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Cosmos Purgatory

Factory

It is almost five years after the initiation of the Silent War. The Leverites, unknown to the League before the last Reinvention Convention, have all but disappeared. Most believe they have slipped into the Star Eyes Out-sector. This is not a chimera, but based on a number of direct references on the MedCom. This allowed a permanent peace between the Mind Doamers and the Leverites, and by consent, the two warring sides had separated.

Something of a miracle also took place in the Beautican system. Leverites and MindDoamers fused, and produced an alternate MindDoamer that could accept the bringing the dead to life and yet, keep their last thoughts in the living part of the MedCom. And for the one, did not go to the Star Eyes out-sector but forged a mission into the past. Daron remembers this and his mother, who is called Idea, a woman that according to legend, was the nexus point of Mind Doamers and Leverites convergence.

Daron can remember growing up in the Beautican system, only knowing his mother, his sister and four adults. They lived in the forests of Beautica. His mother could do things like no one he had met since. He learned this from her. Later she told him she had to leave and he could find his own way and construct his own circle of four. He did. He followed the ways of Mind Doamers, ultimately migrating into the expanse of the Second Human Federation. A vast slower than light culture that had not been resolved by the maps of shifts and jumps of League Cosmos. The continuum of the League operated in at least 7 dimensions and the Second Human Federation only operated in four. It is a classical intellectual problem in both cultures. To get from one to the other, for most, it still took hundreds of years, which few were willing to do. Daron moved into HumFed 2 space and took with him all the knowledge of the convergence that he had learned from his mother.

The long trip consisting of a more than two years had Daron in a dream state, where he would feel the colors and smells of Beautica in his dreams. He now woke up to a place where he could build his own nexus. And he did. Hundreds of remotes were rezed. Construction started of massive new Centerdoms using Slither Spark methods. The smell and glow of fresh duraplast replaced the dreams of Beautica. Alnex-92 is under way.

Daron surveys the collection of Centerdoms being rezed in the Alnex-92 system. They are no longer mere Centerdoms, but new massive star homes. Certainly his ship with pure Slither Spark technology, had helped find the transit point using hundreds of remotes. Now the solution is at hand. Each is populated with hundreds of babies. Each baby has a purpose. There is hope for the League and the Second Human Federation.

Kandox

Halzee rocks back and forth with excitement after receiving the latest information from the Kandox System. He consciously restrains himself and the facade of his formal image. After his fourth League Reinvention Convention, he had been elected as League Admiral by a significant plurality. The admiral met the crew of almost a hundred, each with an interview that included talk of the service, stories and aspirations. Halzee had the kiss-of-goodness from Ambassadors in the New Orn to command a capitol ship, the Ecostream, along with its support craft.

The first officer standing beside Halzee is Nema Hands, a capable and tough first officer, assisting with the welcoming ritual of all the new crew members, whether with civilian or military affinities. Halzee leans over and whispers into Nema's ear. "We have consensus among the League Barristers. Our work on the fifth planet has paid off. The exotic properties of the native creatures that live there have excited the imagination of the entire League. The first part of our mission is to establish a permanent base on Kandox-5, then continue with the detailed research on the native sand beasts. The real prize of the mission comes after that. We will jump to Kandox jump space and explore the unknown."

"Good one Halzee", replied Nema. "The detailed recon of Kandox jump space should keep us occupied until the next Con."

Nema and Halzee continued down the flatplane of the station orbiting the New Orn gas giant. They visit every control center of new capital ship, each capable of functioning as brain of the entire operation. Nema and Halzee now go through a simple Q and A with the crew members at their stations in preparation.

The Ecostream did not have expanse and facilities of entertainment star cruiser. The ship was equipped with the capabilities to explore the expanse of unknown space. Each crew member had to have a detailed working knowledge of the entire ship and there were numerous systems to master. Each deck of the Ecostream is a self contained operation, usually with a commons room or a large conference room. Labs can be reconfigured as to their needed purpose. Each deck has a farm system capable of feeding a majority of the crew members. The Ecostream, like all League ships, has distributed power production, fore and aft. The hull of the capital ship is a dark stellar green with a number of light sources emanating from the ship fixtures. The Ecostream is streamlined so it can land on planets surface with atmosphere without interference. Each deck has a complete set of environmental controls. This allows one commons area to be cold and invigorating and another to be warm and familiar. The Ecostream does have a number of comforts to cater to crew needs in a long out-system exploration.

It takes Nema and Halzee several hours to visit each deck, each station, each system and each center. The purpose the routine is to build morale and esprit de corps. They agree to return to the first choice bridge at 10:00 hours League time. By then the crew will have established quarters. The final preparations for departure will be completed with the MedCom locals.

Nelson Beezlee looks over the sequence visualization of deck 2 again and after two uninterrupted hours of training, decides to break. He leans back in his small quarters and starts his sequence of images. The first are the frigid forests of New Sotia, then just the trees, next the branches with a few leaves, then on a single leaf, then on the molecules of the leaf and finally on a flame that senses both the tiniest subatomic and the entire know set of universe time-spaces.

Nelson is a League Barrister, and has worked hard to get a contract with the League Navy on a deep space mission. With strong skills in social dynamics and xeno-psychology, he spent four solid years learning starship engineering from both course grain and fine grain schemas. The shift sequence is starting over the com. Nelson isn't aware of it, he deepens his meditation. The primary segment of the

sequence starts when the Ecostream moves outside of the defensive sphere that protects the New Orn system. That primary segment is now almost complete. In the few minutes everything that Nelson can feel will have zero mass once inside the Ballonium Effect. Nelson focuses on the flame of his meditation, now the perfect combination zero mass and galactic consciousness.

The difference in two and four dimensions determines why one shift domain to another is difficult. The Kandox system has a jump metric of eight in one direction and two in another. Along with the Star Eyes out sector, the Kandox out sector is one of two currently known universes that star cruisers with Balonium effect drives can navigate. The question always is asked, “why can’t we jump to one of known population centers in the Second Human Federation?” The answer is that it’s effectively a one way trip. To get back it’s actually faster to use a slower than light ship. What astrogators search for using unmanned faster than light message torpedoes, is a corner of jump space that allows reasonable two way traffic.

The discipline of null meditation finally comes to an end after several hours in jump domain time. The hum of the filtering mechanism in the cabin lulls Nelson into a drowsy state. He turns the lighting an incandescent purple and moves to the bed, anticipating the entry sequence into the Kandox system. He realizes there is no real privacy on a deep space star cruiser. Every breath he takes, all his sweat, urine, sperm, all bodily functions are fed into the ships analytic system as part of the crew monitoring system. Nothing exists as primitive as a camera. The crew monitoring device is the entire cabin, including the furniture and appliances

From the bed in his quarters, Nelson settles, waiting for the micro-controls to submit to the external pressure of his body, forming a perfect resting place each time. Virtually no sound can be heard from the Ecostream as it makes its passage. Once in a while a creak or groan comes whispering out of the ship infrastructure, creating the illusion that Nelson is sleeping in a tree bough, slowly being rocked by a gentle wind.

The square structure on the lowest deck of the Ecostream has a solid dura-plast construction with the capacity to hold a three story creature. The three story creature in this case, is the mysterious sand crab from the fifth planet of the Kandox system. Actually it’s more of a giant insect than a crab, but has an exceptionally light weight exoskeleton that it excretes as part of its own bodily waste. It is thought to constantly regenerate the skeleton as part of internal energy processing while living in the sands under the fifth planets surface.

Dollie Bushway is the keeper of the cage like structure on the lowest deck. She is also responsible for landing party that will capture the creature. Scanning one from orbit will not be a problem. Getting under the sand and fetching it out will challenge her group. Being newly discovered, the finer points of the creatures are not yet known. That’s her job. Some crew members relax while in jump domain. Not her. This is where she does her best thinking and organizing. She looks at the ground party manifest.

Codie Dillamont – xeno biologist specializing in cold worlds, also capable of handling a number of exotic weapons. Over ten years experience as a League Scout, Codie will be second in command behind Dollie.

Mannie Keeble – chemical materials expert, also a pure brick with martial arts. Mannie has a League military background, grew up with a sixth sense for danger in unknown terrain on his home world of Ris.

Nelson watches the party assemble on his rezed images, thinking that he is watching a zoo-keeper in action. Dollie has the team assignments on display. Some change as the situation changes, others remain constant. The group then waits quietly playing games and rezing notes on the local MedCom.

After the usual shift turmoil, the crew and passengers adjust to a period of zero mass. For someone

experiencing it for the first time, it seems like an eternity which can cause space madness. Someone falling into jump hysteria can easily be spotted by an experienced crew member. They are trained to defocus and in almost every case adjust the neo to the illusion of time extension, Nelson adapts to the sensation of space jump better than any of the regular crew members. He watches the chaos reform quickly into order as ship and its crew adjust to the purposeful rift in the space and energy of the Kandox domain.

Halzee turns to Nema, the first officer on the ship, “An open system, without the circumference in place. Sensors will pick up an armed gun boat here and there. An open wild frontier Nema”. “I’ve never heard of two star ships actually engage in battle. In this case, as always, its the stationary objects, like planets and planetoids that are the vulnerable ones, without the circumference”. “I suppose you’re correct. Especially in this out sector”

The Ecostream entered the Kandox system well outside the primary gas giant. This gave Dollie about 30 minutes for her to ready her ground party to land on the surface of the fifth Kandox planet. Manie and Codie kid about claws in the sand and how they in eight years of League service they have never killed anything during a hunt. Dollie reminds her team that Kandox Five is largely unexplored, open and potentially dangerous. Manie and Codie wipe their kidding with a sober moniker. They pull their equipment together and are ready to go.

“Its a strange fact the the fifth planet is actually warmer than the primary in this system. It must be the reflection and concentration. “ Nema listens to Halzee while scanning the logs as they are visualized in front of her. The atmosphere is on the thin side, but the ground party should be able to adjust their thin suit and convert the the planet side atmosphere. Nema focuses on charts, looking for a likely ground team drop spot. “Its pretty much an icy desert with very few features in the terrain.” Halzee looks at the display on the fifth planets life form. “Able to move through the soil on this planet like some creatures can swim in water. It has an exotic metabolism, but in this environment, it works”. “An effects vehicle with the proper instrumentation should be able to track one, since they get pretty big”. Halzee is nodding his head as Nema shuffles through the visuals.

As the Ecostream moves up to a low orbit around Kandox Five, Dollie arms the pilot on the Effects Vehicle. No one will actually be flying the thing, but Dollie can override the native machine intelligence if she chooses. The effects vehicle already knows that it is tracking a sub surface life form and will fly accordingly. Mannie looks at the visual, “this planet is one deep crimson red.” “They all are like this in the Kandox System”. Codie joins the chat stream, “rich and soft, there’s a lot here that is hidden.”

The Effects Vehicle drops through the thin atmosphere, parts of it glowing as the heat conductors store the energy gathered during entry. “What’ this sand walker look like, any body know?” Codie says after looking at the picture of the creature in the display. “You’re looking at it mate... mostly exoskeleton, but able to generate its own heat. We’ll be looking for pieces of them. Odd creatures, seems the first in party thinks that they can reproduce from a left over chunk. Also the x-bio on that ship thought they could fuse with one creature absorbing another. Sorta a sand walker marriage if you will.” says Mannie as he goes into the first in party’s records for about the sixth time since departing from New Orn. Dollie adds “ This universe has slightly different basic laws. The hiccup is missing in the continuum that we are also used to.”

Time passes as the Effects Vehicle follows the pre-defined search pattern. Mannie is telling stories of Farmit cuisine. Dollie, being a strict vegetarian, is making sour faces, but doesn’t say much as Codie listens with a wry smile. Panels light up on the Effects Vehicle like a bush at a Porridge Festival. “We got one”. Immediately Codie releases several remotes that impact the surface of Kandox Five behind the sand walker. Dolly initiates an extrusion pattern from the remotes. “Let hope these work”.

The remotes created the illusion of a set of large moving objects underneath the sand behind the targeted sand crawler. The sand crawler made several evasive motions and then emerged on the freezing surface of Kandox Five. "There it is, Mannie. Give it the Damper." "You know Dollie, if these things turn up intelligent, they might be pretty pissed off at us" says Codie as he modifies the field as it associates to the creatures chemistry and metabolism. "Call an Ambassador" says Mannie in typical Mannie fashion. "It's stopped." The three away mission experts fixate on the controls. "By the Lights, what is this? Do we have damp?" "Yip. still damped." Dollie softly croaks the command "settle the vehicle in the sand just outside the damp".

"Run a scan on any life form in League space or Hum Fed Two space that commit suicide on any capturing behavior" Dollie now has a severe look after this real life query. Codie contradicts "It may not be what we think we are seeing". The three in the planet side party stare at the chunks of the walker in the frozen red hued sand. Codie rezes up a Vid: "OK, there are a number of lifeforms, especially water lifeforms that will tear themselves to shreds on captivity." "Time to pick up the pieces and take them home to Mama for further inspection." as Mannie looks to Dolly for the next move. "I read ya Mannie, quarantine in place down to the subatomic level."

The team exits the Effects Vehicle along with several mechanical assistants. Looking up into the sky of Kandox Five, the sky is clear as a mid-vacuum vista. The surface is a frozen fine dark red sand. The Red Sun dominates the sky and the shadows reflect a pale red brown as the team makes it's way to the flotsam of the sand traveling creature. Each section is carefully encased and sealed. The assistants, functioning as automata of the ships cybernetic system, carry each of the sections to a sealed lab on the Effects Vehicle, where the ships xeno-biologists go to work with their analysis.

Mannie, Codie and Dollie are the last to board the Effects Vehicle. Mannie turns and looks at the spectacular red desert and red primary in the sky, "They might get really pissed if we played a game of low grav ball out there." "Forget it Mannie, this is a deep space mission," as Dollie closed the door.

The flotsam and jetsam of the sand crawlers is slowly hauled in by the remotes, along with a substantial habitat of sand and ice, recreating a micro-environment of the Kandox Five desert on an entire aft deck in isolation. Dollie looks pensively at Codie and says "We've been studying the pieces of the creature. They are still mutating. We think they are calling out to each other on some very high and very low bandwidth, way beyond radio spread on the high and low end. It seems to be a very sophisticated form of communication, but non-intelligent in its operation." Codie responds "What Faces me is that the composition of the crawler is more flexible than duraplast. You are talking about a creature from a icy desert that has a hide that can take more bending and stress than the stuff that we make our star cruisers out of." "Yea, By the Lights. It's tough to log and make sense."

Alyson Nocera assembles the crew that will stay on Kandox Five. They agree not to try to capture any of the sand creatures, but will establish a permanent base on Kandox Five. Alyson and six engineers are tasked to establish a permanent base on the south pole of the planet.

The missions prime directive is to direct the automata to rez an underground complex. If serious problems present themselves while establishing and running the base, the construction party has an in-system shuttle they can fly to Kandox Prime. Within a two hundred days by League Time, they will be able to rez a small Scout craft capable of out system jumps using their own resources.

Halzee greets Alyson and the five engineers and wishes them complete success with their mission on the South Pole of Kandox Five. He watches the in-system shuttle with all the creational equipment departing from the Ecostream.

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Nema turns to Halzee, "Should we track, another one?" "Two measurements give you stereoscopic

vision Nema, but the second one stays on Kandox Five. I only want one quarantined. The second sortie will just be a wild hunt of sorts.

“Heads up Mannie, the Halzee wants a second team to track a sand crawler, no bringing it aboard, we just kiss it and make love”.

“Yea right Dollie. I think you and Cody have your hands full with the one in quarantine. Let's see, Nelson Bezlee, a newbie. But he's supposed to be talented or the Halz wouldn't have him here. We need a MedCom type. Tyroe Channel, yea, OK. Let's contact them. No planetfall excursions, just hug a sand crawler nice and safe from inside an Effects Vehicle.”

Tyroe Channel has learned to separate from the Doamer Mind, the We that he was familiar with in the League is now the *we* of deep space in the Kandox out sector. He had made the transition to the status of Mind Doamer, while controlling the terrible fear, pain and death that stalked many Mind Doamers. Maybe it was his intelligence and knowledge that spared him. He knew every detail of how the MedCom worked, even in remote mode where FTL message packets were sparse. Tyroe attached his instruments on the side of his uniform, straightened his pure dark grey hair, giving him an old home world look and headed to the briefing room.

Nelson looked at the Viz and responded quickly to the pictures and they rezed. “Let me get this straight, what we are to do is just chase down these buggers down get close to them and see what the do?” “That's pretty much it.” Dollie, replied. “Think of it as a game of SnettleTop, played with sand crawlers instead of snettles.” “I, see. Is the effects vehicle ready?” Tyroe leaned forward and asked, “does the vehicle have a name?” “Yea, not very exciting though, EV2.” “Its bad luck to fly an unnamed vehicle.”

After a long silence with both crew members absorbing all the data from under the surface of Kandox Five, Nelson breaks the impasse.

“Tyroe, you seem like a pensive crew member. Have any feelings out here in this different universe?”

“Fixating on the MedCom and the instrumentation, that's what I do best.”

“I feel almost a sense disproportion since we departed League space.”

“I feel somewhat detached out here, but part of my community.”

“If you don't mind me asking, but do you associate to the Galactic Doam?”

“Yes, they are my community, and I can read the lines. But here it doesn't change.”

“No new news?”

“Yea, no new news.”

“I have my own regime of the soul, and it seems to fit well with deep space travel, but I wondered, I have heard of turmoil in the Doam community. And wonder if it will cause impact on all the changes going on in the League.”

“There is some pain, but most of the Doamer community seems to be able to adjust.”

“Hey I think we got something Tyroe, about 3 meters below the surface, 30 degrees below horizon.”

“Yea its moving fast, for something lives under ground. How does it do that? Hold the Com Nelson and get us a close to it as you can.”

The Effects Vehicle is now about 10 meters off the flat cold surface following the tail of sand shooting out of the surface as the sand crawler changes course.

“AtellOrRee! that thing can sense we are following it.”

“Nelson, look at that. Its a second sand crawler”

“I see it Tyroe, I'm going to split the between the two directions they are traveling. This may be the first time anyone has tried to heard sand crawlers.”

“By the Lights, hold your course, they are converging.”

Tyroe and Nelson study the rez inside the effects vehicle, capturing every instance of the two sand crawlers movements.

“What happened to them?”

“They are gone.”

“No.”

“Look at the Com.”

“Pull the Vehicle closer.”

The effects vehicle stops at the precise coordinates where the sand crawlers disappeared. Tyroe and Nelson drill into that proximity as far as they can. No sand crawler can be sensed. Sensors fan out and drill deep. No sand creature can be found.

“What shows up?”

Nelson is pulling in the entire spectrum from the Com on the effects vehicle. All I have is an exceptionally hard substance on the Com.”

Tyroe resets the controls after a full Com absorption of the sequence. “Back to original pattern.”

“Pull it up, and lets do it again.”

Deep Space

“The best move is to send a torp probing in the tangent six positions of jump-space in this sector.”

Halzee slowly nods his head and completes Nema sentence ...

“and have them emit a full capacity Com according to the capabilities of each torp.”

“It's the correct move Halz'. The sand crawlers have a generic point that is as dense as Duraplast. The signature from Nelsons and Tyroes Com verifies the effect in its natural state. The pieces that have recombined into balanced geometric shape in quarantine produce the same effect, though not as stable as those presented by Tyroe on the surface.”

“Any change in the status from Alyson and the engineering crew on the South Pole.”

“No, from their reports once in a while they might sense a sand crawler in the vicinity, but the creatures seem to go their way ignoring the complex under construction.”

“Get Dollie to coordinate the Com modules for the probes. And Tyroe to do second iteration, he is really good at that, I've reviewed his record with Com back in the League.”

Nema now moves away from Halzee to prepare for more mundane tasks on the ship she that she is

responsible for.

“Crew on the Com, take the EcoStream four diams from the last gas giant. Prepare for the launch of slip space torps, full spread into 2-4 space coordinates.”

The Tyroe, Nelson, Dollie, Mannie and Codie are working with the recovered parts of the sand crawler in quarantine. Dollie concentrates on the xeno-biological processes. Mannie coordinates what is being done, and makes sure the Com rendering of their investigation is easy to scan. Nelson is determining where the ultimate residency of the life form should be. Right now he is recommending that they return it to the fifth planet in the Kandox system when they are finished.

“Nice idea, Nelson. What if it rejects the environment on its home planet.”

Mannie throws that in, playing the role of a Farmit pessimist.

“We need a little negation Mannie, but catch this. The chief is sending torps in jump space one jump coordinate in each direction, looking for the small-space, macro atomic and sub-atomic signature of what we are seeing in this quarantine.”

Nelson, reacts to this news with severe introversion. Tyroe also reacts to the news. He pushes a connect to the *we-us* on the next torp to New Orn.

Mannie, laughs.

“How about a game of long-shot gamblers. Did we get any signature of this life form before we arrived and left the fifth planet?”

Dollie wraps it.

“Nothing, no signature before or after planetfall. You got the corner Mannie.”

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Six hours before the torps returned, Nelson is on his shift. For two days the sand crawler continues to be a collection of moving pieces in a quarantined pen. Now some thing unexpected happens. The pieces start to dissipate and merge into the cold sand imported from the fifth planet.

“Dollie, Nelson. Somethings happening with the Kandoxian crawler. It just melted and spread itself into the sand from it's home planet. I'll let the chief know.”

Within two minutes the entire planet fall crew is in the quarantine area.

“Ok, I see the spread.”

“We all see it Dollie. It's spread itself through out the quarantine taking the shape of the container. There is a thin veneer of sand crawler covering the entire shape, right down to the duraplast bottom. Amazing.”

“We have the entire process on the Com.”

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Halzee pours over the each and every aspect of the sand crawler. Halzee and Nema look at each other with quizzical expressions on both of their faces.

“Make sure we have the quarantine tight in every dimension we know of.”

“Right, chief. The strange effects of the sand crawlers is causing quite a ripple in the crew. I heard that even one crew member sent a message back to New Sotia that we have discovered magic crabs on the fifth planet of the system. Can't blame'm though. It was in a dream.”

“Any results from the probe torps yet. It's been our experience so far that each out space dimension that we find has some tweaks in the natural process we usually refer to as continuum physics.”

“Well, chief, these deep space missions are not for the meek. We don't know what we are going to run into. We know the Badges exist and that they have a much better command of out space than we do. We just don't run into them very often.”

The thought of the Badges makes Halzee shudder. There are only three or four documented instances of the League encountering the alien species. They are technically advanced. When encountered they only communicate a few concepts and depart. They are vaguely manmaloid, or that's the appearance they would like to present. They are about two thirds the size of an adult human and covered with a soft brown fur often with white stripes. That is the League's accrued knowledge on the Badges.

“Nema, do you think maybe dynamic effects of the sand crawlers are somehow related Badge effects?”

“It's a remote possibility, but I think these guys are home grown.”

“Chief, how did the team play out? This was their first mission together.”

“Dolly has a good track record for in system missions, she has focused their interests. Nelson, is the mythic type with his constant quite mulling and Doamer background. Mannie makes sure that the accountability and audit trail is in order.”

“Do think that the Doamer affiliation will ultimately cause problems chief?”

“I think it will help. There has been a lot of turmoil in the Doamer Church in the last few years. It gives Nelson some extra incentive to solve some of the riddles out here.”

“How so chief?”

“Doamers can have an over active imagination given all the memories they plug into from their deceased members from the past. We need that imagination and energy out here if we find anything.”

“Maybe, but Nelson seems just the opposite to me. If anything, he can turn off his imagination and voluntarily go catatonic. But I must admit, he has really put in extra effort analyzing the sand crawlers”

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Dollie pours over two weeks of log captured and edited by Mannie. The sand crawler has disassociated and recombined three times during the two week period. Codie, Mannie and even Nelson have tried to come up with a local recronimation. They come close, but have yet to come up with a replication of the exoskeleton material of the sand crawlers. The act of isolating the sand crawlers and returning to the League Sector would bring a quantity of status commodity to the next Reinvention Convention. And this would make Halzee a happy starship leader Dollie tells herself. Hour 22:00 some more information comes in.

While continuing the analysis of the Kandox crawler, launch personnel have been systematically sending probes to the nearby systems in Kandox sector jump space.

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“Chief, when I'm completely still sitting in the lab, and devoid of any focus on the sand crawler, I can feel a subconscious force. It is not intelligent, but almost like a hypnotic broadcast. Working there has become a great place to daydream.”

“Are you sure your not having a Doamer experience Nelson?”

“No chief. This is subtle and has nothing to do with my meditations.”

“We are going to be collecting all our probe torps and then make the jump to a nearby hot yellow star system. While in transit and when we arrive, continue the work with the quarantined sand crawler. Obviously we now plan to keep it with us when we return to League space.”

“Chief, I think we are on a grand adventure.”

“I hope so Nelson. That would be some nice commodity for this ship and it's crew at the next Reinvention Convention.”

“Any word from the Bylosian Protectorate on the proper care of alien life forms?”

“Good point Nelson. Nema issued a report directly to the Bylosian system. We haven't heard back. They deal more with creatures from League Space. Aliens with exotic physiological structures are not so much in their domain, though we don't want to loose status by ignoring them and getting a bad report.”

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The Ecostream appears in normal space about 15 astronomical from a hot yellow star system designated Alnex 18. Closer to the star are planetoids, all small and without atmosphere. Farther out is a giant disc of methane, water crystals mixed with fine heavier elements. The Alnex 18 system did not have the abundance of hydro-carbons that the Kandox system does, but has a couple more magnitudes of energy from the bright yellow sun. The Ecostream took an orbit around the primary outside the massive disc.

Mannie lays back after the jump into Alnex 18, taking a 6 hour break from work in the quarantine lab and starts catching up on Sport in the Risian system where he grew up. He competed in the Chase not long ago before he gained his election in the League. The Chase starts in the mountain complex of Koob in the Koblan Mountains. The winds blow warm up the Koblan valley from the plains below. The large, orange Risian sun shines behind the Green trees blowing back and forth at the First Corner, where the players start.

Mannie looks to his right and then his left. There are several dozen opponents to his left and a score to his right. The mountains sides, the opponents and the referees are all part of the part of the playing field. Chase is a game of caroming off the sides of things as you pass the corners. While you do this caroming, you need to control your base. The flash goes off signaling the start of the race. Mannie surges forward attempting to get maximum spin to get a good carom off the icy peak in the Koblan. The low whining of the bases of all the racers make an eerie low humming that drones in unison like spiritual chant. The ice particles spray off the peak rendering a chromatic image of the light coming from the orange Risian sun. Everything smells sharp and clear. The competition barrels down KeepAlong Canyon once past the Koblan. He can see the finish line of the towering peaks of IceWind Mountain.

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“You know chief, this is interesting. We are getting a common story from the crew members working with the sand crawler. The subject came up by accident, but now I think it's noteworthy.”

“Ok Nema, I've heard some stories about visions and the like? Deep space missions can cause some illusions after a number of days, but for the most part we have a experienced crew, so why the fuss First Mate?”

“Normally, a few visions make the trip worth while. Here's what I'm picking up from the original ground crew and still adding to it. Dollie gives me a detailed description of being on Ground 3, her original home world, she gives a description of organizing a museum area in one of the ancient

sections, called NoTilzen. This description includes the exact replicas of ancient boats using carbon fuels. Each boat is described in exact detail. And with each boat, there is a crew and coordinator, you know how well Dollie organizes her work, well this dream sequence reflects her ability to organize.”

“This doesn't mean she is having some kind of pathological illusion in deep space. I dream from time to time about the best of all possible conventions. There's nothing wrong with a nice deep space fantasy. Don't you agree Nema?”

“In other circumstances, chief, yes. I have over 40 pages notes from Dollie alone. The dreams and illusions are sequential from nap to nap, sleep to sleep. Where one detailed dream ends, the next one exactly starts.”

“How about Codie and Nelson? Any dream stories from them?”

“Chief, Nelson claims nothing deep dark sleep, but Codie has his own sequence. He told me about a vision he would dream each nap starting with a small, fast explorer ship and ending up on the ice balls he loves to explore.”

“That's three out of four.”

“Yea chief, three out of four.”

Halzee directs the Ecostream from Alnex-18 and its warm yellow sun, to Tempar 11, a system with a hot white star with space dust and planetoids. The Ecosream navigates to an out side orbit . There is reconomation going on, that is a standard operating procedure in a hot star system. In each system the Ecostream enters, probe torps are sent out into neighboring systems and collected. After refreshing energy to a maximum capacity, the Ecostream enters deeper into the Kandox sector along the u and v coordinates to a system with a cool orange star, that the crew names by consensus, Kandox Minor. The planet side crew continues to work with the sand crawler from Kandox-Five and continues with their imaginary adventures during their naps. Towards the end of the stop at now named Kandox Minor, one of the probe torps returns with some unusual data.

“You are sure Dollie? “

“Absolutely captain, Codie triple checked it against the sand crawler. The signature is virtually the same as the sand crawler, flux across a large spectrum, what the probe torp caught might as well be from what we have in quarantine. “

Halzee looked that the signatures and the originating coordinates and without hesitation put the crew all to operating level orange. Remaining uncollected torps would converge with a designated master and catch the Ecostream. An all hands message went out from Halzee.

“Exiting into the next point in transpace, two minutes, prepare.”

A transpace slip surprised the crew, but they were ready. The coordinates set by the prob torp led the Ecostream to a number of parsecs outside a system with a glittering orange star. Immediately more probes were dispatched in a maximum Kandox transpace radius.

Nema looked at Halzee, and nodded her head.

“Its the origin, and we are detecting more with the same signature. “

The strange strand of small space atomic formations rezed up on the vid. Nema and Halzee circled it. There are some slight variations from the Kandox crawler, but its basically the small space set.

“This is odd.”

Nema gave Halzee a quizzical look and then continued.

“The signature is starts here and ends here. Its as if something appeared in an orbit around the orange primary stayed in orbit a while and then disappeared again.”

* * *

Nelson Beezlee examines the records of the his peers that engage in regular contact with the sand crawler. The dreams are all well inscribed and voluntarily documented, each a story with each individual dream a chapter. “ I wonder why I haven' t had the dreams” Nelson thinks to himself. “I wonder if my meditation somehow causes a lack of dreams. “ Nelson hasn't attempted a deliberate thin veneer of meditation during sleep after daily analysis of the Kandox crawler. Later, after his turn going through quarantine and exiting the xeno-lab portion of the ship, Nelson stopped to talks to fellow crew members in the Black Room Lounge and then returned to his quarters. Normally he had no trouble falling a sleep, but this time there was a slight edge that kept him him awake.

* * *

“Yes, I did have a dream, a dream of suspended animation. A slow sequence of still pictures as I created new laws at Reinvention Convention. It lasted what seemed like an eternity, maybe a dream under drugs. Except there weren't any. No, I started a sequence, but I removed it. “

Dollie looked at Nelson, wagging her head back and forth.

“I've started writing mine into an offline. It's a complete story. All I have to do is rez into the offline when I first wakeup. Maybe we have the muse of all muses in quarantine.”

“You heard the latest news from Nema and the skipper? They found a signature measured by one of the probes, that closely matches that of the sand crawler.”

“By the Lights!”

“Yes, By the Lights. Check the data yourself.”

* * *

“Prepare to head into trans-space coordinates measured from the probe torp”

“Got it exactly Nema. Are we ready, all hands?”

“They have been warned. Go.”

Nelson settled back into a meditation. He liked it best when in a transfer between normal and transition space. It's easier to spread yourself when you have zero mass. Nelson returns to the slow motion court of his last dream. It has become a mental exercise. Nelson vaguely saw the orange star on the Rez.

“I guess this is where we find our signature of the unknown ...”

* * *

“Has the sand crawler continues to disassociate, take the shape of the container, reshape and disassociate again. It seems to care less if we found its footprint left behind by something in this system.”

Mannie twitches and little and responds in his local accent.

“All I have to say Codie, is that working with it has vaulted me to the status of a story teller. People back in League Space are asking for the reports now. The tales of the Kandox Out Sector Dreamers has a following.”

“We follow the sand crawler and they follow us. We are in an out space ... “

At that point an message alarm, both visual and audible breaks into the containment area. Dollie and

her entire xeno-crew are requested to go through decontamination and meet with the chief and his command crews in 30 minutes.

Dollie looks at the xeno-crew.

“Now what?”

Within in minutes the Ecostream departed and headed towards the system where the torp had detected the signature, It was another system typical of a hydrogen rich orange star, not unlike the one where the sand creatures were discovered in Kandox. It took a couple days to gather all the probes and dispatch them in random directions in trans space. Halzee became very active. Nema could tell.

All the trans-space navigation for the Ecostream is controlled by Olma Brizbee and her cybernetic systems. There are several things you can't do through trans-space yet, one is direct point-to-point communications, other than through small message carriers with jump capabilities. The other is no weapon systems can be launched through trans-space, unless you send some kind of object. No League technology has been able to create an energy beam with zero mass. The new data collected around the primary of the orange star showed two things. The first was the signature that explorer torp had found. That was was already in the hands of the crew that was dealing with the sand crawler. But the second is what made the lights pop in Olma. The area in which the signature had been detected also had the residual signature of a very large star cruiser.

Pursuit

The entire crew is online with Halzee in an all hands meeting. He seemed calm, but anxious. Nema was shuffling through notes and pictures on the viz. The statistics had already been gathered from the signatures and what they have is a graphic of a ship the size of a large asteroid. The ship seems to be at least 100 kilometers in one dimension. The other dimensions are not known. Halzee puts them on the rez without talking. Finally he speaks.

“We've never seen anything like this. Our xenology crew has been on top of observable phenomenon since capturing the creature from the 5th planet in the Kandox system. And now we have found the same phenomenon measured in a very large unknown star ship. I want everyone too know that it is now my intention to track this large ship, observe it and report back to the League science foundations with the results. That's it. That's all I wanted to say. Any questions?”

(Nema repeats the questions, Halzee gives the answers)

“a question blinks in from area recron Y”

“Do we have any idea where the origin of a ship of this size is?”

“Negative, the only record we have of ships this size are from HumFed2 history, Famlee ships, which make those part of our culture.”

“a question from game fun A”

“Any indication of how fast the ship moves into trans space coordinates?”

“Negative, we won't know that until we track it as least one or two moves.”

From here there is a prolong period of silence.

“ I wanted everyone to know at once the changing nature of the mission, and am asking you for answers, as the data comes in.”

Nema looks intensely at Halzee and whispers softly. “ I think we have ourselves ... we are in a for a good one this time.”

After about 37 hours, Olma got the data first from the tracking torps. “We'll it's not trying to hide from anybody. It's a short traverse into transpace from its last signature. Virtually the same as we picked up in this system. The only difference is that the torp found the signature in deep space. The ship evidently had no attention of entering a system. It looks like it traveled that far in trans-space and that's it.”

* * *

“A jump into deep space between stars systems? I know that sounds odd, but I want to see what this thing is.”

“ So do I”

Visuals for transpace mapping are always in two dimensions. Both Nema and Halzee stare at the grid they are entering. They put their arms around each other. Its rare to for two League officers show any kind of affection, but somehow this reach into out space drew them together for this moment .

“Back to work, prepare to collect the probe torps, and scatter them in the next pattern.”

Halzee seemed to enjoy Nemas momentary affection and then smiled while fixating on the pattern in the transpace map. The sensation zero weight passed as the Ecostream slipped into trans space coordinates in between star systems.

Olma read out the coordinates in three dimensional space. “ Maximum gees until we intercept, field effects at full strength for the Ecostream.”

The star cruiser Ecostream streaked towards it's target in operation state orange in the darkness of open space. The signature of the dynamic durable substance was clear and present.

“We are picking up the ship on scan. It's the shape of a huge cigar. Yea on the cursory, its got the standard duraplast scan, but it's also leaving a nice clean trail of that exotic stuff we have in the quarantine area. Yea we have an accurate reading of how big it is. A little over 18 kilometers long, 5 kilometers maximum radial axis. Surface color is a mucky gray-purple reflect. Are you catching all this chief?”

“By the Lights, yes. Have we picked up any kind of communications?”

“None, Nema, it's as silent as deep space itself.”

“Intercept, chief?”

“Yes, lay a course using standard effects yellow.”

The Ecostream pulls twenty Gees and within an hour is within a hundred kloms of of the massive ship. The Ecostream is now in operation state yellow. As the Ecostream closes, the crew puts it into operation state blue, maximum scan and slowly circles the massive vessel. There are no lines, no external features, until reaching the extreme fore end, and there is a singe massive landing bay. Nothing is in the bay.

“Anything Nema?”

“Nothing chief. I would swear it's a ghost ship.”

* * *

“This could be dangerous Dollie, what if this massive ship makes another leap into trans space while we are in the landing bay?”

“Well chief, I guess we would go along for the ride and if it's alright with you, could you come get us?”

“Of the xeno crew, who has volunteered?”

“Most of those on the Kadox Five mission, Mannie, Nelson and myself, plus Tyroe Channel, an experienced engineer. This is the kind of mission I dream of.”

“Meet in the launch bay in 30 minutes, complete out space survival and and be ready.”

Dollie, Mannie, Tyroe and Nelson move quickly through the corridors of the EcoStream, lifts taking them vertically and horizontally through the passages of the ship. The EcoStream is not a small ship by League standards but not large either. It does take a few minutes to traverse from the quarantine area, to a sub atomic scrub and on to the system of the ships corridors. As the xenology crew makes its way, they rezed a display of the immense ship they were approaching. The landing bay is a good two kloms wide, enough to hold the EcoStream itself. In deep space with only the distant light of near by stars, the giant ship has a deep purple tinge to what looks like a duraplast hull.

* * *

“How many probes are in the landing bay Nema?”

“Forty six, eighty percent of the probes currently rezed on the ship. They have scanned the entrance inside the landing bay. It is a clear hard membrane made of almost the same material as the sand creature from Kadox Five. “

“Weapon systems?”

“None detected Nema.”

Halzee and Nema are waiting in the launch bay along with Codie and ten other ship side supporting crew members. The walls of the launch bay are a bright gray with a common graphic of the massive ship where all could see it. The Viz changes and change projection so each crew member read the viz. Dollie looks excited and rightfully so. This experience is what they all have been training for years. Mannie seems particularly excited. The probe craft is only about ten meters long, and for a probe craft, it is one of our largest. The probe craft system can initiate a vector into trans-space, if necessary, but it has been engineered to protect the crew, as long as they are inside the perimeter. As the exo-crew enters EcoStream's probe craft, a number crew members remaining on the mother ship slap the hands of Dollie, Mannie, Nelson, and Tyroe. The four exo-crew members enter the probe and settle in at the controls. Codie and Nelson look at what resources they have in the event they need a recronimation to build something on the fly in case contact is lost with the EcoStream.

The trip to the gigantic mystery ships landing bay completes with no incident. Olma and her support staff along with Nema and her command staff are overseeing the relaying of the data into a message torp soon to be bound for the Kadox system on the border of Kadox space and League space. Olma looks calmly at Nema and asks about the creature from Kadox Five.

“Now that the exo-crew is probing the mystery ship, who is monitoring the sand crawler in quarantine?”

“The chief himself, Codie and a new support staff drawn from new quarters, some of them this their first trip.”

“Interesting, has Halzee spoke of any serialized story dreams like the exo-crew was always talking about?”

“Not yet, we'll see.”

* * *

As the probe approaches the membrane inside the massive landing bay, it is now apparent, that the membrane is emitting a faint lucent shade of violet-blue light. Dollie focuses intensely on the rezed instrumentation, while Mannie, Tyroe and Nelson get a reconimation so there is a corridor from the probe to the massive membrane. The probe looks like a spec planet against a giant blue star

“Dollie, I'm getting a signature through the membrane, on the other side is duraplast, we expected that. We are also getting an intense reading of the variant found in the creature from Kandox Five along with the clear signature of a breathable atmosphere.”

“Check the breathable atmosphere against all known inhabitable systems.”

“Lights!, that makes no sense. The closest signature is a HumFed Two out system.”

“If you want my opinion, this whole thing reeks of Badger.”

“Maybe, but contact with them is very rare and they seem to avoid the League and the Second Human Federation at almost all costs.”

Anyone can assume the leader role on a League star ship. And the probe is no different. Dollie with her nervous movements, right now a uncoordinated female, doesn't seem like the kind of person to lead an exo-team. But she is. Dollie doesn't miss a thing. She keeps it organized, first in her own mind, then what she can rez as she moves the corridors of an out space probe.

“Mannie, is the recron done that connects out probe to the membrane?”

“Got it Dollie. Put on your skin suits and lets go. The machine intelligence can run the probe. Let's go.”

Dollie in the lead, with Mannie, Tyroe and Nelson following make their way down the structure leading from the probe to the massive ships membrane portal. They stop in front of the membrane, a massive bulging structure, as big as the EcoStream itself. To the naked eye, the membrane is not flat, but has a curve to it, like it is a huge eye, lacking a pupil. Before entering the membrane, the exo- team had made a decision to enter all at the same time. It is an all or nothing strategy. The tracking is left to the units on the probe and the subsequent monitoring of the four team members. Dollie started in her dominant yet subtle way.

“on the count down from five ... ready?”

She got affirmative from Nelson, Tyroe and Mannie.

“five ... four ... three... two... one ...”

Core

Dollie looks out over the bay at the Onot museum complex for ancient ships. The sea breeze is blowing at a moderate pace. The warm Growthresian sun is up presenting a perfect day to be outside. Two of the ancient ships, completely reconstructed and maintained are at the docks in front of her. Dollie sees the organizer of the museum down the dock coming towards her.

“But I'm not here! “ I had just passed into the membrane of the huge ship we were tracking. “This is illusion”.

But she can still see organizer, Ja Nala, approaching . She holds her breath in attempt to wake from a dream. By the time Ja arrives she is panting and gasping, and red in the face.

“Dollie, are we surprised to see you, we didn't expect to see you back from your deep space mission for months Growthresian time. Are you alright? You seemed about to choke.”

“Ja, this may sound crazy, but I don't believe I'm here.”

“How is that Dollie, how can you not be here?”

“One moment ago, I was leading an out ship expedition to a huge unidentified star ship and the next minute I'm here.”

“Sounds exciting. But how is that possible?”

“I don't know, Ja. As far as I'm concerned, I'm talking to a ghost.”

“Dollie, trips to deep space out systems can play tricks on you, you are here on Ground 3 as part of the museum staff as planed at the last re-invention convention.”

“Ja, you mind if I rez up the MedCom.”

“Sure Dollie, we can wait.”

The MedCom rezes up as always and Dollie is immediately able to drill down on the status of Ecostream's mission. “Pursuing a huge ship in the out-sector ...” It's reflects the status of the last message torp we sent. Everything is as it should be, except I'm here instead of there ...

“Are you alright? Do need some time off before you start on our project?”

* * *

Mannie looks around and he's on TreeKoj.

“No, this is wrong. I just entered a portal to a huge star ship in the out sector.”

The planetoid with enough native elements to rez micro terraforming. He closes his eyes and tries to contact Dollie via the MedCom. He sets the response to local proxy.

“Ok, will anyone respond?”

The voice and then the picture of Jinaze rezes up.

“Mannie, you are here, I thought you wouldn't arrive for weeks, I went into a slow sleep so we could meet here.”

“Jinaze! Where are you?”

“On the other side of the planetoid like we planned. It's hard to get away doing as many activities as we like to do. I've made a beautiful dome where we can watch the hot yellow-white star from a distance.”

“Jinaze, is that really you?”

“Are you alright Mannie? come to the dome and we can talk. I'll pick you in a few minutes, I rezed a small effects vehicle.”

Mannie, walks in a circle, in the containment where he found himself. “I just stepped into a giant ...”

“You stepped into a giant what?” Jinaze just stepped through the containment.

“you're here, that was fast!”

“I have rezed a fast effects vehicle, I've been practicing Mannie.”

“Jinaze, listen to me. Moments ago I was on a deep space mission in the out sector and now I'm here with you. How do I explain that to myself?

“Mannie, trips to deep space out systems can play tricks on you. I've read about it on the MedCom. What matter is that I've really missed you.”

After some very affectionate kisses both of them were making love furiously on the containment floor. Mannie looks at Jinaze, holds her and can smell the sexual liquids after the love making. He holds her a long time. Finally she says, "Mannie, want to see the doam I rezed?"

"Sure." And they get into the effects vehicle, Mannie is still thinking "this is all wrong" ...

Mannies reflexes don't flinch. His race caroms off ice sheet and slides along on the speeder. But ... No time to think. The reflexes take over again. He caroms off another cliff and an ice sheet. And another cliff and another ice sheet. The fast speeder, but how ... ? The reflexes take over again. An open plain full throttle ...

Tyroe is surrounded by voices in the Doam-Mind, the voices that know pain.

Nelson looks at the medcom focusing on the starship engineering sequences in cascade mode, no. Stop. He goes completely still. Engineering fades to blank. Memories go away, he completely shuts down all knowledge memories. Slowly Nelson comes out of null meditation and finds himself near a clear corridor of material. Inside he can see Dollie and Mannie alive and making motions while suspended inside the glassy clear material. Where is Katoh? Dollie and Mannie are moving around and talking, but no sound can be heard from where Nelson stands. Mannie and Dollie seem to have no awareness of each other, each preoccupied with some task while in suspension. Now some of Nelson's lawyer instincts take over. "What are the common law directives in this situation, crew member directives?" Nelson attempts to communicate with the *Ecostream*. Nothing. The field effects and mass of the gigantic strange ship block the transmission to the shuttle craft. "Should I try to rescue them? But it seems that the only way to pull them out is to go in, and I cannot focus on them while in meditation. All the timing is working on his instrumentation, so he marks the time relative to the internal time of the *Ecostream*. He has only been here ten minutes. He looks around three hundred and sixty degrees surveying the situation. There is a spherical bay here about fifty meters in radius. He is not floating in free-fall space. An effects force of an unknown type is keeping him on the duraplast floor. There are corridors leading off in every direction. The corridors range from about three to five meters diameter. Each corridor is completely spherical. The light source right now is a soft yellow-orange. The smell is soft and slightly citric.

After examining the immediate surroundings of the immense ship, Nelson again turns his attention to his four out-system crew members. Each is still moving and breathing. He strains to see the expression on their faces as he stares into the clear suspension. He magnifies the viz. They each seem to have a either an active or pleasant expression on their face. He is so focused he does not sense those behind him until they are almost on him.

* * *

"No communication! Neema, try the tightest beam we can cast without destroying things."

Neema and Olma rez a session building an aggregation of all the communication systems on the *Ecostream*. Focused mixed bandwidth energy drives a signal to the *Ecostream*'s probe craft. The probe responds but none of the crew members.

"The on-board says the entire crew entered the portal of the giant ship. No communications have been received since."

"What's the last rez-con we have Neema?"

"I'll rez it up right now."

Neema, Olma and Halzee looks at the images marshaled from the probe which emits "Each crew member is coated with a protective suit, and one by one they fade into a blue light the is that portal to

the giant ship”.

Halzee ponders the images and what audible there is for some time. He smiles at Olma and looks at Nema and asks her to take this bridge while he joins the new xeno-life form analysis crew. He descends through several sections of the *Ecostream*. Each section is a like a smaller ship, all put together to make a large ship. Each section takes on the culture of a smaller ship. Halzee stops from time to time to poll the technical staff that tweeks and fusses with the Balonium Drive, and then with the staff that manufacturers, releases and gathers the hundreds of probes that are a microscopic version of a starship. Then he visits League Barristers and Social Dynamicists in charge of sending the status back to New Orn where they initiated the deep space voyage, and monitoring crew interactions. Finally Halzee reached the quarantined section where backup xenon-lifeforms managers have the sand creature from Kandox Five.

The crew working with the creature from Kandox Five didn't have differentiating information. It was a careful audit of what the creature did. Halzee entered the clean duraplast container section that was the creatures new home. The walls were glistening as he walked through the complex. The micro bio-defense systems had swept him clean and now he was in the aliens quarters. He looked at first science officer in charge, a man from New Orn that he had been introduced one time before. He wore the silver sleeves of a biologist with the marks of a seasoned League Barrister.

“Any change in the behavior since our approach to the massive outsider ship?”

“No, not in the slightest. It divides and recombines. Each pattern is different. But it always reunites. The weird part you know about. When you are down here in the proximity of the creature, it affects your sleep. Each person on this crew is experiencing the equivalent of a personal novel. “

“ I see. I think I want to remain here with the back up xenon-crew for a period, I want to feel one of these novels for myself. “

Halzee rezes the com to the current bridge configuration.

“Nema, Halzee here. Take the Ecostream as close to the outsider ship as you can safely get it. We know it has trans-space capability, so be careful. “

“Right, got it Halz.”

Nemas face fades from the rez. Halzee takes a comfortable seat and stares in the creatures domain. “ So what do you know about my xeno team, and where are they?”

“Are you speaking to us Halz?”

“Oh maybe, but more to the Kandox crawler creature in quarantine.”

“You get used to it, but it does seem to effect you. Try a nap.”

“Why not, it seems the way that it communicates.”

“Halz, this is Nema, who you talking to?”

“Crew in the quarantine lab.”

“Really?”

“Halz, switch over.”

“Sure. I can sense them now. They are embedded in another consciousness. Alive. Safe. But not present. “

The giant ship is now clearly in Halzee's vision. It has but a few gateways that one can enter to the

inside. He can see his Xeno crew entering and the pleasant looks on their faces enter into a world of their own making. Halzee is trying to get into that domain, but can't move, there is something holding him back? There is a blue light. He is still trying to move towards the blue light. Suddenly there is jolt and shaking.

"Spacer Halz, wake up!" it was one of the technicians in the quarantine area. Halzee stumbles, eyes wide open, but disoriented.

"Nema is on the line for you."

"Nema here, the giant ship just made a shift, and jolted the Ecostream, checking damage now."

"Coming to the control area."

Halzee made his way back to his bridge. This time without stopping at the various regions of the ship. The images of nap, which did not seem like a nap, fresh in his mind. A plan of action is forming in Halzee's mind.

"Nema, rez up all the probes we can emit, save those for a special automation, to send inside the ship."

Halzee brings up an local net driven automation with max probe and communication intelligence and gets the plans in the resolution pipeline.

"Halz, do you think that this automation can get inside where the xeno crew couldn't?"

"We don't know how far the xeno crew got, Nema. But I think it's worth a shot."

Halzee excused himself into his quarters and left Nema and Olmo on the com. His thoughts were rapid and direct as he lay face down in his mattie. Where could the ship come from? Why did it have the signature of sand creatures? How could he be visualizing the xeno crew?

* * *

Nema and Olmo look at each other. Then they prepare a saturation spread that might set a record. "short escapes, and all that we can muster". The probe torps have visual signature of the Ecostream with a thousand different whiskers of energy disappearing into a destination. Halzee sleeps for almost ten hours, and the first thing he does is record all his dreams in an off-line. The dreams start where the last one left off. The blue light is a gateway, He is looking past the gateway into events of the Second Federation. None of the events have been recorded. The lime green uniforms. Where did they come from? He has the last distinct image of directing the remnants of Second Federation. They are looking at him waiting for the next instruction. Halzee finishes the offline. "Best check out the *Ecostream*." Halzee starts walking and visiting each district on the ship. This level of intensity on the command region continues for several hours, until interrupted with a new positive identification of the gigantic mother ship. Nema asks Olmo if anything has come back on the giant ship from the league and it's massive knowledge net. "Nothing Nema." Halzee prepares for a shift as soon as the coordinates are set.

"Is the Probe ready to send in?"

"Yes, the reconimation was done hours ago in the engineering region."

Olmo locks the position and speed of the giant ship and looks up at Nema.

"They aren't shifting to systems, just a small series of shifts remapped to deep space in this sector."

"No wonder it took a while for the probes to find it. Do we have any kind of pattern to the shifts?"

"Not yet, we only have two points in shift space"

Halzee listens to the two spacers having this conversation with an uncharacteristic worried look on his

face. Turning away, “When do we get a close approach?” Olmo mods the rez and looks at Halzee; “We'll be in position in about 20 minutes.”

“Good. I’m going over the probe again. This should work, I can feel it.” Olmo gives Nema a sly look, but she to is wanting to see if the probe can get in.

The Ecostream moves closer to the portal on the gigantic ship than the last encounter. If it slips to its next destination, the damage to the Ecostream could be severe. The engineering rezed automation slips away from Ecosream and enters the portal. Nema looks at Halzee and suggests in a nervous voice, her stomach churning with anxiety, “We should back off now Halz ...”

“Halzee twitches and pleads for a few more minutes of close contact. “Anything from the probe?” Both Nema and Olmo declare in unison “Nothing since it entered blue light”.

Eventually Halzee bends to his officers and the Ecostream moves to a safer distance.

Internal

Nelson turns quickly after hearing a soft footfall. There is a corridor leading from the clear closure where Nelsons associates are suspended. Directly in front of him is a child, what looks to be a young female dressed in drab clothing, flanked by two android entities made of the same material as the corridor. The units have obvious sensory organs of some form, and are completely mobile. What look to be eyes, Nelson sees countless reflections of himself.

“Hello. My name is Nelson, what is yours and who are your friends?”

The young child says “Pah”, but not to Nelson, but to the android figure on her left. <WE..THEM> “Ennnnn” . Several times the android figure says “Ennnnn” to the child. The child retorts with “Pah”. The android on the right of the child rezes a small little latrine and somewhat uncerimoniously pushes the little girl onto the latrine. “Ahhhhh”. <WE..THEM> “Ahhhhh”. <WE..THEM>. The child poops in the potty and to Nelsons amazement, the android washes the child's bottom, while the child squeals and let's the child loose, all clean and ready to go again. The child then pokes Nelson in the knee and says “hoo doo”. <WE Ennnnn>. The androids depart and leave the child staring at Nelson.

“Pah”.

“No I'm not the Pah.”

Nelson points to him self and says “N e l s o n”,

The child stares at Nelson for quite some time and the child finally says “me”.

“Yes, you”

The child then squeals with delight and runs down the hall and disappears around the corner. The walls and the corridor leading off the bay area where Nelson is standing are all evenly lit, all with the same soft yellow-white light, with the light source emitting equally from the floor, ceiling and sides of the corridor. Nelson decides to follow the child, but to return regularly to this bay to check on the status of the suspended crew members. He is about to look to his left, when two more children run by. What he sees stuns him. The circular levels in this mother ship extend as far as the eye can see, Each one slightly smaller than the previous one. They descend as far as the eye can see, until so far away they are blue fuzz of an atmosphere descending into unknown sea of clouds. There are thousands of children and hundreds androids attending them, as far as the eye can see. There are no plants, only the massive spiral of living quarters of this massive ship. Nelson checks his offline and rezes the architecture of a Famlee ship. Similar, but Famlee ships were true mother ships, from an era where slips through out

space sectors were unknown. There are still some out there. The Famlee ship was a micro planetoid, with entire environment attached at some point in time to a gravity well that was home base, known as a Feelz. No, this is a massive out space vessel evidently packed with androids speaking a familiar dialect and young children marginally potty trained.

While gawking at the interior of the ship, the child previously encountered, slowly walks up and pokes him in the side of his leg. "Pah?"

Nelson jumps, but regains his focus. Again he repeats slowly "N e l s o n" and points to himself. "N e l s o n" the child slowly says. Nelson points to the child and says "you?" and the child repeats "Pah?" This circular conversation repeats several times, when the child finally points to herself and says "We". Shortly after that a number of children start to notice Nelson. In turn, two more come up to him, a young boy and young girl who point at Nelson and say "Pah?" The conversation that Nelson had with "We" now repeats with the second and third child with them also finally identifying themselves as "We".

On the level that Nelson is standing are a number of androids moving among the children. They seem to be herding the kids to common area a ways to Nelsons left. He looks at the other levels and can see the same activity going on at each level in the mother ship that he can see. So far the androids have not payed any particular attention to Nelson. But carrying only the light armament of the xeno team, and that carefully hidden so as not to invoke offense in a new encounter, he does not want to interfere with any of the android activities. But at some point, he decides that he must communicate with them. First to try to establish a League com link. Nelson proceeds to the common area where the androids are working (are they really androids, human sculptures with all the characteristics of a human except they are naked. They look like a child sexless toy).

Nelson gave the common League greeting. Surprisingly the android nearest Nelson responded in a clear communication "We-us-others-Now". Nelson thinks for a moment and is stunned. He recognizes the language of the android. Its the reflective language used to organize the minds of the collective dead in the Church Of the Galactic Doam. He desperately tries to rez up what's known of the language in his offline. If he can communicate with the androids, then much of the mystery of the mother ship could be solved. Finally Nelson tells the android "We-we-to-we-Us". The android stops and pays attention to Nelson. Right after the initial communication with the android, a group of children approach Nelson, including the young girl he first encountered, In a loud unison voice they all chant "We"? Then the android looks at Nelson and the group of children and repeats "We".

Nelson thinks to himself and imagines 'we' is better than 'pah', which has no meaning to me. At least it's a starting frame of reference. The primitive conversation continues with several of the children for some time. As it continues, more and more words and more and more concepts appear. The first child he met is now referring to herself as "Me-Dev". Around him he also has "Me-Tuk", "Me-Kig", "Me-Kam" and "Me-Rif". Nelson also notices that individual children have the various appearances of a complete spread of physical types found in League Cosmos and the Second Human Federation. This includes black skin with blond-yellow hair and completely grey hair.

Periodically the androids round up the children in the immediate area and move them to what is obviously a cafeteria area. Nelson follows along, since he is also getting hungry. The food is non-nondescript. It is rezed in sticks starting with a strong protein taste, with starchy middle and a sweet end. Of course the children try to start at the sweet end, but at the first touch of their tongues, the sweet end transforms into the protein end.

"pez We Us, ... We Us pez" exclaims Me-Dev. Me-Tuk, Me-Kig, Me-Kam and Me-Rif have similar exclamations at eating time. After a while, they all calm down and finish the bars. Nelson consumes his, not a meal to be remembered taste wise, but it completely fills him up. He continues to observe the

children in this immediate sector. Their communication, verbal and non-verbal seems to be getting more sophisticated and complex as time passes. At the thought of duration, Nelson realizes it has been almost 4 hours since he has checked on the other crew members suspended in what ever covers the entrance bay.

After moving quickly through the lighted halls of the mother ship, Nelson is once again at the portal where the xenoparty arrived. Dollie, Tyroe and Mannie are suspended in the passage, just as Nelson left them. They all are moving. Their legs, hips, buttocks, torso, head and eyes, all functioning in such a way that each encapsulated crew member is in another place and completely mobile. Nelson wonders where each illusion has taken them. And Nelson wonders what will happen if he can convince an android to pull each of them from their encapsulation.

Nelson again starts with the offline, trying to give meaning to the language of the Mind Doamers. “Me-Them ask Me-All Me-Them here.” The android pays attention to Nelson for a moment, but is now focused on the translucent port that leads to the outside. Now Nelson turns and looks. There is something coming through. “Its a probe from the Ecostream.”

The automation slides through the passage avoiding the suspended crew members from the *Ecostream* and plants itself firmly on the floor of entry bay. Nelson rezes a link to the probe from the *Ecostream*. Simultaneously the androids rez a link to the probe. Nelson attempts to contact the *Ecostream* as his first act. It is blocked and even fed back so he can monitor his own blocking. As the second act, he attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the Mind Doamer and with this act he penetrates. The probe is now an extension of the Doamer Mind. “Rez Me-Me, Me-Us Me-We Tyroe”. The answer back is “Me-Us Tyroe ouch”. In spite of the negativity implied the android it enters the membrane and heads towards Tyroe.

* * *

“Agitated would be an understatement. As a crew member of Ecostream, things have been on the edge of intensity.” Nema looks at Olma and rubs her hands flat on the the appliance in front of her.

“Olma, I can feel it too. The exposure of the large mystery home ship is now the fixation of the entire crew, including the captain and myself. I dream about the home ship every night. I find my self searching all the records from the Second Human Federation on large Famlee ships and where they went, what they were converted to. And anything that big in the League or the Human Federation.”

“But Nema, how did they find a route to this out sector? And for a ship so huge. Where did it come form? These are now my dreams. “

“We still haven't heard a thing from the probe we rezed and sent into the home ship. All transmissions ceased once it was inside. Nothing. Halzee put the Ecostream as close to the home ship as his sanity would allow. Even so we barely made it out before the next shift by the huge ship. Now we have to find it again ... Probe torps, and more probe torps.”

“Any word from command in Kandox Prime? I guess chasing an unknown mother ship is an acceptable contract with our mission.” Olma stops for moment as she monitors the rezing up of a new batch of probe torps, now being optimized to sense the home ship and again turns to Nema. “How is the rest of the crew dealing with all this? “

“The second xenocrew is constantly monitoring the creature from the fifth planet in the Kandox system. They talk about sequential dream sequences that are vivid and can't compare to anything stimulated using conventional means. Then there is the signature from the home ship. It matches one of the signatures of the creature. It seems to match the pro-entropy sequence emitted by all living things. But that is about as far as we have taken it”

Olma's and Nema's conversation doesn't ring as true as they would like. There are two League Barristers still on board, now that Nelson has disappeared into the mother ship. They want to chase it, but are worried about the loss of basic wealth, status-commodity, for the next Re-invention Convention. This is not the case for Halsey, the designated leader of the out sector mission. He now paces through every sector of the Ecostream talking to the crew members about the creatures from the fifth planet in the Kandox system, what they should do to get inside the mother ship, or just what to do next, where the mother ship will go.

Progression

Nelson looks at Tyroe. His face is is completely dry, his skin is flushed. The eyes are dilated to a deep pool of visual confusion. "How ... How ... How? I was in church, The most intense. "

"Tyroe" Nelson speaks in a low voice. "Tyroe. Tyroe. It's me Nelson." Tyroe stands and steadies himself. He then slowly looks about his surroundings and notices the corridors, soft glow of the walls and Nelson standing in front of him.

"Nelson. Where are we? Yes now I have it. We are part of a crew to enter a huge mother ship."

"Tyroe, you made it inside. I made it in by bringing myself to a null state of consciousness. You are on the giant mother ship. I still don't know where it originated from. But you can help. The ship has a vast number of androids. They speak the language of your church."

Tyroe slowly scans the interior of the bay where the automaton pulled him from the entrance medium. A steps away he sees the automaton observing the two of them.

"Where are Mannie and Dolly?"

"Turn around 180 degrees and look at the membrane that I convinced the automaton to pull you from. As far as I can tell they are completely alive, but in state of suspended fantasy."

Tyroe turns slowly and can see Dolly and Mannie. They are making movements in the suspension. Tyroe tries to not to react suddenly and then turns to Nelson.

"What else is in this mother ship?"

"Kids. Children who are being potty trained by the automatons."

"No. Why would a mother ship full of automatons that, you tell me, kind speak the language of the Mind Doamer do that? And with a group of children that need to be potty trained? Show me Nelson, Show me."

"Tyroe, I have struggled with with this since pulling myself through the entrance. Do we guard Dollie and Mannie or continue into the interior of the mother ship? It's gigantic."

"Mannie and Dolly seem safe enough for now. Show me."

Tyroe follows Nelson down the passage where he left the children and passes a automaton.

"<me><We>" "<Me><We>". Tyroe looks at Nelson. They are connected to the mind of of my church. I can tell you that much.

Nelson and Tyroe walk down the corridor leading into the inside of the ship. They see the thousands of crèche areas up, down, to the left and to the right as far as they can see. Nelson spots Me-Dev, Me-Tuk, Me-Kig, Me-Kam and Me-Rif near where he left them. Now they are playing a learning game rezing

shapes, numbers, sounds. Many are in the language of the Mind Doamers. But a number of the symbols are common to the League and to the Second Human Federation.

“Their progress is remarkable”, Nelson tells Tyroe while closely analyzing the rezed symbols the children are creating.

“Me-Dev”

Me-Dev turns and looks at Nelson, “Nelson, Nelson you here now. Other. Hello Other” Tyroe speaks to the child in a more detailed language of the Mind Doamers to Me-Dev finishing with a complete <we><We><wE>. “The child knows the basic language. <you><me> speak from <us>?” Me-Dev points to the learning instrumentation that rezes the lessons. “Some how all the children are versed in the basic language, it is being taught by the Com on this mother ship.” Tyroe then asks Me-Tuk why they are on the mother ship. <us><we>learn<us><We>teach. An hour ago these children could not even take care of themselves, now they have donned bright color shirts, are keeping them clean, eat, and stay rezed to the medcom on the mother ship.

“Nelson, have you discovered a rapid transport system on the ship, I mean this ship is at least 10 kilometers long. It will be tough to discover it's secrets on foot.” “No not yet, have you tried to talk to the local MedCom?”

As before Tyroe, easily accesses the superficial segment of the MedCom on the mother ship. It is an odd dialect of Mind Doamer symbology, but Tyroe can grasp the basic meaning, and disassociates.

Tyroe has a quizzical expression and then continues his talk. “I know where the mother ship originates, but it doesn't make any sense. It's origin is from the Second Human Federation, system unknown right now. Taking a course in a particular pattern that consists of small shifts and at the same time waiting for an event. This is the overall state of the MedCom on this mother ship.”

“But how did they get into the Kandox out-space continuum?”

“I don't know Nelson, but I can associate and try to get their out-space origin at local time zero.”

“Yes, Tyroe, yes and this mother ship seems to be a re-rezed Centerdom, the mainstay direct drive star ship of the Second Human Federation. But it's been completely re-engineered and has a shift drive capable of small shifts. And the children, why a mother ship full of children?”

Tyroe continues with a quizzical look on his face. “The local MedCom knows about all of the children and watches over them with a whole army of remote android avatars. The sole purpose of the avatars is to teach and guide each child. It knows about the education but not about the meaning and purpose of the ship. But I did find the transportation grid that connects 32767 different sectors on this mother ship. It seems that the transportation system is not part of the children's curriculum, so they don't know about it.”

Nelson turns his attention to the children in the sector near the portal where Nelson, Tyroe and the rest of the crew members had entered the mother ship.

“Tyroe, see what you pick up.”

“Me-Dev, Me-Tuk”

Nelson now has the children's attention. Tyroe looks over the group of children, focusing on Me-Dev and delivers “Me-Tyro, ME-Tyro, mE-Tyro, Me-tyro, me-tyro, mE-tyroe, Me-tYroe, ME-TYRO.”

Me-Dev, Me-Tuk, Me-Kig, Me-Kam, Me-Rif and several other children turn to Tyroe, who has their attention. The conversation between Tyroe and all the children continues for some time in the language of the Mind Doam order of the Church of the Galactic Doam. Some of the mother ships remotes are

present, can hear the conversation between Tyroe and the children, but seem uninterested.

“The children are learning the basics of any curriculum in the League, but at the same time are associating with the Domaer Mind. As far as I can tell, they are trying to complete a test. But what kind of test? Certainly the children don't know.”

“Do you think you can instruct the droids to fetch the rest of the crew before we explore the rest of the contents of the ship?”

“Possibly, it's a simple command, but is it safe for Mannie and Dollie?”

“I think so, Nelson. It will jerk them out of reality, much like I was, it will put them into shock. For how long, we don't know.”

“I have been carefully listening to you talk to the children in the dialect of the Church of the Galactic Doam. I was able to recall and reconstruct enough of the dialect to get on of the androids to fetch you from the suspension. I also notice that you swiftly change the dialect as you speak to the children. Can you teach me more?”

“Nelson, I'll go over the basics. The emphasis is on three distinct sounds that make up a triplet. So each word has a double meaning. For example, if I say <WE-THEM>, the emphasis is on the complete first and second triad. When emphasizing, position one is a MedCom active state, position three is an active rational state and position two is a fast dynamic between the first and the third position. But if I say <we-them> all three positions are deemphasized. When de-emphasizing position one this is a MedCom passive state indicating massive parallelism, deemphasizing position three is a passive rational state allowing a richer interaction between the first and the third positions. A deemphasized position two designates a slow dynamic between position one and three. Understand this Nelson?”

Nelson's eyes glaze. “Uh, ... yes ... to a point.”

“Now, to mix up the emphasis, you can say <We-them> or <wE-tHEM> or <we-TheM> <GET-IT>?”

Nelson has a blank look on his face.

“It takes some education, something that is part of the Church of the Galactic Doam.”

“This is how you marshal the memories of the dead?”

“To some extent, yes. This is how the MedCom activates the countless minds to a practicing Doam member.”

“But the Mind Doamers, so active in the recent Silent War, how do they differ as a separate discipline?”

“Not only are they associated, but carry all the memories of the sacred dead while alive. Their burden is beyond my comprehension. They are a ... separate League religion.”

Nelson and Tyroe walk slowly back to the portal and see Dollie and Mannie alive in the suspension.

“I think I can get one of caretakers to pull them trough. Lights! I bet Halzee is shitting a brick. The mother ship has completely re-rezed the probe sent in. He wouldn't recognize it. I bet he tries to get in some other way.”

“Yea, that's Halzee, he won't give up Tye.”

Tyroe associates to the MedCom on the Mother ship and engages in a dialog “<US-them><FORward-thrU>”. This continues for some time. But after the conversation ends, four care takers enter the membrane and push Dollie and Mannie towards Tyroe and Nelson, about One hundred meters away. Eventually they are extruded as in being born from a giant womb or birth passage. When they land on the floor of the bay of the mother ship they both scream. Mannie is moaning as if in pain. Dollie is

weeping uncontrollably. They both are saying. "It was so real, so real." Nelson grabs Mannie and Tyroe grabs Dolly.

"Mannie, look at me, I'm your crew peer. We are on an away mission inside a giant mother ship. You were suspended in a substance that effects every nerve in your body. I was able to make it through with my mental ability to completely shutdown but move my body. "

Tyroe has both hands on Dollies shoulders, the tears are still flowing but she focusing on him. "Dollie, I was in the Grand Illusion myself, months of friendships, details of going to work each day. Each one of these memories, when Nelson was able to somehow convince one of the caretakers to extrude me, I still can remember in complete detail. I've ran an off line. I suggest you do the same".

Tyroe knew that it is Dollies dream to return to Ground One to the ancient sectors and work there. He didn't need to ask. She knew that's where she went as did Mannie to the sport races. It takes a while, but Dollie and Mannie adjust to where they have landed, so to speak. Nelson tells them about the caretakers and describes them as android extensions of the Doamer Mind. He then goes on to describe the countless children in the mother ship. And he also tells of what they know where it came from.

Dollie finally looks around and then looks at Mannie, Tyroe and Nelson.

"I'm the leader of an out-sector xeno-mission once again. Time to get to work. Why a ship shrouded in a substance with such strong hallucinogenic properties? What are the kids here for? Why the short jumps seemingly in a random pattern?"

Mannie looks up from now a devastating loss of status as a gaming hero on Ris, "Fuck if I know."

"That's not an acceptable answer Mannie. "

"Nelson, I'm in a bad mood. Take me to see the kids and show me what's on this mother ,,"

Drill

Halzee continues with his crew, walking from section to section. He is now single minded with respect to his chase of the gigantic ship.

"I know that the ship shifted. Get the probes ready. We are doing something new."

Nema now stares and paces. Nocera is doing the same.

"Funny Necora, I don't mind this chase, It's in my blood. Who cares if there is a funny creature from the fifth Kandox planet in quarantine. I want to see what's on that gigantic ship and it's now that I dream about, not some shifter creature from the sand of Kandox Five. "

"We're fabing the True Drill, by the lights. This will get is in."

Nocera ponders and looks back at Nema.

"How many barristers on ship?"

"It doesn't make any difference. They are into it as much as we are. Don't forget, one of lost xeno-crew is well versed ..."

"Continue."

"Continue."

"Nocera, I think we should take a detour and rez max energy at a high energy A-class star system

within in a few deep space hours of our current position. “

“A sign of basic intelligence. Take a detour from your immediate goal to gain in the future.”

“Let's see what we have in the neighborhood. A hot A star system. Don't see a ultra hot O star system with in range. Ah, Outsystem 22, B system with ample energy. Halzee we're taking a left turn to get energy to rez this drill.”

The Ecostream unloads its probes to locate the position of the giant ship it is chasing and takes a shift to a B star system within a few hours relative time. The energy of the star is used to power extrusions that the drill requires. Within a few hours the drill is complete. It is a third the size of the Ecosream itself and temporarily attached to the ship where it was rezed. It looks like a cone with concentric circles. At the base of the cone are a series of duraplast negators. The first set dissolve and attach, the second dissolve and drill.

When returning to the point where the giant ship shifted, the Ecostream starts to collect the probe ships. It takes a day longer to locate the giant ship. Halzee paces from one end of the ship to the other. “Its the same story for me too, I travel with that ship every night. The amazing story never ends.” Halzee tells Nema.

Nema informs Halzee that we have become a ship of writers, each with a story to tell.

“Each of us has an amazing story that fits together like links on a chain. We get a new link each night. Some of the crew members are actually publishing the stories on the local MedCom. All so detailed, all so real.”

The crew spends the time assessing their situation. The consensus among all the crew now is that the creature from the fifth planet in the Kandox system is creating a matrix that allows them to chase and understand the giant ship, and it will help them in discovering it's ultimate origin. The on-ship MedCom has now assimilated much on the information on the giant ship and the Kendra, the creature from the fifth Kandox planet. The MedCom has permuted it's own machine consciousness and is actively associating with all the crew members including Halzee.

Finally the position of giant ship is located by the probes. The drill is readied. . Halzee continues to walk the ship, back and forth from bow to stern, through each deck. The Ecostream shifts to the new location of the giant ship and converges at 6 Gees acceleration, for which crew members measure as such in this outspace dimension.

As the Ecostream approaches the mother ship for a third intercept, there are no weapons, no instant jump to avoid combat, it remains where it is, steady and ignoring. The entire crew is associated to the MedCom as the Ecostream approaches this time.

Nema to Nocera: “Is there a spot to drill? What do the scans tell us?”

Nocera to Katoh: “They scan all the same, our ships MedCom is leading us now, it says it's choosing a random surface to drill. “

Katoh to Nema: “Thirty seconds until drill launch.”

Halzee paces by, and looks directly at the command crew and says in a clear voice, “We can do this. I know we can find our crew members and the secret of the giant ship. I know it. Continue. “

The massive probe launches and within seconds is attached to the massive mystery ship. No defense systems are detected by the Ecostream. Its as if the giant ship doesn't even consider it to be an attack.

Nema is associated to the Com and getting full feed of fine grained status from the drill. “Its on, Its

taking itself through the wall of the giant ship. We have a new portal. Its huge.”

“Halzee hesitates for a second and then ... “attach the Ecostream to the drill, we are now part of the giant ship. The second xeno crew is ready. Send them in.”

The Ecostream locks on to the Drill and is now connected, effectively part of the giant ship.”

“Nema, is there a barrier, can we get the xeno-team in?”

“No, Halz. Get them ready to go.”

The xeno team lead by Katoh Spane was ready to board the minute the shift was over. They five new xeno-searchers enter the dock of the drill fully space worthy and armed. The smell of the air inside space worthy liners is too clear and devoid of any odor. The walls of the Drill glistened from the recent rez process as the crew enters the other end to finally gain entrance to the giant ship.

“No barrier, we are in. Wow. I don't believe this. Check your receptors, this can't be real. It is Katoh. This all reads.”

“Why would a giant ship have a sea with a small island? The portal to the Drill is about 500 meters from the island, off angle about 38 degrees. We'll have to fly down there with our suits unless we want to float around this huge starship ocean. “

“This is even stranger, it seems that it is very close to a replica of an island on Ground Three circa pre HumFed 1. A primitive airfield occupies what I would call the north portion of the island. It seems to be a replica of Lollipop on Ground Three.”

“This has got to be a Growthresian illusion” a team member put on the com.

“Yes, there a number of buildings adjacent to the air strip of fliers from ancient history. And a number of roads through the islands that seem to accommodate ancient internal combustion engines. How strange! Why build this inside a huge starship?”

“Thats one of the questions we have to answer. Any signal from the first xeno-crew?”

“None, Katoh.”

“I suggest we head to the group of buildings towards the centre of the island.”

“Nema, can you still copy. You catching all of this?”

“By the Lights, yes Kathoh. I'm sending a second crew of three to occupy the drill at the entry point to the giant ship.”

“Yes, that is the plan.”

* * *

“Halz, how many crew members we have left on the Ecostream?”

(hesitates a second or two) ... “thirty six exactly Nema. I know. I know we'll find the first xeno team here and the mysteries of this ship. I know it. “

(and the entire crew of the Ecostream knows about the discovery of Lollipop in the giant ship)

“First thing, search the island. Even our ship MedCom is telling us to do that.”

There. The xeno-crew is at the complex in Lollipop Island, (or it looks likes Lollipop Island says MedCom). They landfall much like a meteor, flaming and clunk! into ground and stand up. The buildings around them are primitive metal with grooved roofs to shed rainwater into a catchment tank, The power for the complex originates from a solar generator, but what star? None for this ancient

technology. Maybe light from the giant ship. “Must be.”

The crew continues towards the five or so buildings in the middle of Lollipop.

“Hello ... Hello! ... anybody here?”

No answer. Katoh scans all the media he can, even primitive broadcast bands, nothing except the link to the Ecostream. Katoh and the other four in this second xeno team continue their search and discovery of the ancient island airfield complex.

“A control tower, a fuel farm with ancient petrol products, a complete runway with six taxi approaches, and look! Ancient aircraft in the hangars, all in immaculate condition, ... but why?”

“This has to be some kind of mass illusion. Validate all of this with Nema.”

“It all comes back as solid reality. We are already getting warnings about the dangers of ancient petroleum based aircraft fuel.”

“There are trees and plants with fruits, so there is plenty of native food. There are some giant lizards at one end, but I don't think they will be a threat to us. “

“No people. But why an island inside a giant starship? Is this somebodies idea of art and creation.”

The group investigates and finally converges in one of the hangars inspecting the glistening metallic ancient aircraft.

“Its a war plane. Look these are exploding devices attached to the wings. And here. These are ancient slug throwers, probably rapid fire for their time. There are three on each wing. This device is designed to be fired from the cockpit while the plane is in the air. And this propeller. This is what pulls the plane through the air. It is very limited in speed, but probably can maneuver quite well.”

“The Com on the Ecostream identified it as a AX-47, a plane used during GroThreesian ancient history during air sea battles. Nema has already rezed a simulator back on the Ecostream we can use to learn how to fly the thing if we so choose.”

On entering the control tower, the xeno party discovers that all the ancient instrumentation works. “A real primitive radio wave emitter used to track the position of vehicles in the air or on the ground.. And look at this. A control for a semi-automatic ancient anti-aircraft cannon. And in here, replicas of ancient weaponry .”

* * *

Katoh and two of the members of his ocean island group board two of the ancient airplanes. One holds a single pilot and the other holds a pilot and a navigator. “I had no idea that people flew these things on dead reckoning” Katoh said lifelessly. “The training that came over the com should be good. Start the engines. The other two members of the island party guided them from the control tower using ancient instruments of communication and tracking.. The engines start. Katoh and associates take off perfectly in their ancient aircraft with the primitive instruments giving them a heading of direct west. The engines are massive and heavy, but that thing actually flies.

Sleep

“But did you find a way to move rapidly around the ship? When you got the remote to free myself and Mannie?” Dollie was definitely in command again and well over what was like years of experience on Ground One.

“Yes, there is a way. There are security measures in place to make sure the children don't have access to it. We'll have to find a way to bypass those security measures.”

“Any ideas?”

“Yea, we know the remotes use the lift systems that operate in all directions, up, down and sideways. We have to convince the system that we are not a child.”

“Do we have to convince the system that we are a remote?”

“Not sure, but I suppose that is possible.”

“How long have we been in the mother ship, accrued hours since leaving the shuttle?”

“I count 18.453 ...”

“That's close enough” Dollie says to Nelson. “You can tell, the kids have finished their learning, and are eating for the third time today?”

“Yes, that's correct. And I see they have sleeping areas in each of the crèche's.”

Not long after the third meal, each of the children rezes into the MedCom on the mother ship one more time. Soon after that they start falling asleep most of the lighted areas on the ship are darkened. Nelson, Dollie, Mannie and Tyroe find an unused crèche and decide to have three sleep while one watches, trying to penetrate new areas in the local mother ship MedCom to pass the time. They agree that they are probably not in any direct danger. If the remotes wanted to harm them, they easily could, given their overpowering numbers. After a short while all the remotes can hear is three outsiders snoring, one watching in the dark using equipment, and for a moment one of the children hums a tune about rocks, colors and long distance but is soon asleep.

Dollie's party sleeps for a good ten hours with Dollie watching the surrounding crèches the last of those ten hours. She does see movement. Some, but not all the children are getting up from their crèche and heading a common direction..

“Mannie, Nelson, Tyroe ... wake up. Some of the children are moving from the crèche's towards the ship's centre. Lets follow.”

It is easy for the four to follow the children. They continue through several tunnels. The Children stop. They are doing this on their own. No remotes are helping them. It does take some time, but they take a path that progressively gains speed. Dollie's group continues to follow, also taking the movement paths common to League infrastructure. Then the group of children stop. Nelson recognizes one of them. She calls herself “Me Kam”. Me Kam turns to see Nelson and smiles and says “ready”. The children jump into a massive translucent cylinder made of the same material that emitted the alternate reality when entering the landing bay.

“I don't think we should go in that substance again”, Dollie said as she recounted what seemed like a lifetime on Ground One.

“I could” said Nelson, “but not now”..

Tyroe looks around and then asks Nelson “Where are we?”

“I think we are now connected to the transit system inside the mother ship, With a little exploring we should be able to find our way around.”

Dollie looks at the team and says “The first thing we should do is the path back to set of crèches near the portal, where we started.”

“Agreed” she gets back in unison from the team.

Tyroe associates to the local MedCom and is able to get a complete map of the paths through to the main areas of the mother ship. He then generates a Viz the other three team members can see.

“This is where we are right now and this is where we were before we took a set of paths to the core.”

In just a few minutes the four crew members at back at the crèche they slept on what seems to be a “night” sequence on the mother ship. The antiseptic smell of a clean nursery permeated the air in this sector. The group watched the children wake up. They had no residual conscious from the previous “day”. The remotes now started the entire sequence that Nelson had witnessed the first mother ship-day. Their first lesson was potty training. For these children in the crèche's each mother-ship-day they would start with a new consciousness.

Then Nelson turns to Dollie, “It seems that a certain number of the children get something like a promotion or graduation and the rest start over. It looks like they have one sleep cycle to complete their goal, ever what that may be.”

“Yes, it is starting to make some sense Nelson, a set of android remotes, local Med Com and a vast group of children that all speak the Mind Doamer dialect originating from an unknown point in the Second Human Federation..”

“What do you make of it Tyroe? You know a lot about this?”

“I believe that creators of this complex are building something that has to do with the Mind, but I'm not sure what the goal is. I can try to go deeper into the local MedCom and discover the consciousness of the promoted children, but there may be some danger in that.”

What do you think Mannie?”

“ Maybe this is a new sect of the Mind Doamer Church. Maybe it has nothing to do with the existing church.”

Tyroe associates to the local Com. “Sit back and talk among yourselves, I'm not ready to try to associate to the core where children are promoted, but let me do a slow scan of what's on the local MedCom . This could take awhile.”

Nelson pulled back in close to a null state, but still with the group, in almost complete withdrawal. Mannie and Dollie sit there watching the two of them and finally Mannie says to Dollie, “I don't know about you, but when I fell asleep last night, I went right back to my existence in the membrane at the portal, did anything like that happen you Dollie?”

“The same, total return. It makes one happy to go to sleep on this massive ship.”

“By the Lights, I have to agree, though I don't get it.”

Mannie and Dollie continue their conversation for some time while Tyroe associates to the com. Mannie and Dollie talk about their serial end-to-end dreams. Mannie describes sport in the Risian system and how he's having the season of a lifetime. Dollie talks about her wonderful new life on Ground One in the historical section. She thinks to herself “Mannie has sport but, oh, I have the fantasy lover of my dreams and it's making me really horny.” She looks at the three males and thinks to herself. “No girl, not with the crew members, if you did one of them, you would have to do the other two. Not now.”

Several of the remote androids come by but act as if they were not there.

After some time, Tyroe backs out of his association to the local Medcom and looks at Dollie.

“Several hundred meters from here this nexus, there has been a major reconfiguration of this mother ship. Something has been altered and re-rezed of significant size.”

“Can we find a progressive path that to that sector?”

“Already to emit it on a viz.”

As before the original xeno-crew takes the progressive paths in the viz .They pass other paths, and it no longer has the smell of a freshly washed crèche. They are working their way through the interior of the ship. Soft incandescent light emitted from the walls make it easy to see. The is not decoration, artistry or sound. They continue until they come to an opening many times the size of the landing bay that they made their original entrance to the mother ship. The four xeno-crew members stop, stunned.

“By Faces Face ... By the Lights! ... “

Finally Dollie breaks her silence and says “It can't be.”

“Look at that massive drill that punctured the side of the mother ship, and a bay almost a kilometer long. And ... and ... inside the bay a huge mass of the blue substance identical to what we went through when coming through the portal ... and inside the mass, the Ecostream!”

Fight

Katoh watches Lollipop vanish to what the instruments indicate as west. The sky is clear. What should be a sun or star in the sky does not exist, only the glow of an atmosphere bathed in bright blue light. Katoh can fix on the single beacon of the Lollipop control tower. The crew member, Gack, operating the navigation module and primitive automatic slug throwing weapon activates the electrical systems on the craft as it drones on with a monstrous hum and vibration... There is nothing but ocean below.

“Gack, what do you think is in that ocean.”

“We took off before we could find out.”

“Okay dokie pokey. Let me make a call and see what the other two find in the ocean. That reminds me. Lets make a connection to the Ecostream using this ancient transmission equipment.”

After a few unsuccessful connection attempts, the crew at the portal hole the drill punctured connects to the Ecostream.

“Nema, can you scan the ocean on the Centerdom style ship for life forms?”

“Damn Katoh, next time are you going to communicate using wires and metal cans?”

“As you know, this is what we found here. For what ever reason a complete replica Lollipop island exists on this ship. We have both triple validated its existence. By the lights, I just want to find out what lives in the ocean.”

“All right, doing a full probe now, including a remote.:

A torp emits from Ecostreams drill portal and proceeds several times the speed of sound, then slows down to a crawl and hits the ocean. It shatters into hundreds of fragments, collecting information as an organized totality and sends it back to the emitter up in the portal, tens of kilometers above the ocean.

Within seconds the research systems of Ecostreams MedCom respond. Its a long list of vertebrate fish, exoskeleton bottom dwellers, ocean plants. The list continues, and is easily rezed on a viz. It completes with a list of harmless bacteria . All are in the records of the Growthreesian system.

“Well if we land in this ocean, we don't want to be there too long or we will end up being someones lunch.”

After some time, a section of the probes report a metal submersible, constructed with ancient alloy, much like the AX-47.

“Seems we have some company below the surface of the ocean.”

The solo AX-47 continues in what the primitive instruments designate as west. First Katoh and Gack notice giant corral beds typical of the Growthreesian ocean. Then they see another smaller island appearing just to the the northwest west. Still in radio range, Gack relays the information back to the control tower on Lollipop which in turn relays the information back to the Ecostream using Med Com technology. The viz returns that this is Soarro Island on Ground Three. As they fly the ancient aircraft, they continue as see a few small islands surrounded by coral reefs. Another is on the horizon and was known as Hogmog. Its all part of Ultha atol.

* * *

Halzee turns to Neema as she turns to Halzee.

“We have the precise data from the primitive equipment in this ocean. I don't know how the giant ship is doing this, but its a complete replica down to the last detail of the area of the Oceanic-Yotan Imperial Wars. The equipment, the aircraft, the geography,.all from that period.”

“Move some modern energy and modern missile weaponry to the edge of the portal from the Ecostream.”

“Done.”

“Prepare another team to go Lollipop, and train them in ancient aircraft from the period.”

“In progress”.

* * *

The AX-47 continues for a little over a hundred clicks, keeping a line of reckoning back to Lollipop. Another island is coming up on the horizon to the south west.

“Katoh, if the Ground Three pattern is consistent, that should be Yak Island.”

“Wait, direct communication from Ecostream, it's Nema.”

“We rezed a simulator of the ancient radio wave communication technology, we now have direct contact. Scanning Yak island in front of you, we detect another base. You are flying ancient Yotan aircraft, these planes on Yak Island all have the signature of the Oceanic Empire.”

“Really?”

“Katoh, yea. I think you will see them as incoming.”

The single AX-47 continues towards Yak Island, when Gack whoops at the top of his voice “incoming from above”. Two Panther fighters from the Oceanic Empire are above them and on their tail. The weapon systems are primitive automated projectiles but effective. They pierced the AX-47 in a number of places.

“Shit, it's attacking us, contact Nema and the weapons crew at the portal.”

A second later a beam of energy comes from the heavens above and literally vaporizes the ancient attacking Panther fighter. The second Panther veers to the starboard and rapidly descends back to island Yak. The crew at the Ecostreams portal listen to rapid chatter in an ancient Growthreesian language. It is translated that the crew of the remaining Panther is informing the Oceanic Empire outpost that the Yotan Aliance has developed a devastating anti-aircraft weapon.

* * *

“Halzee, are we in a time-warp of some kind? Time travel is possible, but has been avoided up to this point because of the extreme danger. Just probing time in the most neutral fashion has been absolutely prohibited by every by every League Reinvention Convention since NoresCon One. If we keep firing advanced technological weapons into a war in the ancient past, what will it do?”

“Good point, how fast can we rez AX-47's in the ship?”

“Something that primitive? We can rez a dozen an hour. The hydrocarbons that run it, called petrol, might take a little longer, but it won't lag far behind. I'll take the risk of altering time to protect eight of my crew members. There aren't that many crew members left. See if you can put a little something extra in the primitive automatic projectile weapon systems that are mounted in the AX-47.”

“Nema, get Alyson to do some research on battles during the Yotan/Oceanic Imperial war on Ground Three.”

“She's already on it.”

“No more than a few skirmishes. Never any major battles between ancient aircraft.”

“Hmm ... what have we stepped into ...”.

* * *

“Kato, whats wrong with the AX-47? Can you rez and repair, I think the one of the main tubes in this craft was hit by the projectiles.”

“This is some old technology, but I think I can do it. “

Kato can rez enough duraplast in small quantities to slide down one of the pipes that is leaking heavy petroleum. He then tries for the other leak in the highly combustible petrol that gives off more energy, but then stops the process.

“ I have to fly this ancient aircraft back to Lollipop. I can't repair it and fly it at the same time. Gack, see if you can rez up and down all the plumbing in the thing.”

“One thing for sure, if I'm going to fire this mechanical repeating weapon, I need some practice”

Gack concentrates and pulls a number of metallic micros, but the system is confusing to him, he doesn't want to disrupt the combustion engine. He is able to isolate some damages. The aircraft continues to fly but some of the hydrocarbons are continuing to spill out. They keep on course and watch this very simple gauge that ranges from full to empty.

“Twitch butt simple. Don't let it get to empty.”

“I'm still at it.”

“Do we still have contact with the EcoStream? Do they have the schematics for an ancient airfoil AX-47?”

“Yea, they do, rez it up now. What a complex nest of a system for such a primitive airfoil.”

“How far to the closest of the islands on the atoll?”

“HogMog, not much there.”

“Change course, for that.”

“This is dead reckoning, I'll judge it.”

“Come on ... gets some help from the Ecostream.”

“Got it, 11 minutes away.”

“Katoh, your airfoil is deteriorating.”

“Focusing on the main fuel lines.”

“Standard equipment on these old airfoils is something called a parachute.”

Gack continues to try to rez repairs on the flying machine as micro-atomics would allow. Word comes from the Ecostream.

Your aircraft is going to explode in 40 to 45 seconds!”

“How close are we to HogMog?”

“Almost on the western tip, its not big.”

“I'm taking her down to 1000 meters, ... 750,. 500 ...”

“Gack, pull the covering so we can jump.”

“It's heavy. Let go of the controls and push.”

“OK”

A stream of air hits the crack as they release the latches, the cockpit covering blows off in a 95 kilometer wind. Katoh and Gack both jump and are blown clear off the rudders. Thirty seconds after they jump the AX-47 explodes in a ball of petroleum. The majority of the flaming pieces fall in the palm trees on the north end of HogMog atoll. Katoh and Gack land about a half a meter in relatively shallow water from the shoreline. They know enough to detach the parachute and start swimming as fast as they can for shore. Both are in top physical shape and rapidly reach the beach. On the beach they look at the ball of flame on to the north of the atoll.

“By the Lights.”

“Shit.”

“Now what?”

“Consider ourselves lucky that we weren't eaten by native Growthreesian oceanic life forms.”

“What kind of shape is your Com pack in?”

”Let me see. No problem, just a little water on the outside, nothing wrong ... EcoStream, you still copy us?”

Nema cuts in. “We got ya, your airfoil exploded, but you're OK, I think they used to call what you did, atmosphere diving.”

“Thanks ... my pants are clean, thank you.”

“There are some boats on Lollipop, they are on their way, be prepared to expect a few more crew members from the Ecostream, and a few more AX-47s”

“ I don't want to ask why you are not sending down armed GEVs.”

Katoh and Gack dry quickly on the HogMog beach. Whatever recreated this Growthreesian world on the large ship, large ship? What is that? Katho and Gack don't think or remember much about a large Centerdom style ship, but are focused on the Ecostream. The boats and their petroleum fuel motors arrive piloted by two Ecostream crew members.

“How many are left on our ship?”

The young woman guiding the boat tells Katoh that she doesn't think there are that many left.

"It looked much like a skeleton crew to me. Halzee and Nema are still on one of the bridges, but the AI is running the ship."

* * *

"Nema, does this parallel our historical records of ancient Ground Three? No, there was nothing more than a few skirmishes around Lollipop Island and the surrounding atolls, and that was between AX-47s and submersibles from the Oceanic Empire."

"Halz, just to let you know we now have seventeen crew members on Lollipop and five here, not counting you and me. They are undergoing intensive training on how to fly and fight with AX-47s. Of course we have given your AX-47s a little something extra that historically they did have."

"What's that Nema?"

"I have a much more efficient ancient petrol combustion engine and some very rapid, non-jamming ancient automated slug throwers. The only operation a Panther does better is a mid-air turn. We have better armor, and this combustion engine will push a propeller-driven airfoil about as fast as it will go."

"We now have five AX-47s headed towards Yak Island to the southwest. This time we'll see what's there."

Three Panthers scramble to meet them in combat and take on the AX-47s in air-to-air combat. Unlike before, the crew members flying the AX-47s have a better understanding of what needs to be done. Though the Panthers can make sharper turns, the enhanced AX-47s have overwhelming speed and fire power. They quickly damage two of the Panthers, one seriously. All three fly back toward Yak, but the most damaged Panther dips below the other two and the pilot bails out, with its chute opening over the Yak jungle. The stricken Panther goes into the jungle nose first, as smoke pours out of it and then explodes on impact. Halzee and Nema are watching the battle unfold when they get an emergency message from the quarantine bay.

"The creature from the fifth planet in the Kandox system, it is gone! Vanished into thin air. No detection system can find it on the ship, near the drill or somewhere below us in the Ground Three reality dimension."

Halzee and Nema have a blank quizzical look on their face and are at a loss as to what to do next.

"Keep the quarantine active. After what we've seen the last few hours, who knows where it is hiding."

Internals

Tyroe looks at his team members and then after several minutes has something to say. "I'm going to associate as deep and as long as I can to the local com here and see how far I can get. I'm not going to be conscious of what's going on here, so watch me."

"What are your chances of convincing the mother ship to extrude the Ecostream back into space?"

"I'd have a better chance of convincing the androids of pushing us out."

"Not a bad idea as long as we are in a ship of that can traverse."

Dollie is rezing what she can in this mother ship. "I think we can scrape enough from the small state dimension to build a very compact vessel that can emit one message torp. This small ship should keep

is alive for a long time.”

“That’s an interesting proposition,” Mannie adds. “But then can we get Tyroe to have us extruded from the mother ship?”

The three wait while Tyroe associates to the Com on the mother ship, watching the Ecostream and the drill that got it in here. The massive bay holding the two objects has a soft light blue light emitted from all the walls, ceiling and floor. The entire area has the antiseptic smell of a completely clean environment. Dollie doesn’t say much as she leans against the wall staring into the bay. After a while Mannie and Nelson discuss what might be going on in their respective home worlds. This continues for some time when Dollie breaks the silence with “Look at that!”.

The three of them see the creature from the fifth planet in the Kandox system, pass through the ship’s hull out into the membrane that encases the ship. It shimmers for a few minutes and then dissolves into the plasmic substance around the Ecostream and the drill. The three sit there bug eyed.

Finally Mannie asks Nelson, “I wonder what reality is cooking for them with the entire ship in this reality projecting substance? One thing for sure, what small state physics its operating on, it only exists in this continuum.”

“Well maybe not”, Dollie breaks in. “There are a number of continuum, not just the one we currently occupy.”

“Oh they are probably looking at rainbows in the Wydeon prime world.”

“Yea, that’s gotta be it.”

“I keep expecting the creature we captured at one point in time, to come extruding through the membrane, but not so far.”

“Tyroe is still in there on the Com, huh?”

“Yea.”

Dollie stands up for a second, “I think we just shifted again. This ship can really camouflage leaps in space.”

About another hour passes while Dollie, Nelson and Mannie discuss the possibility of rezing up a small ship inside this mother ship. Then Tyroe emerges from the Com.

“Unbelievable, but now I understand. Not one but many of these ships were built in the expanse of the Second Federation by a Mind Doamer from the Beautican system. Somehow they found a warp that allowed them to shift into the Kandox continuum.”

Dollie looks quizzically. “And what are they doing here?”

“It looks like several tasks at hand. They are reconstructing the entire Doamer mind that was lost during their Terrible Incident. The way they are doing that is they are replanting each lost mind, one-at-a-time in the children. It only works some of the time. That is why they wake up in the morning and start their conscious existence over. Once they graduate they are suspended waiting for the next step, which seems to be a mass exodus into the Stars Eyes Out Sector. It seems that they are headed there to contact the Leverites, which disappeared into that separate continuum. The leader, which is now in this continuum, was the offspring of a Lerverite, but is the focal point of reconstruction of the lost Doamer Minds.”

“Fascinating. And with a small physics reality that creates illusions beyond possibility in intelligent beings.”

“It would seem so.”

The four sit in silence for a while contemplating their situation, taking in the slightly charged metallic smell and soft blue light that spreads through this section of the mother ship. They agree that rest is needed and they make their way back to a crèche where food and sleeping areas can be found. The timing is correct. The children are about to sleep again, starting their immersion cycle. Tyroe, Nelson, Mannie and Dollie fall off to sleep, each now with a continuance of the serialized dream.

When they wake up, they return to the new massive bay where the Ecostream is encased. Tyroe shakes off the sleepiness and immediately associates to the local Com.

“He's doing something. Maybe he's trying to find a passage to the Ecostream”, Dollie whispers.

Dollie and Mannie are focusing their attention towards a group of androids down one of the many corridors of the mother ship. Nelson remains focused on the encased Ecostream. The androids seem to be focused on rezing and de-rezing operations of some kind. Dollie and Mannie continue to monitor the activities of the androids. After a sometime Nelson interrupts the silence.

“From the Ecostream ... look at that!”

The Kandoxian sand creature was passing through the wall of the Ecostream, through duraplast.

“This can't be! Impossible” the three said in unison.

The Kandoxian sand creature is motionless for sometime while suspended in the blue substance. The xeno-team expresses dismay about some hastily concocted plan of action if the creature is loose on the mother ship. As it turns out, the creature slowly fades away and completely vanishes into the suspension material. Tyroe continues to be associated to the local Com, ignoring all the action around him. When the group of androids pass by the Ecostream's xenocrew, they don't pay attention to any of this and start working in a different area of the passageway connected to the enclosing portal. To Dollie, Mannie and Nelson's amazement, the drill, which is a separate hardware module from the Ecostream, is slowly extruded from the substance and is now resting on the floor of the large bay.

Katoe breaks his association with the Com, turns to the team leader, Dollie and says “done.”

“We can rez a passage out of here for our four a lot faster now. It might have taken use weeks to rez a small in-system ship without slip capability with out the drill. You were able to get the local Com with the help of the androids to script this?” Dollie said pensively.

“Yea it took some work, but I'm really part of the Mind Doamer church now as it exists outside of the League in the HumFed Two / Kandox dimension.”

“While you were associating to the com, the Kandoxian sand creature passed through the wall of the Ecostream, sat there for a while and evaporated in the suspension. We thought it might roam the mother ship, but so far no sign.”

“I don't think the creature has ever been a threat, other than it emits a material with a unique energy residue. Just my opinion.”

“I wonder where it is now?” Nelson replies.

There is a silence for a while and finally Dollie proceeds to marshal her group.

“Lets start the re-rezing of the drill. I think we can create a cramped version of an in system boat, very cramped and one torp that can slip and announce our last position.”

“Can, if can.”

Everyone laughed. It had been a long time since they all had done that.

Purgatory

The discussion continues in the command centre of the Ecostream.

“Halz,, we've traced back to where we made our drill entry the into giant ship. We are on a dimensional platform in the atmosphere of the Ground Three system at the time of the conflict between the Yotan and Oceanic empires. At this point we could just pull out of the planets atmosphere and travel in space during ancient history. We know the physics of the Kandox dimension are off, but this looks like we've found a one way trip to the past”

“That's what worries me. Already there are minor differences in our records of the conflict between the Yotan and Oceanic empires. If we just depart, there will even be more. If we become more involved in the conflict, we also cause greater changes in our own history with what the people of the time period will almost consider magical technology.”

“Here we are with a fraction of our original crew on the ship, and with the ships AI running most of the operations.”

“It is a conundrum”

* * *

Dollie and her xeno-party have spent several days marshaling every chunk of excess matter. This would include extra food and water, remnant clothing from the children. Or anything similar to these items that would not actually disrupt the system integrity of the mother ship.

The ability to rez and de-rez has been part of League bio-genetics since the days of later Second Human Federation. Enhancers to the natural powers of small state physics and their transformation are common to all League Cosmos peoples.

The material is collected along with the drill in an open area near the suspension where the Ecostream is encapsulated. The xeno-party is able to put together enough matter for an in system boat and one message torp that can slip to a nearby system. The Kandoxian sand creature never appeared again.

Dollie looks at the fat cigar of a ship.

“I think this will work. It's our best chance to escape the mother ship, launch a torp with a beacon so we can be found and then try to trace the mother ship and extract the Ecostream. I'm assuming that the crew is in a dream-reality state like we were, completely alive and nourished by the suspension. “

“Reckon that is true” Manny says while finishing off a layer of duraplast.

Nelson looks at each them ignoring all the friction and smell of rezing an in-system boat and makes a remark of the obvious that has been overlooked.

“When is last time the mother ship jump slipped?”

“Uh ... well, now that you mention it, several days.”

“Exactly eight days and a few hours. I'm sensitive to slips in space and we haven't made on for a long time. We are essentially standing still.”

“I wonder if this ship has reached it destination and what is it?”

The mother ship did not slip as they continued to rez their lifeboat. They named it the cigar shaped craft “Ejection”. There was one small area that could be re-rezed if need be. The living and sleeping area was all one room with small partitions.

“This is going to be cozy” remarked Manny as he walked through the tiny ship. Instrumentation existed for in-system communication and detection. There are no weapons or defense of any kind other than rapid in-system maneuvering due to the Ejections small size. One torp was attached that had shift capability. It could only make a few jumps and would stop unless it rezed more energy from a strong star. Each of the xeno-crew had a pack of belongings to help them pass the time for the upcoming indeterminate ride in space. They knew the mother ship was within long travel distance of a K star. No one knew if there were any planets or satellites around the star.

The time arrived for the Ejections final preparations. Finally Dolly looked at Tyroe and asked him, “Where are your items you are taking with you?” Dollie could tell that Tyroe was behaving a little more distant than usual. Finally he replied.

“Dollie, I'm not going. I'm staying here on the mother ship. This is the only way to got the Ejected to be ejected. I am now part of the mission that these giant motherships, the Doamer Mind, the children, the reconstructed memories are on. This is the only way. Unless you all want to stay here, which I don't recommend. I have to take a different path”.

Mannie and Nelson looked at each other then at Dollie. After a short pause, Nelson says to Dollie, you're the leader of this xeno-party, what say you?”

“Tyroe stays, we go. Make the final preparations and after the next sleep period, let's see if we can get ourselves and this ship ejected from this mother ship.”

Dollie rezed a number of new belongings, and recommended that Nelson and Mannie do the same. All their clothes were cleansed, and their bodies quick-washed when awakening after a somewhat restless sleep. Tyroe volunteered to watch while they slept, so they would not miss an important event on the mother ship. Nothing much transpired. The automatons continued their routine functions and ignored the xeno-team as usual.

At last all is ready. Tyroe goes through a well known League farewell ritual with Dollie, Mannie and Nelson.

“I'll be here and see what transpires. There;'s not much chance I'll be able to get a message outside of the mother ship. Tyroe associates to the Com and is able to get the help of the automatons to rid the mother ship of the small craft and it's three crew members through the suspension. The *Ejection* is moved to the edge of the suspension and Dollie, along with Mannie and Nelson.

“Prepare to dream”, not realizing that Nelson could be immune to the created reality in the suspension. The Ejection is pushed into the suspension, Nelson goes to the null state, Dollie is back on Ground One once again and Mannie is on Ris primary.

Tyroe associates deeper with more semantics to the local Com and the Ejection is extruded into space. Nelson comes out of his null state. Dollie and Mannie immediately come out of their dream states. The Ejection is drifting away from the massive mother ship. The in-system drive is now running and they proceed away from the mother ship to the K star about one and one half AUs distance. The instrumentation on the Ejection is now operational .

A display is rezed with all the objects in the system.

“By the Lights ... “ Dollie stops mid-oath. “ ... Tyroe was correct. There's not much in this system, some planetoids, that may be of use to us, but look at the mother ships. Here. What is it?”

“One hundred and twenty seven according to our Instrumentation of the system.” Nelson adds. “They definitely are on a mission having to do with the destroyed Doamer mind, just like Tyroe told us.”

“Nelson, can you map where we are in the Kandox dimension?”

“I'm already on the it. “

Mannie is still rezing up in-space instrumentation and readying the torp. “We'll never be able to map that angel all the way back to the Kandox system, but lets start the torp in that direction and see how far it makes it.”

In unison all three chant “goodbye angel”.

Later, Nelson rezes a display in the standard two space mapping along the U and V coordinates. “It looks like we are about thirty four in the negative U and about eleven plus V from the Kandox system.”

“That sound about correct Nelson”. Dollie had the information on all the shifts the Ecostream made, up to the point of their first mission to the original bay with the original suspension.

“That big ship with its many small shifts, covered more out-space area than I thought. Given this information, program the torp to follow back to Kandox as far as it can go. I know that the Ecostream sent its own angels updating their current position like a trail of bread crumbs. Hopefully that trail can be successfully traced.

The torp shifts and is gone. The three see it disappear from their instrumentation and say nothing.

Polyandry

It had been six standard League days since the torp shifted out the “minus thirty four plus eleven” system. Dollie, Mannie and Nelson live in a space that allows little movement, other than an exercise area. One at a time can visit a small garden area that can be exposed to the light from the K star primary. Basic food plants grow that can be rezed into a thousand different dishes help the monotony. By the sixth day Dollie can sense a tension in the two males, whom she has already spent months with in training but not in these close quarters. She likes Mannie and Nelson and then makes a personal decision.

After the next sleep period, Dollie scrubs in the body cleaner and doesn't dress in her usual League officers silver, white and black. She wears a short soft light tan mini-dress complements her brown skin and silky ocher colored hair. By contemporary League tastes, which very greatly from planetary culture to planetary culture, Dollie is good looking but not an absolute beauty. Her legs are perfection. She has typical well shaped breasts, round buttocks. Since she is in the League service, her shoulders are wide, strong and muscular. To some this would detract from her physique, but it's a natural part of Dollie. She steps out of the body cleaner and sits down in front of Nelson and Mannie.

Nelson and Mannie are speechless.

“Mannie, Nelson .. I'm not going to mince words. We've been in close quarters for about six days now. You guys have spent a more time spanking your duck than a young adolescent. <<Spanking your duck has a number of meanings, anywhere from simple masturbation to rezing a sex robot-android.>> When you're working on a ranging ship, like the mother ship, it's not an issue. I am proposing to you ... I want to marry both of you. The only way you're getting laid is if you are both getting laid. I want a steady relationship, if *you* want it. That means that if we are floating around out here for hundreds of days, and the League does find us, we are still married. Now I'm going back to the garden for a little bit . Think and talk about this. Here are the real choices. We can all be celibate. I can be celibate and you two can be homosexual. We can all spend most of the time masturbating in our own space, given there's not much of it. We can get married. Be seeing you in a bit ... “

Mannie and Nelson looked at each other stunned. They did not expect this. Finally Nelson breaks the

ice.

“Can you share a wife. Dollie makes a damn good wife. “

“We'll, I'm not into same sex relationships, not my style. I still get to do my sport on Ris. I think we can do this. “

“OK, Mannie, but I do want to ask Dollie a couple of questions.”

Polyandry is not common in the League, but certainly tolerated and common to a few local societies. The removal of the serial dream sequence that the three team members had lived during sleep was now gone. Their fantasies had to play out in real life situations. This was particularly hard only Dollie, since her dream sequence all centred around an lover on Ground One that never existed. In this situation, Dollie is now quite horny, though she does not consciously display this behavior.

After about an hour by her self, Dollie continues to day dream in the garden capsule. She wishes it was a deck, but its only a capsule. “If we are in this system for months, we have got to rez more into the graden capsule.” It is easy to rez a viz of many events captured in the Com of their in-system boat, but living in the past only goes so far. “Have I two husbands? Am I'm a bride to be? Its time to face the men.”

Dollie returns from the garden capsule. She looks at Mannie and Nelson. Mannie has a wry smile and Nelson seems calm and attentive.

“My good crew members and friends, what is your decision. Do you want to marry your squad leader.”

Nelson speaks first. “Dollie. You are fantastic. Why don't you have a husband waiting for you now?”

Dollie reminisces to herself. She has had several lovers. She t thinks to some extent she loved each of them. But she always told them: “I love space, I can't stay here with you. I love the cosmos and space, you deserve more ...”

Nelson, I put my love of the Cosmos before my love of lovers. It has hurt me at times. I sit here in a unique situation. I have two friends who I love as friends, that I want to make my mates. You two are part of this grand risk as much as I am. I can't say it in simpler words. “

“You are so hot Dollie. Really Dollie” It's Mannie just venting his personality.

Nelson smiles calmly as he often does and then quizzes Dolly. “If we have children who is the bio-parent? How do you choose?”

“I will only have twins. One child from your sperm Nelson, and one from your's Mannie. I will only gen two or four children, not three. In each case one will be a female and one a male. You two must decide which you want first. Needless to say, we are not making babies out here in the Kandox dimension. Oh! you two pretty males, are you OK with that?

Finally Mannie spoke. “I have a real nice lady friend in the Risian system, but she will have to get over it.”

Nelson simply states “I'm in.”

Next the two grooms and the bride designed and scripted their vows. Marriage tends to last in League Society. Divorce is tolerated, but lowers your status. Nelson, Mannie and Dollie write an long and extended vow, not violating each others ontological or spiritual beliefs, but reaffirming what is best about a family bound through the ages that culminates in League sanctions. Normally the civil marriage ceremony in the League is performed completely nude between two partners in private. In this case only Dollie sheds her light blue briefs and her mini-skirt and sits in front of her two husbands-to-be exposing her beautiful dark yellow pubic hairs, the beautiful folds of her labia major and (very wet)

perfectly deflowered labia minor folds of her sex organ. The three repeat the vows in unison, as Dollie dances in front of her two husbands. She removes their light blue overalls exposing an erection for each husband. Lastly she removes their briefs exposing the stiff penises. Mannie is so horny he has to go first, but does not last long.

For the next 6 days, by their counting, the routine is review scan events in the star system, eat rezed and garden capsule food, defecate, and have sex. After about a week, they finally slow down somewhat and start to pay more attention to their diminished systems on this in-system boat. But still Dollie relaxes while both Mannie and Nelson are asleep. She is still having sexual fantasies associated to her dream life on Ground One and thinks to herself, "Woman, here you are out in deep space and you get to be a floozy and have two husbands. She thinks how different they are. Even their erections are shaped different and she really likes that. Males in League culture are not circumcised, though there are some religious sects that practice it. The belief is due to a more sensitive penis tip, it allows the males to have more intense orgasms and also makes it much easier to for them to masturbate, which is encouraged for both males and females when they reach puberty. Manny has more testosterone, and for the first day after their marriage, when he has his orgasms, his buttocks would flex uncontrollably and his testicles would bang furiously against her buns. Mannie's got the energy. Nelson is more a pure lover, slow and methodical, much more a giver of multiple orgasms. "I'm so lucky. By the Lights I love them both."

Several more days pass. The three settle down to a routine of carefully journaling their experience on Kandox Five and on the mother ship crafted in Second Human Federation space.

"Tyroe told us, all the mother ships have a common destination. If this system is the destination, I don't get it." Mannie tells Dollie and Nelson.

"I know what you are thinking. Nothing special about this system. A few balls of rock. Nothing rich. Not even that much energy."

By now Mannie, Dollie and Nelson have collected enough matter and energy to rez more of their garden module sticking off the side of the *Ejection*. It now looks like a bug eye on the side of a cigar. The only plants they could grow are the bio-fertile seed from their survival gear. The three of them have to spread the pollen and make the plants feel comfortable in the K-star sunlight. A few days later they rez some robotic style insects that are brightly colored, give off a pleasant smell and do the pollination. The garden is now a place to release their subconscious that is not manufactured from their subconscious. Even hardened out system explorers need a break from their own self derived amusement. And it's a designator of better status given the common denominator of League Culture.

Dollie has her two husbands in the garden module and is doing her massage therapy. This is a new skill she has been working very hard to perfect. Both husbands are completely naked and very comfortable in the natural star light given this pass of the *Ejection* around the primary (as it slowly turns to create a light and dark pattern). Dollie has messaged Nelson into a sleep/meditation state and is working on Mannie. He is now snoring after repeated elbows into the back and neck. Dollie lies back in the garden among the small trees and shrubs. "Tomorrow another tale we do ..." She is almost off herself when the viz events go off, all at once. The meaning is simple and easy. Every giant mother ship from Alnex-92 has slipped from the this system.

"Damn, by the lights, this means Tyroe has passed too".

Dollie glances at the two sleeping husbands. Don't agitate them, what can they do?"

Dollie scans the system. The *Ejection* doesn't have the instrumentation of a star cruiser. It makes no difference, the mother ships have left their signature and are now gone. Dollie again lies down in the garden module. The small leaves of the edible plants from the Farmit system tickle her thighs and legs

and soon she is asleep, dreaming an aimless dream where she is back on New Orn at the League Base. The walls are fluid and she is listening to concert from the late HumFed One, with soft brass from small physical speakers and small seats in a large auditorium. She has to defecate, but all the bathrooms have been locked except a portable wheel-chair potty out in the open at the edge of the concert hall. Dollie drops her trousers but nothing happens. The dream meanders on until she wakes up. “Must have been one of the funny vegetables I ate. Her wiggling wakes up Nelson. Mannie is still sleeping. Dollie leans over and hugs naked Nelson, pressing him with her own naked breasts.

“Nelson, hug-gums, something happened while you were sleeping. Every single mother slipped to an unknown destination. They are all gone.”

Nelson rubs his eyes and mumbles, “really? I guess we three are all alone.”

Dollie excuses herself to the decomposition system, so her dream was not all fantasy. She returns and Mannie is stirring. Dollie hugs her Mannie-husband and tells him about the departure.

“I thought so. This system is just a meeting place. They are off to some other feat that only ... who knows ... what it is.”

The days pass as Dollie and the two husbands fall into a routine. They guide their small in-system boat to a number of asteroids in the system, but only close examination, not landing. No one has the urge to go dirt side on these ice balls. They have no weapon systems to speak of, but do make sure the internal systems keeps them and all their belongings safe from any disease or harmful microorganisms. The three discuss the possibility of trying to convert the *Ejection* to a small star drive ship, but decide against it for several reasons. It would take several months to rez enough energy and matter to convert the *Ejection* into a star class ship. The torp they did rez while on the mother ship, has this system as their current location. It is better to wait for the League to find us.

Three months and two days after all the giant mother ships disappeared, two League star cruisers entered the system. The *Nightstream* and *Lightdriver* hail the *Ejection* and are port side at eight o'clock in less than an hour. Mannie, Nelson and Dollie were studying various subjects and running simulations the best they could with their limited on board environment. They all stop and run the life supports hygiene system, and come out smelling like flowers and clean as Growthreesian meowler. Uniforms are now on and they are ready to rejoin their service counter parts and continue their duty with the League.

The Captain of the *Nightstream* is the senior officer, Joan Belandsky. She welcomes Dollie, Nelson and Mannie as they sit in a quarantine that is part of standard operating procedures for any xeno-command group that has had a lengthy exposure to external conditions.

“Joan, I remember you from New Orn one of the briefings. I would like you to meet my two new husbands, Nelson Bushway Beezlee and Mannie Bushway Keeble. Just for the record. “

“A League Service marriage, unusual, but with tremendous potential. Dollie, you should know that except for controlled visits to the station that your original mission established, Kandox Five has been put on the agenda as off limits for the next Reinvention Convention. The effect of the microatomic material that goes into Kandox Crawlers can blow through the Kandox out sector like clouds in a wind. There are now a good ten star cruisers moving through the Kandox continuum studying it. “

“Really” says Nelson. “By the Lights” says Mannie.

* * *

Twelve days later. Dollie, Mannie and Nelson are in a conference sphere at the League star base at New Orn prime. The postmortem is directed by a delegate from the Kandox Five station station and a

group of League barristers. League Cosmos peoples worry about the exposure that occurs directly under a group of barristers. It can result in a great increase or decrease in status, which League peoples view much like primitive societies frame work wealth and poverty. So this exposure make Mannie, Dollie and Nelson nervous.

“Dolly, Mannie, Nelson, you're report and viz of what took place on Kandox Five, on the *Ecostream* and on the mothering ship is excellent. Your service to the League is superior. A great number of cosmos mythologies have appeared as a result of your publications. We believe the origin of the Humfed Two ships is actually on Beautica. A group involved in the silent war settled in the wilderness on the primary for a number of months, measured in star time. Something of an understanding was reached by the waring factions. All evidence tells us that the truce was engineered by a female with extra-ordinary talent. Then they all vanished going their separate ways. It is our belief that one of these exceptionals took a slower than light ship into HumFed Two space, and is the main force behind the giant ships and randomly evolved children you three met. “

Mannie speaks up. “And this is due to evidence you found in the Beautican wilderness?”

“No, we couldn't find the slightest bit of bio-material left behind. They left it as slick as a Growthresian Meowler. We were able to track some passage to the slower than light ship. There are not too many of those in this era of the League.”

The proceedings wrap up. The “NelsonManDol” chronicle as it came to be known, sweeps through the League all the way to the four original homeworlds. Dollie is presented with an Kandox outsector starcruiser that is the equivalent of the *Ecostream*. She will be a focal personality at the next re-invention convention. The name of the new starcruiser is *Cloudglar*. Dollie is now captain of the outspace starcruiser. Her two husbands are with her and are always on special assignment, they are “on staff”.

Two weeks after the postmortem at New Orn, the *Cloudglar* departs for Kandox outspace continuing with the mission to solve the mystery of the subatomic wind, the slip-capable Centerdoms, the appearance of Mind Doamer babies of the dead and anything else the crew of the *Cloudglar* can find in the Kandox out sector.

* * *

Mannie puts together a viz to send to Ris before the *Cloudglar* departs. He is dressed in full League Navy regalia with the insignia from the *Cloudglar*.

<< My dearest friend Jinaze,

I feel a burden is being relieved when I rez you this viz. I will never be returning to Ris to do sport. As you may know, the events of the last cosmic year have altered my life forever. I am now on a permanent deep space mission with my Captain, who is also now my wife. I will always remember, appreciate and cherish our times together on Ris, If I am in League Cosmos space and you happen to be near the vicinity, please visit. I can tell you first hand what I have experienced. Please rez back anytime you have the urge.

As Always,

Mannie Bushway Keeble>>

When arriving at Kandox prime, this brief viz is received by Mannie. Jinaze is in tight Risian sport décor.

<<My dearest friend Mannie,

Best of luck to you on the deep space missions. Watch out for the strange Badger technology (my

opinion, and guess). I'm married too! Jack Beland is now my husband. Tell me about any babies in space. Stay in touch.

As Always,

Jinaze Strem Cheapjanesu>>

Convergence

Tyroe watches the *Ejection* disappear from the membrane that holds the *Ecostream*. He is alone now except for the children and the home ship. He wonders what reality the *Ecostream* crew are in. Maybe each of them has returned where they started as children and became young adults. Tyroe associates to the mother ships net and continues to search. On each ship thousands of children, each starting to transform into one prototype of a single dead Doamer mind. It measures that over 80% of the children are transformed and waiting, with a set of memories that has the identical signature of the lost Doamers. "This is a miracle!" Tyroe is crushed and elated by the experience. The children are disappearing.

The routine of the androids cultivating the children continues. The remaining children awake from a sleep period and don't remember Tyroe from the last time they went to sleep. The dream/sleep state must be a reset point in the children. They start out anew each day, starting to learn how to talk and how to eliminate waste from their body. As each day progresses, Tyroe notices the learning period takes longer than the previous day. Finally he has an epiphany. These children are associating to the most complex Mind Doamer patterns of the dead.

Looking on the Med Com, Tyroe can now sense all the children on all the ships. They are all steadily being transformed. He can also sense the children on the other mother ships that have graduated to associate to a dead Doamer Mind.

"Bookkeeping. Account for the number of dead Doamer Minds. Account for the number of children in all mother ships"

It does not take long for Tyroe to use the local resources to run the count. The total number of children graduated plus the number of children starting out with potty training and talking equal exactly the number of Dead Doamer Minds. This goes on for some time, Tyroe estimates that given his sleep cycles, food extrusions, which he is now able to get the local MedCom to modify for his tastes. He constantly asks himself, "where are we going?"

One day Tyroe gets an answer. A large adult male with dark skin and golden hair walks through the wall of the little quarter where Tyroe has declared home, and says, "Tyroe, be careful what you wish for, you just might get it."

Tyroe is so surprised, almost dirties himself. "Ahh ... ahh ... "

He is beginning to gain control again.

"Daron is my name. You have never met me."

"Daron, you know my name ..."

Daron stops, and is now wearing his most sensitive personality. He has never seen Tyroe before, but knows him well from MedCom rez activity. Daron stares a piercing glance through Tyroe and tells him "Have a sit and relax." They both rez a comfort in the quarters that Tyroe is occupying. Tyroe realizes

that Daron is not an automaton and that he is associated to the Doamer Mind.

Finally after a few moments of utter silence, Tyroe is able to talk.

“Daron, who are you and where do you come from? And what do you have to do with the Mind Doamers? The children on the mother ships?”

“Good questions Tyroe, and I promise you in time, you will have all the answers. Or should I say, most of them. Some of them I don't know. Isn't that what makes existence interesting?”

Some activity can be heard as automatons and a some of the remaining children go through their lessons while Tyroe and Daron sit there in silence. The walls soften colors from light blue to green for reasons unknown to Tyroe. He looks at Daron. Obviously of League origin, with light brown hair and dark, but not black skin.

Daron steps off his perch and talks.

“I was born in the Beautican System on the primary, out in the wilderness. My mother called it the “outside”. She was a rare person in the Silent War. Tyroe, do you know what a Lever is? “

“A Lever. I personally considered this to be a League Cosmos myth, mostly make believe. What I do know is that there were only a score of them and they would appear from time to time and fight with their adversaries, a group from the Church to protect the Doamer Mind.”

“The popular mythology is basically correct, Tyroe. Leverites evolved from the Standard Scientific Organization in the Canali system. As you know, they are part of the Church of Face.”

Daron, now digs deep into the Doamer Mind, something that a Lever traditionally would never do. He looks straight at Tyroe and says “Feel me”.

Tyroe recoils in depression, distress and misery.

“Daron, how do you do this? You are a Simp and a Lever. How?”

“I got it from my mother, who in both the Simp and Lever culture, is now known as the Mother of the Silent War. You see, Tyroe. The Levers disappeared into the expanse of the Second Human Federation. This part of the popular myth is also true. But what did they do there? A handful of the Levers were also capable Simps. Those that were, often were mentally unstable for days, reconciling the birth of babies with the dead in the Doamer Mind. “

Tyroe interrupts Daron, “What is your mothers name, the *Mother of the Silent War*?”

“Ideea. And my father is a musician that carries a Zangelo from Canali. He made jokes that he thought the musical instrument was a force from the unknown, of Badger technology. I doubt that. To continue Tyroe ... the other Levers disappeared into the expanse, including my sister. From time to time I heard them speaking to me through the Com. Their physical whereabouts unknown. In spite of that, we started our greatest project. And we did this together, the few Levers that were also Simps. It was initiated in the Alnex-92 system. This you already know don't you?”

“Yes, Daron, I got that from the Com on the ship. I also know that each child is associated with one dead mind in the Doam. Is this the key to the project?”

“Affirmative. We built each baby from the signature of every dead mind in the Doam. But it takes a period of learning, and graduation to fully take the signature, as you have seen. You know what is on the Signature ships, where do you think they are going, and what is the ultimate goal of the children?”

There is a period of silence and Tyroe stares at Daron with a quizzical look. He knows this has something to do with the Silent War. But what can a group of children and the Doamer Mind have to

do with the Simp? Do they still exist? Rumor has it, they also departed the League, but where? No one knows.

“No, Daron. Of this knowledge, I may as well be staring into the Face of the Universe, as those in the Church of Face might contend..”

“Well said Tyroe, I see your knowledge of ritual goes well beyond the Doamer catechism. Each child is the antithesis of lost Doamer mind. Each will make it's way into the Star Eyes Outsector and join with the Simp. This might not be pretty, but it will end the Silent War forever and maybe re-unite the Simp, Lever, HumFed Two and League Cosmos. A worth while goal don't you think Tyroe?”

“Obviously, but how, Daron, how will you pull this off? And where is this Star Eyes Out sector?”

“It's another continuum like the League Sector, the Kandox Sector. There are probably many more. Tyroe, I need your help. Join me for the greatest transformation in League and HumFed Two history. Think about it. I'll return before we go.”

“Daron, one last question, what is to become of my ship, the Ecostream and the crew?”

“Good question Tyroe. At some point, if all goes well, the small space reality that they are in will slowly dissipate. Right now they are in a complete state of suspended animation, living their dreams as a gestalt.. The dreams will dissipate and they will find them selves in our reality at that time.”

Daron disappears into the wall to some unknown place on the mother ship. Tyroe feels more alone than he has felt since departing on this mission. There are only a few children left. Ever what is to happen will take place soon. He can feel it. He wanders the transport system. Often the crèches are completely empty, the Mind Doamer androids have de-rezed and disappeared into the infra-structure of the mother ship. This continues for several days as Tyroe continues to associate to the mother ships com. One day before Daron returns, Tyroe finds the graduated children on the com. Not only can he now sense them on this mother ship, but all the other mother ships. Each is suspended in the clear material like that which encases the Ecostream and the original portal to this mother ship. Each child is now an adolescent. The adolescents, all lined up in the suspension, represent every human species stereotype in the League, and in the Second Human Federation. Each child is reliving the lives of each lost Mind Doamer. It is an exhausting stream of consciousness to penetrate only for the a short while. Tyroe collapses in a ball of sweat and takes a nap.

Tyroe's dreams take back to where he existed in suspension, but this time they are not sequential or anything close to vivid reality. They are just dreams. You can sleep and dream just about anywhere you want to on the mother ship,. The infrastructure creates a cradle on the spot. Never too hard or never too soft. Sleeping is good here.

One day Tyroe associates to the local mother ship net and discovers that all the children are gone. He moves through the transfer system of the ship. No children. No attendant androids. They are all gone. They have all graduated. A short while later, as promised, Daron returns.

“Tyroe, very soon we will depart from this outsector, all of us. I need you. I need you as me.”

Daron takes Tyroe by the arms and looks at him face to face, squarely in the eyes. The grip on his arms are stronger than anything Tyroe as ever felt.. What happens next puts Tyroe in a state of fear and confusion. His whole physical body is shutting down. He has fleeting memories of experiences with his family, first girlfriend, first time out on a starship. Then a clear light and snap. Daron continues to hold Tyroe. Tyroe is dead. Daron introduces sub-biologies and waited for the Cellular.

“There.” Daron has a calm look on his face.

Tyroe-the-baby-Lever eyes opened,. He recognizes Daron and then slowly repeats a series of vows that

now attach him to the Church of the Face of the Universe. Tyroe repeats the instructive part of the ritual with Tyroe using slow and deliberate phrases.

“Take the anti-Entropy from the always dark, always light Face of the Universe. Let it flow through your eyes and be the ordinary reconstruction of your daily life. Let it flow where energy and matter combine as your consciousness and subconscious combine to open to the Face ...”

Daron and Tyroe go arm in arm as Daron leads Tyroe to the small craft that Daron uses to go between mother ships.

“Where we headed Daron?”

“StarEyes Out Sector. You and I will never forget it.”

“Who is going?”

“All of us.”

Daron and Tyroe depart to a different mother ship. One that doesn't have the Ecostream embedded in the permeative solution. As soon as all mother ships sync up they shift. The shift is into the StarEyes Out Sector. Daron continues to explain to Tyroe.

“The SIMP from the Silent War several years ago found one way passage to this dimension. I took myself as part of the Leverite Heresy into the Second Human Federation Expanse after leaving my Lever mother, as you know. Now we are here to unite the two parts, once and for all. Each youth now has the part of the Med Com that was killed. Each child can merge with the Med Com of the SIMP and the death will give cycle to rebirth, not something that is restorative, but new, revolutionary and transforming.”

“It seems we are going to experience Cosmos Hell or Cosmos Nirvana, Daron.”

“Or maybe both. It's a bold move. Right now we are mapping SIMP home worlds. They are easy to find in this continuum. They are the ones with the most energy. We already know that shift behavior of star cruisers is different in the Star Eyes out sector. Energy is more valuable. Entropy has a slippery and a different curve in this sector.”

“Daron, what will become of the Ecostream? It is embedded in a substance that I don't really understand.”

“Oh, reality building threads from the Kandox, sector that emanate a slight blue sift.. They operate in a dimension somewhere between the sub-atomic and small state arena. Interesting stuff it is. Ultimately when the re-engineered CentreDom that encapsulates the Ecostream as served its purpose, what was once the NeoCentreDom will re-rez. The blue threads will dissipate and the Ecostream will return to its former reality. At least that's what our models tell us. At that time the Ecostream must make a choice, explore this sector or use its energy to shift back to the Kandox Sector. We don't know the path from the Star Eyes out-sector back to League Cosmos. It seems to be one way. But who knows, we may find one yet.”

Daron and Tyroe are now silent, each part of the Lever and Mind Daomer existence churning in their minds and in their being. They watch the fleet slowly scatter to their assigned stellar energy sources, each with a faint smile on their face.

(This ends the Cosmos Purgatory story. The last two parts, Cosmos Hell and Cosmos Nirvana continue from here).