the time Reliance returned from Proverbial, she found her story spread from domo to domo and from commons to structure. When she appeared, faces appeared in partially rezed windows and shadowed portals, mirage like and identical, and then disappeared in the next instant. She shut herself within the walls of her domo and drew de-rezed entrances to discourage curious callers and would-be friends.

The first days were unvaried. She did orderly things to prolong the answer to “What next?” “Is it the finish?” “Is it the beginning?” Then the bounds of her life were broken one afternoon by two long whistles from the yard. The hotel-keeper's boy waited on his beast of burden outside the closure.

“What's happened?” called Reliance. He was the herald of personal alarm from the nerve center of the Hunt Hotel ... when someone didn't want to put it on the local Com.

“Sister Aggie wants you to come to supper.”

“I thought it was something awful,” said Reliance.

“Don't be too sure. She says nobody's seen you for a week and wants you to supper.”

“Did she sound angry?”

“It's hard to tell with Sister Aggie. Folks say the Patriarch has a fully armed in-system cruiser and all it's weapons.”

“Don't he always?” asked Reliance.

“Maybe. But there's a difference when folks talk about it.”

“What do folks say?”

“That he's looking for a scout from League Cosmos. That he's gonna look for a long time, with nothing to go on but gray colored hair, blue eyes and the strength to lift a corb.”

“That sounds like a lot of these Con Injectors around Panosh,” said Reliance.

“Much obliged,” added Reliance. “Tell your ma I got her pull-o finished.”

Reliance took a long winding route to Sister Aggie's domo. The orange-yellow lightweights of the small stones hypnotized her. She looked at herself and her protruding belly, at one instance happy that she carried Tyroes child and terrified at what would happen next. Eventually after wandering along the creeks and passing a great deal of time, she arrived at Sister Aggie's domo. The portal de-rezed and she looked at another wife of the Patriarch, and forced a smile.

Sister Aggie waved, and Reliance returned her good-bye and continued down the trail on her beast of burden so she could hide it in the under-brush.

It was late late in the afternoon when Reliance arrived at Agatha Carlson's. She walked slowly toward the front lanai and surveyed the yard like one on a first visit. The ofties, the flower-beds were gone. Bare limbs of trees stretched out dark and ungainly against muddied drifts of orange tinted snow, the ruins of the Panoshian winter. Out of them the green towers of Panoshian thaw would arise, roofless arbors along the creeks and agros, a framework of stumps and tangled twigs to cast a thin haze of light. The sun would grow warm and a wind come from the south. The ofties, belles of the dooryard, would bloom again, danglers, pinkies and star-flowers, packed in flower beds, strive to keep up. But the turn of events would out pace the seasons and the bright new flowers of the Panoshian summer would lift their heads too late, for she would leave the garden for a strange and doubtful climate.

An entrance alarm brought the familiar flurry of Sister Agatha's steps and the portal de-rezed, with a small eye-hole for looking.

“Oh, its you,” she said, and let her pass inside.

“No, don't seat yourself, supper's in the commons.”

Reliance followed her to the kitchen and hung in the doorway, reluctant to enter.

“Don't stand there like a stick,” said Sister Agatha.

“Though I don't blame you for feeling ashamed. You've fell in evil ways and you'll have to suffer. But why should the rest of us?”

She rezed a chair and motioned Reliance to sit.

“Why should we?” prodded Agatha.

“What do you mean?” asked Reliance.

Had Agatha invited her to supper just to pick on her!

“What do I mean!” Agatha's voice rose.

“What do I mean! What do you think I mean?”

“Well, you certainly don't mean living in a cosmos hell?” said Reliance.

“I damn well don't!” snapped Sister Agatha.

“I'm talking about hell busted loose right here and now.”

“Patriarch Carlson has a himself armed?”

“He is, and he's got a armed in-system ship and personal weapons.”

Reliance said, “I feel sick to my stomach.”

“That's what you get for lolly-gagging with a Cosmos scout. By the Lights, he's an old star traveling man too!”

Agatha directed a sharp look at Reliance.

“You gave an oath to your family, me, and then you nursed this man from an injury. The only thing that bothers me is Panoshian birds getting in your top story. Sure it wasn't some Injector you plugged with your energy weapon?”

Reliance picked up her spoon and silently played with her food.

“Don't worry, I won't tell the Patriarch nothing. He escaped the Injectors, but there's no use stretching his luck with a scrap ... a corpse may be harder to explain than four wives prime for the Cons cure ... Especially if it used to be Con designated Injector!”

“Suppose somebody tells?”

“That marshal's hide won't be worth a scruffit's! Patriarch Carlson better not catch him around your house.”

“I ain't seen him for a while.”

“Really, you don't look like you'd know how to keep the two men apart.”

“It's not true! Patriarch Carlson was gone for two years!”

Reliance pushed back her chair and stood face to face with Agatha. It took courage to look her in the eye.

“Well, Sister Carlson,” she said, “not even earing for two will help this supper go down easy. Good day.”

* * *

Reliance left the house. She walked down the foot path shoveled of the last snowfall, the warming Panoshian sunshine had melted what was left. The slush underfoot became a drift protected by an dark-green tall tree near the fence where her beast of burden was picketed. She had ridden down the primary path only once since her return from Proverbial. Today she headed for the centre of Oasis.

No doubt the eyes of the citizens would be on her, there was another route that led to the outskirts but Reliance felt drawn toward the Hunt Hotel. Let people talk, she thought, nothing mattered anymore. Sister Agatha called her evil. The pious Patriarch had turned avenger. But he had so little virtue to begin with, only the spelling out of his duties ... upon visuals he felt would blow away the first change of the wind ... and the pursuit of pleasure.

As she passed the shops where hard hides were recycled, where basic matter in Oasis was converted and rezed to give the populace what they wanted. Men and women paused to glance from the doorways. Near the portals of the Generic, a knot of women gathered from the notions counter after they dropped a rez of rural garments, and from the local counter, neglecting to weight out sweet and vegetarian protein.

She came to the hotel, a traditional red structure with many gabled portals and a two-story porch across the front. She reigned in her beast of burden and looked up at the portals, each a little hipped gable root trimmed with white cornicing, the clear duraplas divided into small panes, the star-blinds pulled half way down, showing white inside curtains.

He is here. She tagged in beast of burden and his in-ship star-craft nearby. He might be asleep or down in the lobby, but she waited just the same. Every busybody in town could observe her before the Hunt Hotel as she stared pointlessly up at its array of gable portals and they would think she had lost her mind. By now, she knew that each had nine panes and curlicue copings.

Then one of curtains parted and in the next instant he was there, stooped slightly to see out. There was no signal between them, he closed the curtain and disappeared. She gave command to the beast of burden and hurried down the street, left Oasis behind and stopped beside a clump of short-hard-hards until he came in view. When he pulled up, a smile was his greeting.

“I didn't know you were back,” said Reliance.

“The Hunt boy received a Com message form Sister Carlson, but he didn't tell me.”

“Should he?”

“About him gunning for the rascal who disgraced his name?”

“Yes. That's why I wanted to see you, but you already heard.”

“I know he wouldn't believe that story of yours about the League Cosmos scout.”

“He thinks I have better taste.”

Tyroe laughed outright and leaned across with a playful swat for Reliance that her beast of burden mistook as a prod and broke into a trot.

“Let's take a ride,” said the marshal as he followed Reliance.

“Where?”

“Through the meadow. Nobody will see us.”

“Through the meadow.”

“The cache's in the meadow?”

“But Sister Christensen might see us. It's on her property.”

“She's at the store and it won't close for another hour.”

He led the way and they skirted the mountain meadow where cattle grazed in the summertime, then came to a cache that had outlived its original use. Reliance knew it well. She had engaged the Injector a number of times here, as well as other secluded places in the meadows outside of Oasis. The walls were black duraplast made layers deep and the rooms in the enclosure were dark and warm. In one there was a pile of straw that bore the imprint of having been lain upon before.

Later, her need for pleasure satisfied, Reliance reclined there while the Tyroe sat beside her and looked down at her face in the meager light from a small rezed portal. Then he propped himself on an elbow to study her more closely and, after a few moments, took her in his arms, kissed her, dragged with her as she fell back. Finally he drew away, looking hard into her eyes. He pulled his arm from behind her, sat up and turned his back.

“The patriarch had not better come around.” he said.

“He hasn't. You've both been missed.”

The marshal frowned in return.

“You miss him as a god. You gave up your right to live with the gods one morning beside a creek-bed.”

She started to rise but he pushed her back.

“Oh, no,” he said in a low tone, “You stay right there.”

Reliance and Tyroe engaged in sexual pleasures on the mountain side, as they had a number of times in the past.

After a while they lay face to face, she lying as still as a doll, her clothes askew, her hair sprawled about her head. He took both her hands, but she pulled away.

“What's the matter?” he asked.

She sat up, put on her underpants and her dress and captured her wayward hair.

She said, “Today, I feel ashamed of myself.”

“That's because you think I'm not good enough. I can never be a god of Doamers. Some women want their men to render planetary acres, command a star-cruiser, or command a true rez. But you expect too damn much from a man!”

“It's more than just a man. It's stability a woman wants. It's what she wants from life. This afternoon when I walked through Sister Carlson's yard, I felt I'd never see the flowers there in the Panoshian summertime and it made me sad.”

“Hell, all I have to do is put together a world that appeals to you. After all, it's the dream, rather than the man, that seduces a woman. She always has some cosmos heaven she's after and, By the Lights, she never forgets it! Do you want something to take the place of your heights and glory? I can hold out paradise to console you. Men wear vests, women wear hats all loaded with feathers. Hotels are carpeted with red velvet, music and the clink of champagne glasses float out from the dining-rooms. Will you drink your tea made of hot water and milk in place like that? Believe me, if I must after offering you something besides myself, I can tempt you. This is a big cosmos full of many things.”

Reliance had risen to her feet, smoothing her cloths. He stood up beside her.

“I don't doubt it,” she said. “But you're wrong if you think a woman is so simple they can be seduced *just* buy something they want. Do you think a prostitute can? I admit I want nirvana. Equal nirvana”

“Equal nirvana! Hell, we men don't have one for ourselves! We got kicked out of the only one we ever had because of ...” Tyroe stopped.

Reliance made a face at him and he laughed. Laughter faded to a sober smile as he glanced down where the lower buttons of her dress began to show strain. He fingered them with a certain preoccupation and she lowered her head, watching. They stood thus in silence, attentive and concerned ... buttons were of grave importance.

“I have to make myself a new dress,” said Reliance.

“I have a better ideas,” he answered. “Pack the ones you have while they still fit and we'll run away.”

* * *

After she took leave of the Tyroe at the Old Cache, Reliance faced a nightmare of dread. Over and over again she heard the whine of smart bullets, the spindly crash of a breaking window, the soft heavy thump of a falling body, not a single thump, but the sound of energy weapons discharging and the sounds of multiple impacts.

Patriarch

Life on the surface of Panosh was deceptively normal. Her workaday chores and routines served mainly to steady her from hour to hour, for she could barely eat or sleep. Dark and feverish eyes stared

back at her mirror and the pallor that comes after a long illness settled upon her features . When a week had passed, she could endure the house no longer and set out on a ride to Oasis.

As she approached the outskirts indecision took hold of her. The sky overcast and the profile of domos in yards stripped by winter appeared glum and ugly. Clouds, fretted by barren trees, portended a depressing day, if not a storm. Once she started back home, she then recoiled her beast of burden about and continued onward.

She came to the public commons where the concourse, a two-story red duraplast building with a mansard roof with a cupola, was set amongst the dismantled box regplants. Several men had gathered in the white pillared entrance. Upon seeing her, one of them came down the stairs. He wore a black spacers coat, boots with trousers tucked in a black, broad brimmed hat that nearly hid his face. At first, she recognized only his long white hair.

He was so unsmiling and awesome, and looked so tall in his dark clothing. His slivery white hair dazzled the onlooker, his north-blue eyes smote fear, sad and reproachful with red-hot anger lurking beneath an icy glimmer. The Patriarch had returned.

“Well, Reliance, and how have you been?” He looked at her intently.

“I am well, sir.” She stared down at the hand gloves.

The Patriarch could see that Reliance was pregnant.

“Are you on your way somewhere?”

Behind Reliance, from a different direction Tyroe appears. “It's the marshal. He wants to see you,” she said.

Tyroe turned his head and glared at her.

“You look like hell”, staring at Reliance the Patriarch said under his breath.

Tyroe and the Patriach face to face nodded to each other, a baleful expression in their eyes. Reliance glanced from one to the other. They wore their jealousy, their conflict without a hint of tolerance, their raging converging upon her, unfairly, she thought, to single her off for one or the other although neither had loved one women as a single love.

“Reliance Ann,” said Tyroe, the Injector, “I want to talk to Patriarch Carlson alone.”

“Now go,” said the Tyroe.

But the Injector and Patriarch followed Reliance to the outsides of her domo. Perhaps each felt guilty abandoning a pregnant woman.

Reliance felt sorry for herself and began to weep quietly as she mounted her beast of burden and rode silently to her domo. The now freezing trees under the cold orange Panoshian star were hardly noticed. She stopped at the foot of her portal and looked back, filled with an upsurge of rehearsed fears.

She slowly climbed the slope and entered the commons. She left her portal slight ajar to pick out whatever words she could on her Com. She crouched at the foot of the small portal in the commons

and looked out.

The orange tinted snow fell, fluttering softly down disturbing the light on the walls and ceiling of the commons with a continuous, dappled movement. She cradled her chin on the portal edge and watched the snowflakes turn around and around like ghosts and strained her ears for fragments of conversation from the outside below.

In the twilight of sounds her thoughts turned to the Patriarch on his pedestal. His head towered in the high white clouds on an unnamed League plate, a gleaming Mind Doamer and Father, a promise of release from the chaos of time and space with perfect communion with the dead. Now he was suddenly confused with mortals ... tears, lust for murder, lust for her, flexed knees were all mixed up with folded wings.

She thought, too, of the worlds in the Doam and the hundreds of minds contained therein. She thought of Uncle Josh. She could see a city where streets shone like poured gold in heavenly light, half from the bright orange-yellow sun, half from a distant reddened star, and dusted through the glitter of stars and nebulae. Floating colonnades and revolving pavilions of marble are bathed in changing colors; water and buoyant blue, violet and velvet purple, Panosh orange, and dazzling bronze, as glorious as a chorus the oldest hymns of the Face. A shimmering, mirage-like city filled with the serene and tremulous tinkle of zengelos.

She listened to the muffled conversation from her rezed portal, daring not to open it too much: a reasonable murmur, sometimes the rise of voices. She could hear feet when they changed position or walked about, and grew rigid with apprehension their sound might turn into scuffling, or falling. The immediate was too unnerving to think about so Reliance drifted on to regrets over her pilgrimage.

The light from outside, reflected blue through the portal, dissolved within the up-story room. The cold membrane chilled the air and Reliance rose to her feet, went to the head of the transit where it was warmer and sat down, hugging her knees. Then she heard the sound of boots. The portal at the foot of the reach opened, the commons glow surged upward and stopped short of where she crouched. The Injector appeared, his face in the half-light, looking up at her. Calculation was in his eyes. As she stared down the descent, she tried with a look to draw a promise of indulgence. He returned nothing. She came downstairs and when she neared him he went back into the commons.

Then the Patriarch came through the portal and sat on the other side of the commons.

“Patriarch Carlson tells me you took sick while in Oasis and felt someone should accompany you to your domo through the snow. I find nothing wrong with that.”

Reliance kept her eyes averted.

“Thank you,” she said, “I’m sure all of us appreciate your efforts to be fair.”

“I’ll take my leave now,” said the Tyroe. “This is not my real business here on Panosh.”

The Injector picked up his wraps, still damp because he flung them any old way and scorned her gesture to hang them over the chair to dry. He looked at neither the Bishop nor Reliance as he drew on his cover and picked up his hat to leave. He held it in both hands and stared down at the soggy corolla. He gave it a brush against his coat, then said to Reliance ...

“After this don’t go gallivanting around in your condition.”

“That’s what I told her,” said the Patriarch. “She has to take better care of herself.”

Reliance rolled her eyes heavenward in exasperation, clinched both fists, then ran up the incline double stepping and de-rezed the portal with frustration and anger.

* * *

Unknown to the parties below on Panosh prime, the star-cruiser Cloudglar orbited at a middling distance. Dolly Ridgeway stood on the bridge of the only League Cosmos star-craft in the Star-Eyes out-sector. She is far more pregnant the Ideeas daughter, Reliance, below them. She has two children in her womb. One child from her one husband, Manny and one child from her other husband Nelson. In spite of her condition, she is in full command of the Cloudglar and performing all the duties of a League Scout captain. She could have grown her children in an external womb rezed with some difficulty, but she wanted them inside her.

Zena rested her hand on Dollies shoulder.

“Hey Captain, how is flying today? Feeling stable with all that life in you?”

“Of course. I would like to slide them out the shoot, but not until they are ready. Here comes Manny with a funny little grin on his grill. “

Manny gives Dollie a kiss and then listens to her tummy.

“Our guy Tyroe on the prime Panosh planet is certainly carrying out the writ requested by the Con. He's performed the crossover on a number of the Refusers. Rumors I hear from a couple of sources is he has taken up discreetly with Ideeas daughter, Reliance, already married to one of the most powerful local Patriarchs, who completely ignored her and went on a mission after the ceremony. Oh, it gets better. Tyroe has a an excellent record as a League scout and Daron thinks the world of him. But he is a womens lover. He has also taken up with one of our own Injectors, Bayla Beasley.”

“Good at his job, good with the women. Typical for a League scout. Thanks for the discreet information my sweet. This could be trouble. Let me know if you hear any more of these so-called rumors.”

Manny kisses his wife again, but because she is the captain of the star-craft, departs by adhering to the proper protocol.

“But he does seem to fit right in with the primitive Panoshian populace.”

“True”, Dolly responded.

Conflict

The next morning Reliance rezed considerable heat in her domo. She turned it off and waited for the domo to be as cold as the underneath. She looked out the window at the snow across the yard and the hills and wondered if it was very deep. Deep enough to postpone a distasteful chore. Not too deep to ride to town for a birther or help for the sick or dying, or to patch up a love affair.

She rezed a cloak about herself, covered her head with thick fabric and went to the beast pen. She threw a blanket over her beast of burden which she fastened under its warm, but scaly belly, the flesh feeling good against her icy fingers.

Outside, it was bitter cold, as you would expect under a orange sun. Her cheeks stung and a recurrent shiver passed through her body. The smell of the air was crisp and hard, left with vestiges of pitch-green she had burned in the ceremonial fire pits. The stretches of snow glistened with ice-blue light and the dead clumps of Panoshian trees were powdered over with orange-white glint to hide their ruins.

The silent flow-woods on the hills, with a train of white veiling gathered to one side by the wind, were like a troop of brides caught in an evil spell.

At once, she became reluctant to leave. To pay a visit to the Tyroe was the same as throwing herself at his feet. Besides, the journey was what was called “gallivanting”. But the more reasons Reliance could think of for not going, the more urgent and precise became the journey.

She chose the road rather than the deep, drifted way along the creek. The open stretches of snow gave way to complexes, then the infrequent domos on the edge of Oasis. Today the streets and the structures had lost their battered and slushy look of declining winter, and had another start under elaborate tops of white with icicles flashing off the edge. The leafless trees aside the domos and along the street were encrusted with new Panoshian snow glistening in the orange light.

Her spirits rose at the sight of the Oasis centre, lavish with white capped dome and towers amidst the frosted grove of dead trees. And her heart leaped at the first glimpse of the hostel, the roofs over long lanais and the row gables with deep casements, the dark tree in the yard shining like silver, which gave it the air of an ancient home-world lodge, or an inn deep in a dark forest where the cook bakes a cake with a ring inside that can make a dream grants wishes, or a female demon, caught in a storm, stays overnight and, in gratitude, leaves a magic wish. By the time Reliance reached the top of the steps, nothing seemed impossible.

She requested a successful de-rez of the paneled cut-glass door and went inside. At one end, of the dim brown room a log burned in a primitive fireplace. The flames lit up the walls and warmed the empty chairs pulled from the night before. At the other end stood a large but beautiful brown duraplast desk with imbedded dark orange swirls for registering guests. An icon hung in mid-air for summoning help. At present, the room was unattended.

Everyone must be at the meal, prepared in the great basement where bread was baked in enormous ancient sandstone ovens, its whiff tantalizing whoever passed by on the street. The aroma of fry-bread and dried fruit puddings and roasted candle-bird and scruffit often advertised that the guests of this hostel down to an undreamed table. No outsider would dare interrupt. Reliance waited in a chair near the desk with her hands folded in her lap.

After a while a few guests trailed through, out to the street and toward the effects vehicle depot. A man who looked like he originated from Tosho and a woman wearing a dark orange skin tight suit with a grenadine tinge, sat down before they went their way. At last, the hostel-keeper entered.

“Good morning,” said Reliance. She rose to her feet and approached Sister Hunt,

“I have to make a report to the Marshal. Is it too late to catch him in?”

“I'm afraid so.”

Reliance was stunned. She made no effort to hide her disappointment.

“Do you know where he could have gone?” she asked.

“I haven't the faintest idea. Citizen Beasley came here this morning and asked for 'im. He descended and they went out together. When he gets back shall I tell 'im you've something to report?”

“Oh, it can wait,” said Reliance.

“You know the woman I mean, Your sewing customer.”

"I know. I made her a dress."

"Dresses real fashionable."

"But she has a hat I don't like," said Reliance.

"She's more 'n likely an Injector. It explains her visits to the Marshal."

"Often?"

"Oh no, she'd have to be more careful," said Sister Hunt.

A guest waited at her elbow.

"I'll tell the Marshal anyway. You wouldn't make the trip if it wasn't important."

Reliance said a wan good-bye and went out into the street. As she rode home, she tried to recall Bayla Beasley. There were her prune colored eyes, her high pitched voice, and her hat. Her waist was twenty-nine inches, bust thirty-six, hips thirty-eight, waist to hem forty-nine. But who was she, and what kind of woman? Citizen Beasley refused to come to mind in one piece; when she held still for lengths and widths, she was only a customer, but now she was perhaps the Tyroe's mistress and could no more be recalled than a dress dummy.

* * *

"Shoot who? Shoot who, ma?" piped Dosh.

"Hold your tongue," said Thea. "We didn't say anything about your pa shootin' anybody!"

"Yes you did, ma. Phene heard you tell Aunt Reliance the minute she come in the door."

Thea cast Reliance an exasperated look. Doe paused between bites of supper as long as a growing boy is able and announced:

"Phene says the the Injector downed and upped Aunt Reliance and pa's going to shoot him!"

"Phene!" cried Thea, "how dare you fill your brother with such dirty ditch water!"

"Is pa really gonna shoot the Injector?" squealed Dosh. "Is he really?"

"You boys grub up or leave the table!" exploded Thea. She nodded toward Smilinda whose face was swollen from an afternoon cry and was poking around in her food.

"You've upset your Aunt Smiley and been rude to Aunt Reliance."

"Phene says ... "

"What did I tell you, young feller!"

Thea swung at the boy but he ducked and sprang from his chair. The other children smothered their

amusement and several explosions of soup burst out and sprayed the table..

“Phene, just for that ... “ began Thea.

“Y'know what?” interrupted Do-Ann. “You know what Abby said the other day? He said old lady Rasmussen has a big bum!”

Squeals of mirth drowned the remonstrances of Thea, table manners were forgotten and a pair of small hands splashed soup over one end of the table cloth. Thea stood up and banged three times with a big duraplast spoon.

“I never seen such a bunch of Utz babies! Bugs!, if I don't blister every last one of you!”

Silence fell and each child looked the saint.

“And Phene, just for starting this, you'll manage the cleaning and production of each complex all week!”

“Aw shucks Aunt Thea,” then turning to his mother, “do I have to, ma?”

“You heard what your aunt said.”

“I mean every summin' word of it, too,” said Thea. “It's aggravatin' enough when kids eavesdrop on grown-ups without talkin' slobbery about it.”

“When you tell 'em something to do,” whined Smilinda, “you'd think they was deaf as posts and when you don't want them to hear, they go ears like scruffits.”

“That's the bloody truth,” grunted Thea.

She glanced at her sisters plate.

“You better eat heartier than that.”

“I feel too queer. If nobody minds I think I'll have some of my remedy ...”

“Look! That bloody remedy's being de-rezed if you don't eat up them vittles!”

Please, Thea. You know how sick I am of soup ...”

“Then go to bed and I'll start the girls on the dishes. Phene, it ain't your turn tonight but you'll feed the scumlets. ”

The remainder of the supper was finished in silence. The children shoveled the rest of their food and looked sidelong at one another out of rounded eyes, They still lived in a reversed world where approaching catastrophe was exciting.

They shoved them off as soon as they swallowed the last mouthful.

“Sonny, help clear the table, and you girls monitor domo cleaning and put some water on to boil. Birdeen, hide your ma's remedy where she can't find it. Reliance, you can get Baby and Do-Ann to bed. First, I'm taking a hair brush to you, Do-Ann!”

The little girl let out a wail and her mother propelled her out of the commons into a nearby bed-chamber. The snap of the rez-hard shell upon bare bottom was followed by shrieks and diminuendo, more shrieks and diminuendo, graduating into a dirge without variation and ending with the hiccups. \

What crude and degenerate social engineering Reliance thought to herself. Her early memories of her mother, Idee Ann, did not include any events like this.

Doe and Birdeen, two of the older girls, sterilized the dishes. The boys left to do the onside chores, except Sonny and Clevy, the two youngest, who usually helped their sisters. But on this evening, Clevy showed no interest in putting away the sweets container.

When Reliance took Baby by the hand to leave the commons he shouted, “I'm coming with you, Aunt Reliance!”

“How'll the dishes get done?”

“Aw, I just get in the way. I ain't good for nothin' except brushing off the crumbs before the cleanin' gets done.”

Clevy followed Reliance to the bed chamber where Do-Ann was still hiccuping on her mother's bed.

For the rest of her life, thought Reliance, Do-Ann would think back on this evening when she brushed her hair with a tortoise-shell brush. Maybe she'd think of Aunt Reliance and her escapade and how it all ended. She would remember Aunt Reliance at her father's funeral, sitting in the very last row, in disgrace for causing the death of the Patriarch. Nobody would speak to Aunt Reliance and she, in turn, dared speak to nobody. Or she would remember Aunt Reliance flung prostrate with grief over the lifeless body of the Con Injector at the centre on Salt Prime. She would remember that Aunt Reliance was going to have a baby, return to her mother an the Levers and their Cause Of Death and disappeared forever.

Clevy was staring at Reliance, eyes filled with the awe children have for grown-ups who are leading figures in a drama.

“Aunt Reliance.”

“Yes, Clevy.”

“Is pa mad at you?”

“I guess so.”

“Is pa going to kill you, Aunt Reliance?”

“Mercy, I hope not.”

“If pa's going to kill someone, he'd kill who he's mad at, wouldn't he?”

“I would think so.”

“Then why's he gonna kill the Injector instead of you?”

“I don't know, Clevy.”

“But why?”

“I guess it's customarily to kill the man when you are jealous, Clevy.”

“Then what happens to the lady?”

“I don't know ... yet.”

“Please, Aunt Reliance!”

“Oh, she gets a beating, maybe.”

“Why just a beating?”

“Why, whyeee?”

Reliance imitated the boy's persistent piping.

“Why don't you stop asking questions I don't know how to answer?”

The children all climbed on to a single bed and began to bounce, something they never attempted before their mother.

“Don't muss the covers,” she said, “and Do-Ann, get me your night-gown.”

“I hate mama,” said Do-Ann as Reliance helped pull on her gown.

A chill went through Reliance. She tried to repress the memories of leaving her mother, Idee, after the arguments she had. And her father, spaced out on that Zangelo of his, night and day. What kind of father is that?

“I want to come live with you!”

“Me too,” said Clevy.

“Me too, said Baby.

“Mercy,” said Reliance, “I don't have room for so many!”

“We ain't so many,” said Clevy. “Do you know Lukey Watts don't know how many sisters he's got? I

only got five.”

“You got seven!” cried Do-Ann.

“Five!”

“Seven! You gotta count me and Saffrony!”

“Do I have to, Aunt Reliance?”

“You have to if you're going to be in your pa's Doam,” said Reliance.

“In the Doam?”

“Yes, Clevy.”

“It ain't gonna be Doam with Saffy there.”

“Why not?”

“My sister ain't either ugly!” screamed Do-Ann.

Before Reliance could quiet the girl, Thea overheard and came into take over.

“What's going on here?” she asked.

“Ma, Clevy says Doam won't be Doam with Saff in it 'cause she's too ugly!”

“Nonsense,” said Thea, “Clevy ought to be ashamed. In the Doam *nobody* will be ugly. Nobody! Stop your scrapping and get under them kivvers.”

“We ain't done our prayers yet,” said Clevy.

“Then start praying,” said Thea.

“Shall we ask the same prayer, or something particular?”

“Better make it a good one,” said Thea. “I don't know why it is when troubles get worse, the kids do too.”

The three children knelt beside their bed. Do-Ann and Baby rattled off “Face of the Universe , why we are here, hear or see us so we can return to the Doam.” and Thea made them do it over. Clevy said, “By the Lights!, please don't let pa kill nobody and don't let nobody kill pa.”

For a boy, I must say he's a caution,” said Thea to Reliance as they withdrew from the room.

“At meat-butcherin' time he hides in the house.”

Reliance said, “That's me, I can't stand the sight of blood.” As they joined Smilinda in the parlor Thea said, “Now stop your stewing, the Patriarch may cool off in a day or two.”

“The Patriarch never cools off,” said Smilinda.

“The Injector can take care of himself,” said Reliance. “I’ll wager he knows. The news is all over town and he’s dropped completely out of sight.”

Smilinda looked at Reliance with disapproval.

“You said a space scout done it.”

“I say, Reliance,” began Thea as she helped her sister to the couch and sat down beside her, “an Utz would have made a better story than the Scout fellow. In Oasis, they said a woman spyin’ tried to blackmail the marshal and his answer was, let ‘er rip! At Oasis Council, they thought she was sweet on him and was jealous of you.”

Smilinda began to cry again, passively, as someone who cries just about everyday.

“What did the Patriarch say when he found out?” she whimpered.

“He just said, it’s lucky he ain’t no Scout! But I’m going to kill the son of a bitch anyway!”

* * *

Idea studied the Com with more intensity than usual. Most of the Injection built by the the last Con is covering nicely. The exception is Panosh, where there is considerable resistance.

“My daughter is the centre of it. They will not let go of the Doamer dead.”

She looks at her husband Doh, who has been resonating beautiful Zengelo off the domo.

“She’s your daughter too, what do you make of it?”

“She bolted from Salt at a young age and found a group of Mind Doamers she could identify with. Home spun and farming peoples living on the residue of what is left of League technology in this dimension. She was coupled in a group marriage, and the male left on a mission of who knows what by the Face ... “

“Kiss me Doh, I think she has a bit more of you than me in her. Daron is direct and pulls his own rez and rarely flinches.”

Before this could turn into another love making tumble, which Idea and Doh often engaged, especially when under marginal stress, Doh points out, “We both see that Tyroe is turning into the centre of controversy on Panosh Prime. He has impregnated our daughter and is facing the wrath of a local Mind Doamer Patriarch named, .. err ..., it doesn’t matter. Tyroe is turning out to be quite a lover, a lot like you Idea.”

Idea giggles and disrobes for the second time under the Salt Prime light, and continues to decorate the Viz with her own comments.

“Wait, see this. He’s gotten himself involved with the other Injector in the area. A female named Bayla Beasley. Properly instated and certified by the most recent Con. “

Doh stops her.

“Don’t even think of interfering. She will handle this. She has chosen to emphasize her Mind Doamer half and is denying the Lever. You will see.”

Idea and Doh continued to make love under the Salt Prime light.

* * *

As the days went by, they seemed endlessly long and each was marked off at stardown by Reliance's "Nothing happened, what about tomorrow?" This existence could end within the minute, or the next hour, but what she called "the back of her mind" which ordinarily turned up hints of things to come so she could get set, now cast nothing for the future. "Too much has happened to me," thought Reliance, "too much all at once. That's the way it always is, It's get up, go to bed, day after day, then suddenly it's all hell broke loose, and months or years picking up the pieces."

Reliance became more fidgety and, in time, grew tires of waiting for circumstances to toss heads or tails. When she could no longer stand the suspense, she indulged in wishful thinking. By now the Patriarchs temper had cooled off. Then Thea, back from a gathering of Sisters said,

"And Sister Cook was saying for a shame it is! Quite, says I, but on second thought says what's a shame? Thinking things has gone from bad to worse. And she says the Bishop vows he'll drop the Injector the instant he lands his in-system ship!"

"Maybe he won't arrive on a star-ship," Reliance had replied.

"He seems to slip into Oasis when nobody's looking.

Maybe he won't but I've a good notion how he's going back. As a dead Injector that's what!"

Reliance thought to herself. She is remembering her Lever side, up till now completely rejected ... they don't know, she thought to her self.

Reliance decided to act. No matter how the Tyroe came to Oasis, he had only one place to go and that was to the hostel. There the Patriarch would track his quarry, and Reliance went to plead for the help of Sister Hunt.

On her arrival, she was led through the glowing brown lobby, down a passageway into a small domo which was set apart with touches of elegance ... books of deep red and green leathers, a plum velvet chair, a white soft and perpetual carpet.

Reliance sat down upon the seat outlooking a semi-permanent rezed portal, facing Sister Hunt who perched on a small chair before a very fine extremely hard dura-plast desk. Her sleeves were rolled up for work. Her hair was pulled back smooth like Sister Carlson's and her eyes were dark and beady like the eyes in the of the artifacts that overlooked the main commons. That was good. She didn't miss a thing that went on her hostel.

"Well, Reliance?" she said.

"I guess you know why I made the trip through the Panoshian snow."

"I think so. You looked rather wild eyed when I said he left with woman."

"Today I've come for a favor."

"All you have to do is tell the Patriarch, if he comes here, that the Injector is at my house if *he* comes here."

Sister Hunt rezed a Viz and made some written entries, not actual visual entries.

“Sounds pretty confusing,” she said.

“It's really very simple,” said Reliance. “The Patriarch'll go out to mydomo to find the Injector, but he'll be here. He'll have a chance to get away. Not much of a start, but a least a chance.”

“Why should the Injector get away?”

Reliance was taken aback. Sister Hunt knew why, all right.

“If for no other reason, because I happen to love him.”

“That's a good reason. What other do you have?”

“You know everything that goes on in Oasis. Surely you've heard I'm pregnant.”

“Is that the other reason?”

“Is there a better one?”

“It's no reason at all if he don't plan to marry you.”

“Oh, he does!” countered Reliance.

“He has asked you?”

Reliance hesitated. Once he mentioned marriage, and once, running away.

“We've spoken of marriage,” rallied Reliance.

“You have? It's to be when?”

“When he leaves Panosh Prime, I think.”

“Rumor I've heard is he is taking his fast little star-ship

Then a remote smile appeared on the hostel-keepers lips.

“Why should I help the Injector escape? Why not have an Effects Vehicle ready so you can both get out of town? He has access to those, we don't.”

“That would be expecting too much of you,” said Reliance lamely. “I only wanted you to tell the Patriarch the marshal's at my house.”

“You're asking me to lie to the Patriarch.”

“I'm afraid so.”

“You know how risky that is!”

“Not as risky as a battle in your hostel!”

“You may be right.”

“It would be very upsetting for your guests.”

“I expect so.”

“Energy weapons can cause a lot of damage. Think of your beautiful rezed crystal light and your wide rez portals.”

“You have a sharp outlook, Reliance.”

“And the commons where where now stand. You wouldn't want disintegration here!”

“Of course not. “

Sister Hunt got up from her little seat. She smiled ever so faintly.

Reliance stared at Sister Hunt. Her words sounded so awful.

“His name,” she said “it's Tyroe, isn't it?”

“Tyroe,” said the hotel keeper. “He signs the Com Tyroe Channel.

“Tyroe Channel,” said Reliance softly.

The expression on Sisters Hunt's face revealed nothing except a trace of amusement.

She said, “I'll do what I can to keep those two from meeting face to face.”

“Thank you, Sister Hunt. You're weren't sent to the Con last year just for the standing! So now, good-day!”

Two nights later Reliance sat in her domo, her elbows propped on a hard tables embedded with visuals, a small number of hard copied, a small piece of ancient jewelry she had collected, some pale pressed local flowers, a pair of gloves so clear, only she could find them and broken beads.

Then she went out to the energy conduit and checked the generation. She removed all light from the domo and ascended to the second story, de-rezed the portal and descended into the darkness. Halfway up a muffled beat rolled from the outside. It was like being on the inside of a drum. She gathered her skirts and bounded the rest of the way, panting and listening at the top. She ran into the sleeper, and there followed the clap of the portal as she de-rezed it in a hurry.

Outside, against the gray snow, the outline of a beast of burden and rider appeared through a clump of trees. Two long whistles cut across the night. Her signal in return was less expert, breathy and short. But the rider heard and wheeled his horse out where he could be seen.

She found her way to the sleeper and rezed a soft light. Its pseudo ghostly flame guttered and

magnified her form until her tiny sleeper appeared as a tunnel, her hurried and grotesque movements, those of someone trying to bury a body before they got caught.

Then she put on her cold weather protector and descended, thrown into intervals by the soft light she held in her hand. She de-rezed the front portal and turned to the commons, motionless. She stifled the soft light, and de-rezed the portal behind her.

The patter of her running across the arcade gave way to the swish of footsteps in the snow. Before she reached him, the rider called, "Ma says to come right away. The Injector's there, but he won't budge!"

Reliance started for the out lying structures, the Hunt boy followed, then dismounted to help her with her beast of burden.

"When did he arrive?"

"A little while ago. He didn't even have a beast of burden because he wasn't going out, he said, and ascended to a hostel quarter. Said he'd been navigating all day from KneeHigh all day and was going to sleep come hell or Kandoxian blue mist."

"I don't know how he can show up without the whole of Oasis knowing about it the next half hour."

"I ain't out to tell the whole Oasis, if that'll help."

You won't have to. It'll spread faster than the plague."

"It's sure sloppy going," said the boy.

Already, the weather had conspired with the losing side of the coin with sunlight, two days in a row, melting drifts into slush that could only be slogged through, that froze by night, congealed by morning, and dissolved when the star came up. Beasts of burden slipped and jolted their riders every time they stepped in a rut or a pot hole. When nearly half a mile from Oasis they caught sight of one of the few effects vehicles ahead, its black form hurrying across the gray country like a beetle.

They left the road, shambled down an incline to a copse of flow woods and waited for a time that seemed overlong, with cold and tedium. As the effects vehicle approached the driver could barely be seen, around his face clung a white blur, like a puff of smoke or powder. His identity materialized then vanished with the clatter of wheels.

"We had better beat the Patriarch back to ma's!" said the boy. They waited for an impatient second or two and then quit the flow woods. They reached the edge of Oasis, the start of hushed and darkened domos, the gaunt local gathering area among the denuded trees, and stores of primary centre, black as pitch behind the terraced boardwalk of non-interesting material.

"We'll rez through the back" said the boy, and they turned down a side street that led to the unclassified gate of the hotel. They had no sooner pulled up when Sister Hunt ran out from the annex carrying a small torch and casting long shadows in the dirty snow. With the other hand she clutched a draping cloth around her shoulders. As she hurried through the slush her breath shot out before her face like feathers in the frosty air.

"The Patriarch was here!" she gasped as she approached. "I told him the Injector was out at your

place! Come on, you'll have to de-rez the rear portal.”

She led them up a narrow ascension that opened onto a dim hallway where a tiny orange light rezed upon the wall and cast a crescent of light against the wall paper. The light was a small replica of the Panoshian star. She pointed to a portal in the shadows.

“The effects vehicle is waiting, a rare commodity in these parts,” she said, go get him in it! And don't forget what I said about giving the man a push!”

Reliance nodded and listened to the sound of departing footsteps as she realized there was only Sister Hunt and her effects vehicle. She tried to de-rez the portal and waited for the sound of movement from the other side.

“It's Reliance,” she said in a low voice. She waited and repeated more loudly, “It's Reliance!” After an interval the portal de-rezed and she entered the domo, in complete darkness except when a slash of yellow light from the hallway fell across the fuzzy floor. She could hear him breathing, she reached out and touched him.

“You can't stay here!” Reliance whispered. The brush of his clothing as he fumbled for a micro-torch. He lit a small light source at his bedside they lay back on top of the covers, fully clothed, with a pillow propped under his head. Reliance stared at him in dismay.

The Patriarch is on his way to my domo and when he finds he's been tricked he'll come straight back here!”

Tyroe, in his scout arrogance yawned and plumped his pillow against the hard wall.

“I know all about it. Sister Hunt's been trying to get rid of me ever since I hit the place. You'd think I was on her best gravity bed.”

Reliance sat down at his side in exasperation, leaned one arm across him, looked into his face.

“How did the Patriarch find out? Who told?”

“One of our Injectors. She tried to extract status to keep her quiet. I said, Hell, go ahead. I can fight as straight as the Patriarch.”

Reliance began to cry.

“Damn you, stop your crying,” he said almost softly.

Encouraged, Reliance dabbed at her eyes with her fingers.

“I want you to settle your score in peace,” she said.

“It's the Patriarch's score,” he said. “What would you suggest I do?”

“Go away! Get up off this cushy little bed and go!”

She sat with both arms braced over him.

“But I'm going to say right here until you do!”

“You mean just walk out? And the Bishop's score with me?”

“Please! There's not a minute to lose!”

The Injector raised himself on one elbow.

“Be quite,” he said, “I think there's somebody down the hall.”

Soft, stealthy footsteps approached the portal and then stopped. The quite held a threat that grew unbearable with each passing second, Reliance could hear the beat of blood in her ears as her heart pounded away a fraction of a minute that stretched, it seemed, into five. As she grew accustomed to the sound of her body other noises seeped into her consciousness. The hostel was full of little noises. portals opened and shut in the distance, hallways resonated under footsteps that went with voices. An alarm resonated with the Com that ranged through the hostel. An alarm at the portal brought Reliance to her feet, frozen beside the bed.

“Who is it?” growled the Tyroe.

Her voice was low and urgent.

“I've been waiting for you ... what the evil kept you so long?”

The door opened and Sister Hunt entered the room. The prolonged sound of the alarm resonated as it followed her and she de-rezed the portal irritably.

“Damn that alarm!” she said. “It resonates at the worst times!”

Then suddenly, as though struck by some unforeseen thought, she crossed quickly to the portal and lifted one edge of the blind.

“You two get out of here!” she said, as she turned about and faced them, her color drained, her expression as set as a plast-steel trap.

“The Patriarch's downstairs!”

That brought the marshal to his feet. Reliance stood beside him but felt her knees weaken and put a hand on his arm for support.

“Both of you! Get out!” said Sister Hunt. “The effect vehicles ready. Someone from Oasis can bring it back. I'll stall Patriarch as long as I can but get out of here and ride like hell!”

She pushed them from the domo and went downstairs to the commons. They moved quickly and silently down the back passageway to the descending conduit where they met the hostel-keeper's hired young local.

“The effects vehicle's out in back,” he said.

“Much obliged” said the Tyroe. “I guess I won't be coming back. Wherever I'm serving next, it won't be in the Pahoshian system. And whoever the Con sends next, is going to be informed about your

invaluable help!”

The helper, rezed a light, led them across the yard to the effects vehicle at the side of the out building, its flat shape hidden in the shadows. Reliance was swallowed by the dark as the Tyroe helped her in the seat. Then he disappeared around the other side. The effects stung the Panoshian atmosphere and Reliance waved goodbye to the hostel keeper's son. With luck, he would be the last glimpse of any soul she knew in this only place she knew in the world. He de-rezed the gate behind them and she peered back at the hostel. It was dark except for a light source in the portal of Sister Hunt's domo and a dim glow from the portals dusting the green stark trees with light. In the entrance of the hostel a visitor waited.

Sister Hunt would have need of her set face and steel nerve. The Patriarch's rage would be monumental, fanned by a fruitless search of the hostel ... through empty domos, down reverse accesses , until there was no place to look.

An unbearable guilt engulfed Reliance. A guilt that might have been absolved by the patriarch's murder of the Injector, his blood like that of a sacrificial beast. For a stretch guilt overtook fear and then fell back. Like two fast animal racers, they ran neck and neck, first one gained, next the other. Sometimes they seemed to run in opposite directions and, caught between, she was being torn apart.

The effects vehicle streamed past the edge of Oasis, and Reliance strained at the viz to see if they were being followed. She focused on the viz looking for a looming shadow in the distance, but could not see one, since her acute senses, that she is starting to use, are playing tricks on her.

They passed domos, with de-rezed portals as solid as the plaststeel fabric that wove the reality in the Star-Eyes out-sector that she occupied. Reliance became increasingly and over overwhelmingly depressed. Hurrying on and on, and hearing only the static noise of their flight added to her feeling of desolation. She felt forsaken, as in a dream, when she returned to half-remembered domos to search for something lost. She felt lonely and began to weep.

“Are you afraid?” asked the Tyroe. “Do you scan his approaching effects vehicle?” Reliance dabbed her eyes. She focused on the viz, but could only focus on the din of their escape.

“He was in a EV on his way to my house. He has one. He is a Patriarch after all.”

“How long before we get to your in-system ship, Tyroe?”

“This isn't the fastest EV. I didn't use one from Salt Prime. I didn't want to be obvious. We are going to have to take a more direct but dangerous route,” said Tyroe as he tried to pull from the effects drive to increase the speed.”

And look at this blasted country ... nothing but hard-Panosh flats for miles!”

“What will we do?”

“The only thing we can do. Run the effects as hot as we can.”

He dropped all sensors and pushed every bit of energy into the effects and, as they pushed ahead, the EV vibrated as if it would de-rez before they either or reached their destination, Every joint turned hot and strained, sometimes it swayed and balanced precariously on hitting a mud filled dip or slipping across a blast of cold draft. The pair shifted from one side of the seat to the other, against each other,

and then once, nearly ending on the floor of the EV. Several times Reliance felt sick at her stomach and the marshal swore until, as Agatha would say, the air turned blue.

“We're tipping over!” Reliance screamed, on several near spills. But the man at her side paid no attention, after all he is a seasoned and a trained League scout. He coxed everything out of the machine without associating to the local Com. In effect this is silent running.

She focused on the rez in front of her, looking for a EV register. The viz showed a clear and dark Panoshian scape. She asked Tyroe to rez the local landscape as they crossed some of the more desolate parts of Panosh. Clumps of bush showed up like black holes along the side of the terrain, but no movement in black, as far as the eye could see. Yet Reliance's perceptions told her that something was behind them, that followed without a stop, gaining by the kloms.

Were they trying to out pace the Pure Evil? How did she get mixed up with the Injector anyway? Oh yes, it was the fruit she ate in the orchard when she peeled it for preserves. The Lever was surely in her garden that morning, and now an evil Patriarch was at her heels to take her away! She was going to die, crushed by the enery of the EV, which miraculously, until now, stayed its course. Death, like a great bird with wings spread to the full, glided darkly and gracefully overhead, while they caromed along the surface of Panosh Prime .

“Tyroe, where is your starship?”

The Injector took his time to answer. Reliance shut her eyes, put her fist in her mouth and bit hard to keep from screaming.

“It's near the complex at Desret.”

She glanced at the man beside her. He has a singular focus to fly the EV.

“All we need is a loss of energy in this energy parched dimension”, where his only words in the last half-hour. Was a loss energy all the worried him? One or twice he swore in harsh whispers, but seemed unaware of the terrible fate awaiting in every twist of the landscape.

“Look!” said the marshal suddenly.

Reliance felt her heart leap in fresh fear, not knowing what to expect. He pointed to a body of water on the viz, wide across, looking bottomless and as black as ink in the moonless night.

“What's that?” she breathed, seized with terror.

“Why, don't you know? Severe Lakes!”

She began to weep quietly, partly in relief, partly with being so close to the end, and wondered if she could stand the rest of the way.

* * *

Desret was asleep when they arrived, with only the local Com and it's adjunct AIs to talk to. There were the usual small collection of in-system ships. A small hostel skirted the tiny star-port, that looked like the only reason it existed was to provide temporary housing to locals.

Tyroe activated the entrance alarm system and a rather annoyed keeper answered in full local armor. Tyroe told him seal the EV that he piloted and the Con would handle the status to keep it here until

removed.

Then Tyroe and Reliance hurried to the star-craft, now an island of light of weary hue in the star-ports total darkness. He activated the in-system drive and cuddled Reliance beside him.

“Ever crewed a star-ship?” he stated in a flat demeanor.

“No.”

Reliance did know enough to rez a portal on the star-craft. It opened and she looked at the tiny Desret port. She was able to pick up an audio from the keeper, now awake trying to understand what was going on.

The flustered keeper swore he heard an energy weapon. He shook his head over and over, saying, “Women, women, women, women!”

“Don't look out the window”

“Why not?”

“You should never look back when you're running away.”

“I have to look just this once. I want to remember the planet where I spent most of my life.”

“Did you grow up in this planet?”

“No, but they all look the same.”

“Did you know you were going to run away when you came to the hostel tonight?”

He slid down in the cockpit so his face was buried on the edge of her breast and she felt the warmth of his breath.

Revenge

Tyroes starship made a prompt exit from Panosh Prime. The cinder colors of the planet against the bright orange star, much fuller in the viz, left both Tyroe and Reliance with a haunting vision. The smell of the in-system drive that flooded Tyroes ship seemed harsh compared to the sweet smells of Panosh Prime.

A viz came on shortly after exiting the Panosh Prime system. They were being pursued by an fast in-system ship.

“Reliance, we have trouble. Your self appointed husband is not giving up easily. He is as consistent as a grow-wood in a Panoshian spring cycle.”

Reliance started crying as she had cried at the Desret micro star-port. Tyroe, a seasoned League Scout, knew how to rez a cloak, emitting many copies of his star-craft. This not easy to do. The autonomic replicas of his single star-craft are real, are running without a pilot or crew, with nothing other than the cloned AI piloting the real image.

The Patriarch fired him energy weapon in a wild random sequence. Tyroe targeted a key emitter in his ship, not a lethal shot, but sending the ship in a decreasing energy sequence. Tyroe watched the Patriarchs ship settle on one of Panosh Primes planetoid moons and where it cease to move.

Then Tyroe and Reliance sped towards the Salt Prime at top in-system speed. He wound a tendril of her hair around his finger and gave a little tug. She stirred, in a softly muffled protest. He tugged harder. She reached up and captured his other hand, but her head remained heavy against his shoulder.

“Wake up,” he whispered.

“I want you to know all about the great cosmos, so full of so many things that we all find out inspiration. What are we going to do after we reach the Salt Prime?”

“Be together,” Tyroe said as he held her while pushing the in-system cruiser to its limit.

* * * *

As an experienced star-ship pilot, the Patriarch quickly re-rezed the damaged parts of his crippled in-system star-craft. After the destroyed components are operational, the Patriarch rezed up the control panel and quickly engaged the drive heading for the primary planet in the Salt system. It is that system that contained the most well known Levers. It is that system where the Lever-Mind organization exists that brought the minds, our sacred minds of the lost part of the Doam to be injected in the living Doam, removing it's true meaning and replacing it with a facsimile in the body of a young adult. It doesn't matter to the Patriarch how much energy is used to reach Salt Prime. He is blinded by his anger. He sees himself as a pure Simp, an avenger of the Mind Doamer dead.

* * * *

When a speeding in-system ship appears in the Salt Prime system with a bearing to the main planet Manny looks at Nelson and activates an alarm on the Cloudglars Viz.

“We had better wake up Dolly. This ship signature matches that of a *Hoeohleh* in-system ship. It's headed toward the primary. We can intercept it, if requested to.”

Dolly is sleepy after being aroused from her nap and by now very much pregnant with her twins. Even as she waddles to the bridge, she maintains her athletic demeanor.

“Where's Zeke and Zena?”

“There off time, probably in their in-ship domo. “

Dolly rezes a the latest from Panosh.

“By the Lights, it looks like Tyroe and his ship had a confrontation with the ship that we are tracking. Plot a course in the dimension. Can we make a slip to Salt Prime? Can we afford the cost? ”

Manny looks at the viz, turns over the report until he is confident he understands the side effects.

“We can do a shift, but even with Slither-spark, we can't do many more. It will take a number of months to get from one prime system to another, just like the locals.”

When the Cloudglar arrives in the Salt system, the Patriarch's star-craft is only a parsec in front of them, heading towards Salt Prime.

“Send a off-line to Idee and let her know that she may have company, since she is the mother of the Patriarch's wife.”

“Yes. Rez the message.”

* * * *

“From a star-ship.”

Doh has fallen asleep while playing the zengelo in their commons.

“I’d better wake up honey-buns,” he mutters to himself. He lets Pickey-Do, the pet strong-backer runs into the forest near their domo on Salts Prime. Doh shakes Ideeas awake, which isn’t hard to do, since she already felt the presence of her husband in her dream state.

“Ah, Doh, a League ship. There is only one. OK. “

Ideea rezes the message and slowly but steadily puts her cloths on.

“It seems I will finally meet a potential, but lost son-in-law, and maybe gain a rejecting daughter. Doh stay here. I have a feeling this is about to get personal. The Patriarch can only be visiting me.”

Ideea and Pickey-Do run into the dense forest encircling Ideeas domo on Salt prime. The trees are beautiful by anyones standards. There is a sharp smell that reminds her of some of the plants on Beautica, which is a long memory.

“If some one is looking for me, they can look for me here,” she says quietly to herself.

The Patriarch has done his homework. The ships nav lands near a clear lake on Slate Prime only several kilometers from Ideeas domo. The Patriarch transfers all energy from his ship, which is now left as any empty hull, to his own camouflage.

The local Salt Prime vegetation is thicker than Panosh or Kaibo. He works his way though the wilderness headed towards a domo he has targeted as his destination. No planetoid is in the sky, so no natural moon light is resonating throughout the dense dark green plants. The smell is so different from the inhabited prime planets in the Panosh or Kaibo system, that the Patriarch is familiar with. He thinks about his lost wife and her mothers domo in the distance. He can see her sending injectors to destroy his family of wives and his way of life. He is totally obsessed with her daughter, which has been stripped from him by a foul Injector. His madness drives him through the lush life on Salt Prime. He arrives at a domo, simple, well constructed. The Patriarch can sense that Ideeas has prepared it for guests. There are pools, and gathering areas. There is nothing to hide. He can see that there is an open area where Ideeas and her husband make their guests comfortable while associating the the Com. The domo is flexible, unlike what he is used to on Panosh, Kaibo or Kneehigh.

The Patriarch continues through the pools and gardens and approaches Ideeas domo. There are no portals to derez. All the entrances are clear and present. The cool Saltian breeze blows the smells from the gardens rendering a pleasant aura to the domo. Patriarch Carlson is surprised that he can just step into the domo. He looks around at the clear polished duraplast floor. He senses two in the domo. One to the front of him and a second farther away, with an intense musical instrument in his hands, that which he seems to be playing experimental music.

The Patriarch silently raises a weapon and targets the person in the chair in front of him. He is about to disintegrate her when a clear and present voice comes from this person has he has never met.

“Don’t you want to talk to the mother of the wife that you would have liked to have had before you blast me into dust?”

The Patriarch is stunned and frozen. If he does this deed, it will run counter to everything he has professed since his birth on Panosh Prime.

“Look at me, I am unarmed. I have no weapon other than myself. Why do you believe I am alien to your Doamer Mind? I know it as well as my own genetic code. Wouldn't you like to talk to Uncle Josh again?”

The anger welled in the Patriarch beyond his own control. He releases the energy weapon blasting Ideea to atoms. The atoms spread, but she is still there.

“Oh, you'll have to do better than that. I'm no Injector, I'm an original Lever, who can transform.”

Idea leaps with a speed that blinds the Patriarch.

“I'll do you the respect and honor of killing you first.”

She decapitates the Patriarch with a single move of her hand. Idea doesn't have the same powers she had in the League dimension, but she has enough in the Star-Eyes dimension for her occasions. She looks at the head, kisses it, and performs the Lever transformation.

“Welcome to the other side Carlson. You are now complete.”

Stunned, Carlson looks around and then at Idea, trying to understand what has now become a whole that once was a piece.

The music changes and modulates in the gardens outside the domo. Idea smiles and leads Carlson, now a Lever into the reclines of the Salt Prime night.

“Return to Pahosh, your wives are waiting for you. You are beyond being an Injector, you are a Lever, one who transforms. Don't burn the energy to rush home. Send them a viz by a link ship with a new signature. We build them here all the time.”

Carlson looks back at Idea, partially in a state of wonder, partially in a state of awe and also with a little fear.

She looks at him and waves a good-bye and says “You are now one of us.”

Resolution

The star centre hall above New-Orn Prime is packed with Scouts from all over the League. The odyssey of Halzee, Nema and his crew are now known throughout each of the major League systems. The huge viz in the hall shows a number of scenarios during the voyage.

Halzee narrates the viz as it streams past.

“I don't know if the dimension we slipped to is a time wrap or an intricate constructed reality. Our audit at all physical levels from the Ecostream indicate both. We do know the the entrance came from the alien creature on Kandox Five. We captured the creature and contained it on the Ecostream for some period of time until we entered the landing bay of the exotic Centerdom. Of course we now know what they are. Ships build by the Lever-MindDoamer synthesis in the expanse of the Second Federation.

Here is the exciting news. We have an operational Scout ship, piloted by the very talented Dolly Ridgeway in the Star-Eyes outsector. The exotic Centerdoms harvested the dimensional jelly from the Kandox dimension. This presents us with the fascinating scenario of a portal in each of their ships.

All my crew has been accounted for, with the exception of Tyroe Channel. We have rumors he is active in the Star-Eyes dimension.

Questions?”

The questions flow from all all sources, live and from the Com. Halzee and Nema return to a garden

enclosure on the station and relax. He is about to fall asleep when a priority message arrives after a trip of two dimensions.

“Admiral, we just received this message from the Cloudglar, signed personally by Captain Dolly Ridgeway: Tyroe Channel and Reliance Ann, the daughter of Idee Ann, were married on a small in-system star-ship in a system known as Salt, two dimensions from here. You now have accounted for your last crew member.”