



*The Storyteller*

*James D Connolly*

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Storyteller*

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# PREFACE

Welcome to my new trilogy. *The Storyteller Trilogy* has been created as my gift to youth; though these stories would no doubt be enjoyed by readers of all ages, and I hope they will be. These three books gather many of the themes of life, the current world's struggles and realities, deeper forces at play, and some of its history. They lend themselves to the theme of the development of the human race, and the true nature of civilisation. They seek to put civilisation and its ferment squarely in our hands, as we have more ability to understand the ferment, and to wield the power of civilisation, than we imagine.

The first book, *The Storyteller*, is a classic story, and holds other stories within it. It talks to human nobility and the passing from youth into adulthood. It portrays striving and struggle, as this is always part of the passing, and indeed a part of life, showing how nobility is our power over them. The book explores the intertwining journeys of two younger souls; one from a gentle and spiritual background, and the other from a culture steeped in violence and codes of honour. *The Storyteller* wanders here and there, through the deserts of Temelj, also telling of the pathway of its peoples toward their collective adulthood.

To write a book is a magical experience. It unfolds in front of you, if you let it go. You create it, but the nature of the process brings its own magic too. To write about what you love is also powerful; and very meaningful when you have something to say. It is you who writes a book, but it is also the tide of life, the exigencies of the age, and what you see, that brings out your gifts and its gifts. I am a natural writer, who only found it late in life. I would hope that if you are natural with words that you will explore this gift. It is a gift, and therefore something to be given to others. Too much artistic ability is sacrificed to ego, and so it becomes ash. Art created as a gift, and imbued with meaning, only grows.

So, once more, this is my dance with you; my own perceptions, inspired by life and The Baha'i Faith. This book, just as the others I write, cannot seek, and do not seek, to represent my Faith. This is a work of fiction and entirely comes from my imagination, with the exception of quotes and quoted stories, in spite of parallels with Baha'i history and principles, as my symbolism and adventurousness, well, just wander as they do. If you wish to explore it further there is another quote and some links in the back of the book.

It is my hope that this story is something to simply enjoy, and something to mull over, or to reflect on. Maybe something to begin conversations and explorations with, and I would hope it will be used by tutors, youth mentors, and animators in their work.

I hope you enjoy *The Storyteller*. I hope it takes you away as it did me, and that you enjoy the other two books, *Letter to the World* and *The Traveller*.

*May you wander, high in the desert winds of change.*

# *New Cycle*

Able Jones opened the old trunk in the attic. He had always loved playing up here as a small child, and right now, it was the inquisitive nature of a twelve-year-old that had brought him back up here.

The travelling chest was not that old looking, and for some reason it had not drawn his attention as a child. The locks were quite strange as he looked at them now, assuming that they were an older style. In any case, this inquisitive youth would not let that stand between him and the treasure that lay within. He used anything at hand to work the locks, but failed time after time to gain entry. He even thought of taking the hinges off, but they seemed to be part of the casing.

Eventually he gave up, as he did not want to damage the case. He then sat down beside it, breathing in the cold dry winter air, as he began mindlessly playing with two sticks

of hard plastic that were sitting on the old carpet that covered the floor. The plastic sticks were about forty centimetres long, and as Able's imagination usually created a story, a sword fight between a villainous overlord and the great hero naturally ensued. After the long and eventful battle, he decided to go. He would come again another day and try to gain entry to the chest. As he leant on the trunk to stand up, there was a small static "zap", and after two green lights blinked on below each of the locks, they popped open. The dry air and the movement of his feet on the carpet, as the great sword fight had worn on, had created the static charge.

This lad was very aptly named, as he seemed very able, even when luck needed to play a part. Some called that being born lucky, being blessed, or kept by the hand of God, but it did not matter what anyone thought it was, Able was most definitely able. There was an old mysterious friend from his father's past who had given his father the idea for Able's name. It seemed to him that this man was ex-army by the way his father talked about him, and the story was from a time well before his father was even married. The man and Able's father had thought it was a good strong positive name. It meant breath, son, breathing spirit, as in Abel; but it also personified a positive way of being, and strength of purpose, in the particular way his name was spelt.

Able's friends had a field day with it, as little and younger boys do; well, even as older ones do sometimes. He had learned to be calm and strong even by this one, very small, recurring hardship. He had learned quickly in many things, as he had been given the understanding early on that hardship was the opportunity to learn more and be more. Also, that it was the power source of invention. This was a very strong part of his family's ethos; one Able took to with a real will. He had been a joy to his parents, as was his much older adopted sister, and his family was close and strong. His older sister Lilly had grown up and left now, but Grandpa was still with them. He was special to him too, and them all.

He now stood there bending over the trunk; not believing his luck. He opened it slowly and stood back as he did. There were some old black suits with black ties sitting on top of them, and a uniform with strange patches on it folded up with them. He could not make out the writing, as the letters on the cotton badges, and most of the symbols, had been eaten away by something. As he knelt down for a closer inspection, he wasn't even sure if the words were English. He thought that maybe his father was ex-army too, wondering why he had never said anything about it. Then as he dug down further, he came upon some other clothes made of an odd feeling cloth. They were women's clothes, and nestled in amongst them was an amulet.

He pulled out the gold amulet; it was not large, but not small, and quite heavy for such a piece of jewellery. Just then his mother called him. He instinctively put the amulet in his pocket, quickly packed the clothes back in the chest, and closed it. He put some old books back on top of it, and as he did, he realised that he had made a big mistake. He did not know if he could open the trunk so easily again, but the urgency of not being found out was more present in his mind.

As he walked down the stairs for dinner, he decided that he would take a good look at the amulet before he talked to his mother and father about it. They sure had some explaining to do, but he would take time to explore the piece first. With that thought he smiled, and his steps showed, just a little, the feeling of excitement and discovery that lay ahead of him.

# *The Bridge*

It was Friday night when Able had found the amulet, and it was now Sunday. He was not happy, as he had not managed to get enough time to himself to explore the amulet. It too was locked, and he had only got it unlocked very late last night. Under torchlight in his bed, he had played with the five small winders inside it, all with markings around them. He could not work out what it did; tell time, play music, or open further. Being a young soul, he was very impatient to find out its nature, while also impatient to ask his parents about the clothes he had found in the chest. Part of him was protesting at the way he was going about this, but his curiosity about the amulet held him tight, and would not let him go.

Grandpa had told him that curiosity was a great friend and a great danger. There was so much that it could uncover, but if the particular road to discovery was ill-advised, it was usually fraught with many dangers. He had encouraged the boy to be curious and courageous, but right now Able was missing the point a little; as is sometimes the way of younger souls, and maybe a mirror for us all to seek at times as we walk through this place.

“Able! Com’on, we have to go. We’ll be late for the walk on the bridge,” called his mother.

“Coming, mum,” he called.

The bridge walk was a yearly event, and it was a lovely cool, but sunny, morning right at the beginning of spring when they joined the throng of people to cross the bridge. Able's parents walked ahead of him as his hand jostled the amulet about deep in his pocket. Grandpa walked beside him, thoroughly enjoying the bridge walk. He almost cried whenever he talked of the walk, as he had laboured for almost a lifetime to help build the beginning of the new culture.

Halfway across the high bridge they would always stop to look over the river, and every time Grandpa would show Able the circular catfish nests under the water. Able pretended to listen again as he pulled out the amulet, but in doing so he dropped it. It fell onto a long narrow grate just beyond the rail, and for a child his age this was a *most dire* emergency. So as his family moved on, he stayed, then going over the rail as quickly as he could to grab the amulet.

Just as he took hold of it, his mother turned. He saw her and flinched. Losing his balance, he began to fall backwards over the very shallow river. Death or great trauma seemed the only outcomes. He then saw his mother look to the amulet and call out some strange words. Every split second is felt, and known, by those who are in the midst of an accident. The mind is clear, quick, and sharp, the senses alive, and he missed nothing as he was falling. After the strange words, she then mouthed '*I love you*', just as ribbons of light of many colours wrapped around him and mixed together to become a white sleeve. The white vortex then bore him away.

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE ABLE FOUND HIS DESTINATION. Playing with the amulet had reset it, and it had sent him very far away to a planet in a far-off galaxy. He sat there in the white sand, and he cried as he looked around, not knowing what to do. He knew

he was in a desert, and that was all; well, other than the orange sky that made it very obvious that he was no longer on Earth. The air was thankfully breathable, and he just held the amulet tightly to his chest and wished to go home. He closed his eyes and tried to repeat the words his mother had called out, but he did not know them. They were strange, like this place.

Suddenly, the head of a large lizard creature, the size of a small dog, popped out of the more loose, pebbled sand beside him and then popped back in again just as quickly. It then cautiously lifted its head so that its eyes were just able to see through a single layer of the pebbles. It was amusing to Able, and he laughed a bit. The lizard responded, jumping out of the sand and onto his lap like an excited puppy looking for a pat. It put its head over his shoulder and leant in for a hug. Able laughed some more and felt a little comforted.

It was then that another massive lizard head appeared out of the pebble-sand. Able realised his mistake, but it was too late. The great beast pulled itself all the way out of the sand, as it lived and easily moved within it, now eyeing Able like prey. There was no emotion in its gaze as it suddenly moved to strike; but then, just as suddenly, it stopped. A stick had appeared, pointed directly onto its nose. Able turned to see a long arm and a tall lean creature on the other end of it. He was humanoid, with deep purple skin, blonde streaked hair, and deep green eyes. He wore a light white cloth that was draped loosely over him down to his knees; over that was a light green cloak made of a very rough material and tied around his neck and upper arms, open down the front and hanging down to his midriff. He had a brown belt with all manner of things hanging off it, and his feet were bare. The humanoid's gaze was focused and intent directly into the eyes of the great lizard, and as the baby lizard jumped from the boy's lap, Able began to see an image in his mind.

The image had him standing up and walking gently away towards the high, and more red coloured dunes, just beyond where they now were. He immediately got up and followed

the instruction given him. All the while, the humanoid held the stick to the beast's nose with an unblinking stare into the large creature's eyes. Suddenly Able got a picture to run, just as an even greater creature burst out of the loose pebble-sand and gathered up the mother lizard.

Both the humanoid and Able were then running hard for the red dunes. The humanoid had greater speed across the finer sand flat that they now ran on, with Able thankful that he had been deposited by the vortex at the very edge of that loose pebble ground. It would have been impossible for him to run on, and he imagined that was one of reasons that these creatures hunted there. It was like they lived within it. His mind was again very clear, taking in every detail as he ran for his life. This thin white sand he now ran on made his upper leg muscles burn painfully, but he was not complaining...just running.

ABLE'S MOTHER WAS DOWN ON HER KNEES. Her husband held her, but it was like he was not even there. Nothing could still her grief, and her guilt was escalating it. "*If only I had given up the amulet like I promised when we settled here*", she thought. With this she sobbed even harder and cried out in pain. Her husband held her tighter, only now becoming aware of the measure of the grief he should feel. His wife knew the instrument, and if *she* was this broken by her son's use of it, then the situation was more than bad.

She looked back to the time when she had made sure that the amulet would not take her *deeper*, by locking the instrument to this outer universe only. She had taken it with her to Earth, even though she knew she should not, and that decision would now haunt her. She knew that Able was somewhere in this universe; this reality, the *Outer Realities*. It would have been better if he had gone *Deeper*, as there were many there who could have, maybe, helped him get home; all was more intimately connected there.

*Deeper* was inside this reality, and far bigger; but the relatively smaller size of the Outer Realities was of little consolation to her. This outer universe was still almost endlessly large and impossible to find him in. She knew that he would have most certainly played with the settings and changed the destination, but even if it was on her last setting, she could not now go after him, as Able had taken her only means of travel there to find him.

This woman had created the amulet and knew the workings well. She knew the science intimately, and she also knew that she could not recreate it here. Both she and her husband had given up their right to travel *deeper* some fifteen years ago, so she could not return there to build another. She knew that even if she could manage it by some miracle, Able could be anywhere in the many galaxies, of galaxies, of galaxies; endless worlds, that even with an amulet, she might search for a lifetime and only touch the surface of. She let out a howl of grief right there on that bridge on planet Earth. Today she was like any other mother who had lost her son; one who could only live on the hope of his return.

THE HUMANOID'S FEET WERE VERY LARGE, yet in proportion to his frame, as he stood at well over two and half meters in height. He also had webbing between his four large toes which helped him to move faster on the sand, but other than that he could have been mistaken for human.

The two of them now stood on red rocky ground in amongst the small clump of red dunes, catching their breath. The humanoid was impressed with Able's speed across the dunes; well, with such *ridiculous* feet.

Able laughed at the picture the alien put in his mind on the subject, and so sat down, taking off his sports shoes to show it his real feet. The creature then allowed itself a small

grunt of humour while it gave most of its attention to the goings on in the pebble-sand. The greater creature had killed its prey, shook the life out of it to make sure, and was now making its way back under the looser sand. It's movement was like a cross between digging and swimming, as Able saw it, and even though he had been scared for his life a minute ago he was now quite in awe of his surroundings. He looked back to the humanoid, and the creature nodded, as if to say, *yes, this is good, we are safe.*

Abel's thoughts somehow passed in pictures to this creature, just as he could see the thoughts of this tall purple being in his own. The creature looked again and again to the sky, and back to Able's eyes in between. The nature of the young traveller's situation was made clear as the creature now delved in the boy's mind. It then opened the boy's palm to reveal the amulet, and the boy sobbed, but stopped short of crying. His reaction, and the thoughts the alien had gathered, made it clear that there was no return home for the boy by that strange ribbon-light that had brought him here.

The tall creature looked up to the sky in all directions again as it gave Able new instructions. It seemed that the creature was wary of something and that they were to move on immediately. The creature was not nervous, but made it clear to Able that they needed to take great care and keep moving for their safety. This necessity took the morning through, both in their own thoughts of what had happened, and in the creature, also what was to be done with the boy.

When they rested some hours later, they ate some small fare and drank some water. The alien had them quickly on the move again though, and now a little more at ease, began to send instructions to the boy. This purple humanoid with piercing green eyes, said that Able was to talk out loud, as well as send his thoughts to him, as they walked; and that at other times, the creature would do the same. Vivid images in Able's mind showed him that they

would learn each other's verbal language, as storytelling was impossible without it. The emphasis on this art was *very* strong. It seemed from the feeling of the images that storytelling held the spirit of these people, and the man-creature made it clear, that...*First there were the stories, and then, all else.*

Able wasn't sure, as learning a whole new language would take a long time. With that thought, the man called out a short howl which presented itself like a laugh. He sent a message back to say that they had all the time in the world, as he was a Sandwalker, and he walked the endless desert in search of The Great Chasm; that he had walked twenty years since he first set out, and that it may take twenty more to achieve his goal, even that he may *never* find it.

*"It is up to The All,"* it communicated; then, *"We walk on."*

Able moved in the direction of the man's pointed stick as they went. It seemed that he often changed direction, moving in a very random way. The creature's stride was long, and the boy was always working hard to keep up, especially when they sporadically walked along the front of some of the seemingly endless white sand dunes of this planet. They walked amongst a great ocean of dunes; just specks in its immensity.

The creature had regathered himself, but Able was of course, still reeling from the sudden events of today. He was also very quiet now as his thoughts wandered to the full nature of his predicament. When the man-creature had said that they may walk these sands for twenty years, a full reality of his situation had become abundantly clear. As he then thought of his family far away from him, it brought small sobs that he tried to hold back. The man-creature then stopped, and turned, talking his native language as well as communicating through Able's mind.

*“To grieve is to honour your family. It is no shame. Yes, you will have to be strong, but your love for them and the endurance gathered as you walk will make you strong.”*

Able let out his pain, and sobbed now, as he walked. The man-creature knew intuitively that this one *was* strong; that he had been *built* strong. He then added, *“You seem of good stock, and I will honour your parents by teaching you. You will learn of the desert, and Story, and you will share your stories with me; your stories and The Great Stories will hold you. You are of an age to move on to adulthood, and I will see to your training.”*

“I’m just a kid,” said, and thought, Able.

*“No, you are on the path to adulthood.”*

“But I’m considered a child on my home planet.”

*“They are wrong,”* the tall purple being stated, plainly.

The creature then stopped and turned his stick towards Able, to get his complete attention. As Able stopped, the man moved around beside him. He pointed his stick in a great horizontal arc, from the top of the dune they now stood on, out across the seemingly endless nothingness, saying, *“In any case, you do not have the luxury of childhood any longer.”*

NIGHT CAME QUICKLY, which somehow soothed Able’s soul a bit. In the night there was a black sky with stars, just like home. The light orange sky in the daylight here had somehow been unsettling to him, so it was good to see a night sky that could make him feel somewhat at home. The sun was twice the size, or maybe just closer than the Earth’s sun. Dossd, as the man liked to be called, had told him that this sun and its worlds were very old. Able had asked Dossd how he could know this, as it seemed this creature had no obvious scientific

learning. Dossd had replied that he had learnt of it through discussion with other Walkers. It seemed that Sandwalkers travelled wide, and learned much.

After some water, and some food, which was very plain but palatable, Dossd told a story from his youth. It seemed that after the evening meal was the time for deeper stories, and story of more significance. He told the story of when he had first been sent out into the unknown by his clan, and while he had been so proud to be doing his duty, he had still been full of dread. He had been trained as best his clan could, and the rest they prayed to The All for. He remembered the threshold of change as he walked through that first day, and how the feeling of dread had changed to one of fearlessness. He had gathered this gift on the other side of that great threshold, as he let go of his life and accepted his place and his work. He had walked off into the desert and had not looked back. It *all* lay ahead of him; no longer behind him.

The caring in that story was not lost on Able, and he knew deep inside that he must pass through that same threshold sometime. It was also not lost on Able that he was quite honoured to hear such a personal story from one who knew him so little. Then he supposed, that out here, life was about now, as there only seemed to be more dunes and that there may not be a tomorrow. Dossd then asked Able to share a story with him, so he told the tall man-creature the story of how he had ended up in the white ribbon bridge, as Dossd had called it. It was hard to tell that story; Dossd feeling honoured that this young pup would tell so hard a story as his first story.

After Able had finished his story, and after some reflective pause, the creature shared some thoughts. *“You will do well. You will pass beyond the threshold of fear, and to the new place you must attain. Do not dally at the threshold, as the only relief is to be found beyond it.”* He then seemed to settle and began to meditate.

Able just lay back on the sand, looking up at the night sky. He was very tired, but also very awake with all this newness. He decided to talk with God, as he liked to do. He saw Him as *The Omnipotent*, but mostly as a genuine friend who always walked with him. To him, God saw everything, so he could share everything with Him. He loved his *Endless Friend* and now talked with him a little. He talked with Him about his predicament and about the ring of fear he had to pass through. It was then that Able simply decided to step through that ring of fire, knowing that Dossd was right about dallying there.

With that decision he felt the strain fall from his being and he breathed deep as he looked up at the two moons. They sat there together in the night sky; one just above and to the right of the other, and their orbit seemed the same. As when they rose, they walked across the sky together, not shifting in alignment with each other.

“*Good,*” broke Dossd into Able’s thoughts. He had seen him considering the moons, when he finished his own meditation. “*Learn the night sky. Watch how it moves. Find your place within the nature of things, and this planet’s place in the stars.*”

Able did not ask why. He just did as he was bid, as the alien’s words had now made clear the stars beyond the moons again. He sobbed a little more as he took time watching them freely, learning the brighter stars and their relation to each other. He also watched their slow movement across the sky in relation to the horizon; so much so, that after a reasonable time he started to gather the sweep of this galaxy, even feeling the planet move beneath him. He felt this planet’s age and its being, and he was filled with awe. By all this, he strangely came to know that the days here were shorter than at home; that, and from the low influence of the sun on his skin today, that somehow it did not burn as hard. Then he recalled Dossd telling him that this star was old. Maybe that meant its light was less intense. He knew a bit

about stars from school, and remembered a little about how they age, but he had not experienced another sun; actually, no one on his whole planet had.

He sobbed a little again at what was lost to him; his home, and his family. But he also realised his fortune in this experience and the powerful education that would be clearly entwined with it. Then he saw more clearly the great power of science and experience when brought together in life. He became elated at the thought of it. Able's reality was changing. It was like his mind was seeing, and seeking, much more now. He *was* becoming an adult, as he felt his intellectual powers suddenly growing and reaching out.

## *Ice and Water*

It had been seven days now, and Dossd and Able had simply walked and talked. It was strange for Able hearing this new language and seeing the images in his mind, but he was getting more attuned to it every day. At night he and Dossd would also share words of same meaning with each other to add to their learning of each other's tongue. Able's new friend had made clear that words and meaning needed to be kept true, and that the deeper stories had to be shared out loud in voice. All this seemed very important to him.

They ate small, dried foods, and drank water that Dossd carried in a skin. The skin was draped over his shoulder and sat diagonally across his back, and under his outer shirt. Able was always hungry and thirsty, and very impressed with this man-creature's ability to go without and carry his load. When Dossd had put the water skin on Able's back for just half a day it really told on him, but the tall creature had assured him that one day he would carry it easily, and that bit by bit, day by day, he would grow stronger.

It was now coming on to evening again when Dossd, walking ahead of Able, turned his head and seemed to feel the air. Then suddenly, "*Run. Follow me!*" came to Able's mind. The boy did not need to be told twice as they headed off the flat ground towards the face of a smaller white dune nearby. Dossd almost dove into the sand and started digging himself in. Able followed suit, and The Walker threw a wide unrolled cloth over them after they had set

themselves. Able realised that he could see through it as they both squirmed back into the dune, then letting the loose sand above them trickle down over the cloth. Then it came...a great noise that threatened to burst Able's ear drums. But he most certainly did not cry out, as the sand, slowly but surely, formed a greater covering over them. Dossd then pushed gently at the cloth with his finger in front of his eyes to see through while still remaining hidden, and the young boy did too. Cocooned in the sand together, they waited.

A portal seemed to be opening; at least that Able could make out. It seemed like it was made of plates that quickly came into and out of existence. These plates appeared and disappeared; all at different angles to each other and in different sizes, but they stayed within a great sphere of what could only be described as *water-light*. It was a bubble of light that got disturbed like water, rippling as the plates came and went within it. It was huge, about nine metres in diameter, and sat in the air about four metres above the ground. Able was amazed, but The Sandwalker made it clear by the silent symbols that a great danger was lurking nearby. Able could feel the immediacy of the danger in the thoughts of his new friend, yet strangely, Dossd did not seem to be afraid.

Suddenly a great mass of lights and steel burst through the strange portal. Able was in fright, but Dossd sighed deeply with relief, making it clear that *Life* had smiled upon them. The space vehicle had crashed into a dune in another direction away from them, and very soon alien creatures started making their way out of the shell of the ship. These were very different creatures to Dossd. They seemed to almost dance as they moved, and skipped here and there, from the ship to the ground to aid their fellows.

Able was entranced, seeing real beauty simply in the nature of the way they moved. The boy was about to push himself out of the sand when Dossd grabbed his arm to hold him back. A huge airship then rose over the great white dune that the spaceship had plunged into.

It was an elongated iridescent white balloon with a large, long gondola hanging from it. It had a flag showing colours and was beautiful in line and shape. The creatures from the spaceship looked up at its beauty, just as they were obliterated by an explosion that suddenly encapsulated them. In that moment they were gone and so was the portal. All that remained was the crashed spaceship, and the airship with beings in black coveralls and sporting weapons now repelling swiftly down ropes to the desert floor. They were tall like Dossd, but all had dark hair and paler purple skin.

They went with great precision around and into the broken ship, seemingly looking for any more of the creatures. There were small, muffled sounds coming from inside the spaceship, and eventually they emerged. One of the airship's company was carried out on the shoulder of another, as were two of the spaceship's creatures. All three were then piled together on the ground and the others walked away. Able thought they must be dead but saw one of the spaceship creatures begin to rise, just when a smaller blast from the ship obliterated that small pile of souls. Able wanted to scream. He had never seen such violence; such soulless precision, and it told very immediately and clearly the story of those who rode in the airship.

IT WAS THREE DAYS UNDER THE COVERING OF CLOTH AND SAND. Much of their water was now spent and Able was not at all well. Between the heat, and not being able to move any muscles in the daylight at all, just a little in the night, it was all he could do not to burst out of the sand and let them obliterate him too.

Dossd had been calming him, yet with a clear certainty growing that they were in real danger of Able breaking. The airship was a large craft and these Icers were taking their time stripping the crashed spaceship of all they could carry. Who knew how long these violent

creatures would take at their work and how much more Able could take, so Dossd eventually decided that he and the boy must sneak away in the night. He now shared his plan and they waited for the night. Thankfully, at this sign of action Able began to breathe deeply again, as to him now, anything was better than staying under the sand.

Dossd had told Able the story of The Icers on the first day of their predicament, as he knew it would help. No words passed between them, only symbols of the mind. He told him of these people who lived in all the high mountains of his planet. The mountains were cold, and rain and snow fell there. The rest of this world was dry. There were no bodies of water, only the water that trickled down from the Icer's domain to the desert below. Dossd's people, The Clans, were allowed to farm on the wide areas of green that surrounded the mountains and lived in subsistence, but they always had to give up a certain amount of the food grown. The Icers said it was a tax for the water that flowed down to the desert floor.

Many clans worked the soil and lived in huts in the desert on the periphery of the fields, as all moist land was only for farming. In a way it was all a valuable symbiotic way of living, but it could also be said that the Icers fed off Dossd's people. In any case, it was the order that allowed all to live. Dossd himself had been sent off to find the Great Chasm, as all the Sandwalkers were. All his people were not Sandwalkers; only those who were telepathic were deemed Walkers and sent out into the desert to find the Great Chasm. Some of Dossd's people had found it and gained admittance, as whole clans seemingly disappeared from these green zones of abundance. They believed that if all a clan kept worthy lives, one of their Walkers would find the Great Chasm and return to guide them to there.

The Icers were always on the lookout for large groups of Dossd's people wandering the deserts and had also heard of the Great Chasm. They thought it a myth, and sometimes they would force clans back to the green zones, only to have them disappear time and again.

Walkers were mercilessly hunted down and killed by the Icers to stem the flow of willing workers from their green fields. Some of the green zones were now farmed by the Icers where they could no longer hold the service of Dossd's people. They were technologically far advanced in comparison, and it was obvious to Dossd and Able that the Icers would do *anything* to continue that process; now, as they picked through the carcass of the spaceship.

Whole mountain ranges to single great mountains were held by the Icers, as they were dominant in the sky, and so it was to be that all high ground was to fall to them in time. There had been wars between the Icers too, and many of both peoples paid the price. There was also at times, some of Dossd's kind who sold out their own clans, while others who made deals with the Icers to move and farm to save their clans from starvation. Such contracts held many in place as a matter of honour. In all peoples there *are* those who take advantage of their own *and* those who seek to protect them. Many of the former see themselves doing what is best for the weak and ignorant, or see themselves as protecting others, when all they are doing is taking advantage of trust to gain for themselves.

Able could feel the emotion as Dossd shared many stories over those three days. The young man was thankful for the diversion from the heat and discomfort, but now night was coming in, and Dossd and Able started to prepare to leave. They had to leave before the twin moons rose, but long enough after the setting sun for the light to fade. The tall purple man-creature knew intimately the orbits of the moons and thought there would be just enough time, if nothing went wrong.

There were always two guards on their side of the crashed spaceship. They could monitor their movements and scamper off, but they did not know what eyes watched from the airship. The ship was at least thirty meters long and now seemed to fill the sky, as it had been brought down low and anchored on a nearby dune. They would have to take a chance and get

by the guards that they could see. Dossd knew that the evening time for eating brought most of these predators together in a small tent camp to the south of the crashed spaceship. There would only be one guard on this side then.

When Dossd had communicated the full plan to Able he couldn't believe it. They were going out onto the hard open ground; to make a dash for the shadow of the downed spaceship, and then make their way north along its length. Then they would *"Drift slowly into the night."*

Dossd explained that they could not go over the dune that they had been hiding in, as the tracks they left would still be clear in the morning and the Icers would easily hunt them down. The hard open ground was a risk, but it was the only way.

The Sandwalker went first to show the way, pulling himself free of the sand and making it to the shadows. He gave the signal, and Able matched his path. He was over halfway there when the guard suddenly turned. Able just kept on, as he had no choice.

"You!" came the call, and even though Able knew he was found, he still kept on. The language was the same as Dossd's.

"You!" came the call again, and Able stopped just short this time, but his tall alien friend grabbed him into the deeper shadows.

The call of "You!" had come from the balloon, calling the guard's attention to a light that had begun to flicker on one of the sensors at the south-eastern side of the spaceship. Because the guard had looked up to the voice, he had not seen Able. It seemed too, that thankfully, the lookout on the balloon had his attention taken by the flickering light, and the two friends now quickly made their way along the shadowed side of the spaceship.

Then an alarm went off, which had those in the camp suddenly dispersing and scurrying like rats in all directions. Able thought they were found, but suddenly another large portal opened, and another spaceship crashed through smashing into the other spaceship and laying waste to many of those who scurried for safety. It finally bounced back off the larger ship and into the dune where Dossd and Able had been hiding.

A man dressed somewhat like Dossd, with the same green eyes and blonde streaked hair, watched the second ship crash through. He stood on a walkway that looped around the elongated oval gondola that hung from the airship's balloon. He was unafraid of the goings on below and turned to see the two friends fade off into the night. He leant on the railing with a smile on his face, then turned, and went inside. Just then, Dossd looked up, and back. A smile came to his face too, as he and Able kept on into the night.

THEY RAN AT A JOG FOR TWO DAYS. Able felt so free and alive from the exercise, and in his release from their cramped and quite torturous time under the sand. Breathing free, they ran, stopping only for water. On the second night, as they finally sat down to eat, they drank almost the last of the water. There were now just a few morsels each. Dossd knew they had to find water tomorrow, as did Able. No words needed to be shared on that subject, but after nearly two weeks together some words that Dossd spoke out loud were now becoming clear to Able; the word for 'you' was now *most definitely* etched deeply into his mind. Able would never forget the word that had been shouted out in the night as they had made their escape from the Icers.

Even though the water was a huge issue, they both slept heavily. The solid pace they had kept for two days had depleted them. Their sleep was deep, and dreams filled the night.

*Able dreamed of here and there, seeing and feeling many symbolic happenings, as his soul and his emotions grappled with his new place in the scheme of life. He eventually found himself talking with Dossd in his dreams, and his parents were there too, but not sitting with him and the Walker. He could see them, and hear them, as he sat on the sand talking with Dossd, but they could not see or hear him, and the Walker could not see or hear them...*

*“You are greatly courageous, young one,” said Dossd, smiling.*

*“I don’t feel strong,” admitted Able.*

*“You are strong,” stated Dossd, plainly.*

*“He’s just a child. He could be anywhere,” cried Suwna, Able’s mother.*

*“He travels just as we all did,” offered Able’s father, widening their view.*

*“As we all did,” said the old man with them, emphasising the point.*

*“Your behaviour honours your clan,” added Dossd.*

*“I am scared, and I don’t know what to do,” said the young boy.*

*“You will learn,” said Dossd, again, plainly.*

*“What will he do?” asked Able’s mother.*

*“He will learn, like we all did,” answered her husband, Jeremy.*

*“Like we all did,” added Grandpa Jack.*

*Able felt from what he had now heard that he was from a line of travellers of some kind, and somehow, it was his turn. He also felt Dossd's apparent faith in him. He had certainly now gained some courage, and a better glass to view his exile though, from the surety in his father's and his grandpa's words, while taking heart from the undying caring of his mother. The way, and his ability to walk it, was clearer now. But it was not just in what the dream had shown him, had gifted him, it also came in a clear realisation of what his family had already given him, in his short life.*

ABLE WOKE REFRESHED, and found Dossd up, seated, and looking intently at him. He looked more relaxed today but was now seemingly curious about something. Dossd had been curious about something under the sand and over the two days that they had fled for their lives; only now did wisdom allow him to seek answers to the questions that he held in his heart.

*“You are strong, and the courage you showed in the face of great danger and unbearable discomfort was beyond your years. You use your powers easily. Have you been instructed in them?”*

The question was clear for Dossd, as Able had been through so much for such a young one that was, as he saw it, coddled in a very easy existence before arriving here. Able had told him stories about his world, and his life, before their situation with the Icers. His *story*, the life he had lived before Temelj, *was* far removed from the huge challenges that he had faced here in these few short weeks. Dossd had to know where this strength came from. It was always about the *story*, for a Walker.

“What powers?”

“The spirit powers,” said Dossd, plainly, out loud, and then in his inner voice, *“You choose them easily, even under great strain. You seem to camp amongst them.”*

“Virtues; *human virtues?*” asked Able, his mind showing Dossd some examples.

*“Yes, virtues.”*

“I’ve been taught them since I can remember, to live in the spirit and exercise them to be strong and good. My Grandpa calls it growing one’s character. I like that word, because while virtues are powerful, character is more of a noble word to me. My Grandpa says that virtues are our powers, and character is how you use them.”

Dossd smiled, and said inside for Able to see, *“You don’t use them, young one. You choose them. You allow them. The flesh calls for its fears and its supremacy, and the soul chooses these, or reaches for the powers of the higher spirit. The soul chooses to block the flow of virtues into your world, by choosing its fears, or it simply allows these great essences through.”*

“We say that we grow them, like spiritual muscles, or capacities,” offered Able.

Dossd called out his cry of humour, and Able waited to see what would come then, with a smile and some anticipation.

*“They are unlimited, and always fully available. They simply are. To use them is a choice. How could you not know that and succeed as you have? Character, as your Grandpa was aware, is the spiritual choice to allow them.”*

*"I missed that,"* thought Able, now seeing so much more in his Grandpa's words. *"So, I can use as much of them as I wish?"* thought Able, now too, not using words, as he looked at Dossd.

*"Just choose to let them through. You are a spiritual being in a material existence; a free will creature. The One begins us all in the material plane, to see how we will be. What we will choose, and which nature we will follow; which we will feed. You are His mystery, as He is yours."*

"Yes, I get that. We have a saying just like that too."

*"You are choosing well. You are courageous. Your family has set your foundation well. You are strong. I say this not to plump your ego; I say it to aid you, but also know there are always many more challenges ahead of you."*

It was like part of the dream and a good amount of the meaning he found in it was playing out in this conversation. Such is often the nature of dreams.

Able then felt his thirst, and Dossd showed him that the skin was virtually empty by jiggling it. To a twelve-year-old boy, all of what he had dealt with in this short time *was* immense. But even though he *had* been strong, and felt the truth in Dossd's words, he couldn't help feeling unsure again. He didn't feel strong *at all* right now. He looked around, and all he could see was dunes and flat empty ground to the horizon. Fear started to rise in him, as a question formed in his mind, and he looked to Dossd.

*"When there is no water we must look to the Endless Fountain,"* came the thoughts from his new companion.

Able knew what he meant. He sat himself up and cast his gaze down. He knew that other than his companion's skill there was only faith and prayer out here. Dossd had travelled

far and had not been, or ever would be, in the same part of the endless deserts of this planet. He had been searching for the Great Chasm, so always ventured onto new ground. His faith was strong from his twenty years of wandering in this harsh place, as was his learning and character. It was the striving, strain, and struggle that had made Dossd the sure creature that sat across from Able this morning.

Dossd lowered his head too, beginning to chant in a deep melodious tone. Like a bird almost, but deeper in tone, and words shone out in it; words of his own language. It was a prayer of praise and seeking aid. Strong symbols came vividly to Able as the creature's voice raised higher, and somewhere in between those words and notes, Able and Dossd were taken away. They wandered together the sublime byways of the spirit, and the answer came.

Dossd rose immediately, but Able stayed in that rarefied place for a while. His new guardian left him there, while he got himself ready and brushed away any long-term sign that may show that they had been here.

Able only had a short, but nonetheless wonderful, time there, until Dossd broke into his thoughts. *"It is time, young one. We go quickly; we have the morning cool and the afternoon heat to walk through to find the water serpent."*

As Able was coming out of that place, the place of spirit, he could strangely feel moisture on his face. It was like a promise and an incentive. It woke him fully, and he got up and organised himself quickly. Dossd was already off and walking, with a smile on his face. He would always challenge this young one, and in a short while, Able caught up.

*“DO YOU RECALL THE ANSWER?”* asked Dossd, as he and Able reached the place shown to them when they had prayed for assistance. The vision of an odd shaped, taller great white dune had supplied the direction and guided them here.

Even though the sun was not as hot here Dossd had kept a hard pace that day, which kept Able jogging much of the way. He would have given anything for Dossd’s wide feet and his long stride. They had walked hard and kept the morsel of water for the four hours of afternoon.

“I recall the answer,” now said Able, ready to fall from the exhaustion and lack of water, and yet willing himself to stay upright. He could only just manage to think, as he was so tired and thirsty.

*“Do you recall what you saw?”*

“Yes, there was a red cliff on one side of the moistness.”

*“Which side of you was it?”* asked Dossd, not needing to know, but testing this young soul. He knew that it was never good to do everything for the young. They needed to be the Walker, or they would never run.

“It was on my right, as I faced into the flow,” answered Able, as he now looked around the dunes that surrounded him.

Able then pointed at a dune, and they climbed it immediately. As they made the lip, they saw a rough red wall of rock that was far off in the distance. It seemed to rise out of the white desert sand, and then submerge again, like a swimming creature that stayed in one place. A great levitation rising and falling there. It was so surreal to Able that he thought the heat was playing with his mind and vision.

“*Yes!*” exclaimed Dossd. His animation was not for the promise of water or the surprise of it being there; it was his happiness for the boy to have found it.

They walked slowly toward the long red rock that seemed to roll like a low swell of the sea, as Able simply could not go any faster. The red rock rose here and there, and fell below the white sandy surface again, but the stream of its movement was clear. Able wondered how this could be and was somewhat concerned at the seeming danger of getting too close to get water. But the moist air he had felt on his face coming out of prayer called him on; that, his driving thirst, and of course, his will to survive.

When they finally got closer, Able saw that the wide area of dry sand all about the red rock was rising and falling too; but these waves were more like the movement of snake. Able could now feel the moistness on his face. It was pushing out of the sand; a fine spray that escaped from a strong torrent deep beneath it. The companions moved closer, and Dossd pulled out the sheet that had covered them when they had hidden under the sand from the Icers. They had to be wary of the shifting sand and watch from being buried by its constantly rolling convulsions. But the moist air now filled their nostrils, invigorating them and drawing them in. Water is life, no matter what planet you come from.

All was now passing between the two cohorts telepathically as they went to work with the cloth to gather the moisture. They set it up like a net that they held at each side of. Time and again they gathered and retreated to safe ground. They would wring out the cloth into their mouths, and then into the water skin, and go back to gather more. It was an amazing experience, and it felt somewhat like being in the sea for Able as he remembered back to the many times he floated on the ocean or surfed on his boogie board.

It was a wonderful experience, and once the skin had been filled and both had their fill of water, they stripped down and had a shower in the moisture. Then they washed their

clothes, and the dust and sand out of their meagre possessions. The sand had pushed out and fell closer to them at times, and once even threatened to rise up underneath and swallow them. It made them wary, but they could now almost tell from the force of the moisture forcing its way up through the sand just how strong the flow was; or more so how it danced. It was like being alive with the planet, and with the amount of moisture that filled the air Able knew that it was probably as close to swimming in the ocean as you would get on this world.

They camped for three days in the moist air of that place. It was not a trifle to be able to have such an abundance of water in the dunes, and after the previous days of strain they were both in need of some rest and letting things be. The two talked much, and while Dossd was as firm as an elder or teacher would be, he also set himself more as a mentor and definitely a friend. They had been through so much together, and in so short a time, that trust and respect had grown strongly and very quickly between them. They shared their stories, and both worked at each other's words and language. There was much frustration and much laughter as they did.

It was on the last day of their time beside the water-serpent that Dossd set to share some of the Code of The Sandwalkers with Able. He thought the child had earned it, and it would put him in good mind to weather what may yet come on their journey. He told Able of the deep guiding principle that all Walkers held to. They believed that when all hope was gone, when things fell to their worst or their most painful, that victory was not far away. They believed so strongly in this principle that they welcomed crisis. Walkers believed that to embrace hardship was to free oneself from fear, and to receive the spiritual prize that surely awaited them beyond it. Some even revelled while within the place of struggle, feeling relief *even there*, feeling the oppression of the emotional self lifting off them as it was cast away.

Able asked where this idea came from, and The Sandwalker told him that it came from the stories of Nov-Cikel, Edosd. Whenever situations in the story of His rise seemed sure to bring about the demise of His work, it turned out to be something that helped it evolve and become stronger; far better than if the crisis had not happened at all. Nov-Cikel was a Great One who graced the sand of this world with His footsteps. It was He who found the Great Chasm; renewed something called The Power and gave to His followers the blueprint for the peace and security for all on the planet. He also made clear their part in this Cause; their duty to bring it to fruition. Dossd's people believed in the stories that had spread of him well over a century and a half ago, and so began the Walkers, and their search for The Great Chasm.

## *Nov-Cikel*

It had been two months now since Able had been cast upon this seemingly barren rock. He had seen no green in all his time here, but found that life existed in places, where to all sense, it should not. Dossd had taught him how the monsters in the pebble sand grew from smaller prey; herbivorous creatures that also lived in the shelly pebble-sand. They fed on the plants that grew deep in the sand from the light and heat produced by massive hot volcanic pipes and water flows deep below the surface. Dossd had learned of this from Clan traders who had learned more about them from rogue Icers. There were many Icers that traded with his kind. There were always those who lived on commerce, and who *'the powers that be'* could not stop from plying their trade. Trade out in the deserts knew no allegiance.

Water was abundant deeper; in places, in the great dry expanses of this planet, but it was very deep, and the likes of the water-serpent were extremely rare. Food too was sparse beyond the Icer mountains and the fields of the Clans. Even so, Able had very much enjoyed a particular fungus that grew in the red rock and sandstone caves, and also strange root plants that only grew in rocky crevices. But caves were rare among the dunes and getting one of the root plants out of a crevice took more energy than it seemed to give in food value. These tubers would only be seen in the night or early morning when their tendrils rose out of thin cracks to gather any moisture in the air.

Once, Able and Dossd had been *so* hungry, that they scraped some red fungus off the rock wall of a cave without any tool; almost drinking the tiny morsels down. They didn't realise though, that this particular fungus was very hot, and it threatened to burn them out from the inside. It was fortunate that there was also water that could be dug for in that same small cave, which saved them a little. That day they were *so* famished that Able had never been so happy, and in so much pain, all at the same time.

The two now laughed as they recalled that day. Remembering how weak they were, and both giving each other a hard time about how the other was the most pathetic on that day in the cave. Able felt less and less like a child, actually, it seemed of little consequence at all, except when he needed to learn from Dossd. There was still the respect of age and experience, and if Dossd instructed him in any way, he followed it; he also asked many questions, as he respected his mentor. He learnt much from this older creature as this tall noble humanoid was more interested in encouraging Able to do, and seek more, for himself. He would always question the boy, or get him to do something new, to help him learn from what was already within him; to gain confidence in his own powers and vision. Able knew he was fortunate to find an older Walker, as he had much to give from his long experience.

The joking now stopped as they came upon what seemed to be coloured sand. Able had not noticed it, so when Dossd stopped suddenly, the boy ducked down and looked about, while listening inside for silent instructions; his awareness heightened. The young man's time under the sand and his experience with the Icer Hunters had grown this readiness.

Dossd simply pointed ahead. There was a stick, just a few inches of it, pointing upwards out of the coloured sand. Able could now see it, and the coloured sand that was in a rough and very wide circular pattern around it. It looked somewhat like a faded tie-dye of many colours. The stick was at its centre, and Dossd went down on one knee. He began to

chant out loud, something he seemed to do only on special occasions, and probably less often than he would like because they never knew where an Icer airship might be lingering nearby. They had been caught unawares by the portal, and by the great airship they had hidden from. Dossd certainly knew that grace alone had saved them in that perilous situation, but also that he had failed to *'Not be there'*.

The Icers were silent hunters, as their airships had sails as well as propellers; the sails hung below the gondolas and shifted at angles to the balloon in the changing winds. They used the propellers more now, but the sails helped them, most especially, to chase and gather up any Sandwalkers that they managed to track. They would gather the Walker's general direction and wait ahead of them behind the larger dunes, rising as they did near the portal that day. A good Sandwalker though, moved randomly in his path to keep from being tracked and had other tricks up their sleeves. Thankfully, the pair had only seen one in the far-off distance since their lucky escape.

In any case, it seemed that right now, it was a time for prayer, and the feelings of the boy's impossibly tall friend, even though he was still down on one knee, passed easily to Able. They were not symbols in his mind this time, they were the purple being's feelings, but it was somehow clear within them that this was a grave of another Walker. The Earth-child's *own* sadness then filled him as he bowed his head in respect.

Able had only walked the sand for two months, but he was a Walker in his heart and knew the great sacrifice these creatures took on. He felt honoured to have come upon this grave as he stood there feeling at one with all the Walkers. It was very personal. They did not move for a good time after Dossd had finished chanting, each of them saying prayers; now sharing them by thought. Dossd was quite taken by the prayers of this young one, as they did not share prayers as a rule. They had kept from each other's thoughts at times of prayer

because the Walker believed that communion with The All needed mostly be individual; personal, and One to one.

When the green-eyed alien stood up, he pulled the stick from the ground and held it high for a time, seeking to gain the notice of The All and to show that he was a witness to this passing. The stick had been almost buried, so was much longer than it had seemed to the lad. Able wondered how the Walker had buried himself, and Dossd, hearing his thoughts, showed him. Able shook his head at the simple ingenuity of it, as Dossd explained to him that this was one of the Sandwalker's first lessons; adding, that all, Walker or not, moved on from life alone. With this, he began to collect the coloured sand. He only took some, but it seemed important that he do so. He then turned, walked outside the wide circle, and began to make camp early. To spend some time here was about respect for the one that lay beneath the sand. *It was as it was.*

Tonight, after eating, Dossd would tell one of the stories of The Messengers. It was to be in honour of the dead Walker, and he also decided that it was time to begin the telling of *The Great Stories* to this younger soul. He had told many stories, as had Able, about so many different things, but tonight was a time for a special story. A Great Story.

They drank and ate well in the late afternoon, even with their low reserves, as if daring the desert to take them and to show they did not fear death. They talked of life and death, and the flight, yet stillness, of the eternal soul, while Dossd also shared more about the lore and training of a Walker as they did. Able was not of these creatures, but today, more than ever, *he was*, and he noticed that this Sandwalker's words were now even intimating that he should, or could, become one. The boy did question this a little, as he was not telepathic like his blonde-haired friend, but the clear message in Dossd's intimations was that it was more about the heart, and faith, and little to do with any ability.

Dossd was tall even sitting down, but he now raised his head higher as he straightened his back as he began to tell The First Great Story. Able didn't realise it, but Dossd began to tell the story in English.

*“Before the coming of Nov-Cikel, Edossd, there was young boy, whose teacher sent him home to his mother. When she asked why of this Elder, he explained that her child seemed to hold the essence of knowledge within him; that he could teach the child nothing. His mother did not know what to do with the child, so sent him back to the teacher anyway, with instructions to simply listen and do as he was instructed. His mother thought it would be good for him, no matter his intelligence. But she did not see what lay in her child. What lay in him, only the Great Ones hold. The child did as he was bid, and also worked hard in the fields for his clan.*

*Once He had reached true manhood, He suddenly left his clan to walk the desert, and none stood in his way. He had always been different; so humble and serene, and all his Clan were often magically drawn to his words. After a time walking the desert, He reached a particular place. He sat and waited in this place of destiny for the Great Meeting. He waited for those who must come to Him, and one by one they came. One by one, they bowed to the melody and depth of His Words. Led by dreams, visions, and prophecies; at first, one at a time, then growing to a great flow. His name was Vrata-na, Oraji.*

*He then walked the desert on His way to The Greatest Garden; to the place of Pilgrimage, and He made claim there to be ‘The Promise’. Most there just thought Him a fool, or somewhat dangerous, but never took Him seriously. When he returned to His clan though, He and those who became His followers, suffered derision, torture, and death at the hands of the keepers of the Old Lore of The Clans, and by the lies these Clanfolk spread; also, at the hands of those who feared losing power.*

*Unconcerned for His own wellbeing, He gave His Lore, travelled to other Clan lands, drawing many to His beauty, and telling of Another that must come.”*

With that Dossd prepared to sleep. There were to be no words after a Great Story, as Able would learn. It was about respect, and even though Dossd’s culture was one of story, they knew the nature and destructive power of too many words, and the loss in the watering down of meaning and inspiration by them.

DOSSD HELD THE TWO STICKS HIGH. It was in the morning, just as they began to walk. Today he walked ahead of Able, as was mostly the case, but the tall purple being did give the boy the lead much of the time to learn his bearings and how to keep them in the desert.

“Now recount for me the story of Vrata-Na, Oraji.”

It was only now that Able realised that Dossd had told the story in English last night, and that he was speaking it now. He smiled as his eyes showed his realisation. Dossd smiled a little too; but not looking back, repeated the question.

Able tried many times to tell the story, while Dossd kept asking questions that would help him with what he had missed. Early on in the process he could remember some things, but the *whole story* with all its parts was a real challenge to him. After he had failed many times, he was instructed to first *understand* the story; its nature, its meaning, its theme. Then recall the bones of it, the main happenings of the story. Gathering these, he learned to flesh it out from there. It was a bit frustrating at first, but as he learned the bones of the story and was taught some memory skills, it became more of a challenge rather than a frustration, and so a few days later he could recount it almost as well as Dossd himself.

The boy was finding a different perspective on the nature of time in this seemingly endless space; time without endless devices and distractions. He was now walking just as many had on his home planet for all of human history. Great numbers of humans had walked, and talked, and told story; *so many* stories over man's evolution that he knew no one could ever count them. It was then that he saw the nature of story in the nature of man, and he realised that story could never be a thing of the past. It was a great ingredient in the juice that sat within the fruit of life, but more so, that it was also an element of the fibre that held up the tree of humanity.

Dossd continued to hold up the two sticks at times over the following weeks, as a sign for Able to again practise telling the story. It had to be perfect, as it had to be honoured and remembered clearly so that its essence and form were not lost over time. There was a deep power in the story that became part of him just as the words of the story did, and Able would recount it as he looked at the sticks in the air. He knew he had to earn the second stick that Dossd held up each time. He also knew that it would not be months, but years, before he would hold it; years, and after many other stories learned. He knew of the high value and rarity of solid wooden sticks in the Walker culture, and he knew that he would make *all effort* to one day hold one himself. He would come to learn that it was in *earning* the stick, not holding it, that its power was truly given.

After walking and practising the story one day, Able decided to ask Dossd a question that was burning in his mind. He could no longer help his curiosity and was hoping that he had given a respectful amount of time to pass. He still did not know if his question would be met well, so he asked his question in a way that might be more kind.

“Dossd, it was great to honour the Sandwalker who lay below, those weeks ago. It was really special. But how do you feel about finding that place, finding him, knowing that he didn’t succeed in finding the Great Chasm?”

The question brought on a howl of humour from the tall green-eyed being. Able was not expecting that at all.

“Better to be lost in this desert, than within our selves. It is in walking the desert that we become worthy. The goal, The Chasm, is being reached in every thought and action. You will learn that flesh is quite fragile, and in time you will see that simply walking the desert grows your spirit strong. To *Walk* is to succeed. My brother *succeeded*, just as surely as to die in seeking The Great Chasm is to find it.”

“Oh, I see,” said Able, now understanding that The Chasm was as much a spiritual goal, as it was a physical one, to them.

Dossd saw his thoughts, and added, “Turning your face to The All is a portal to the Spirit Place, and when He is before you in all things you walk *in* the spirit. We have been taught to live mostly in The Place of Splendour *before* our flesh passes into the ground. Many only find this place after the end of this life, but we seek it before.”

“What do you mean The Place of Splendour?”

“What you call Paradise. It is within us. But words are useless, as to reach it we must *be* within that Place and *do* all things pertaining to it. It is not available in talk. It needs be found, experienced, and sustained.”

There was to be an end to the conversation for now, clearly signalled by the tone Dossd finished with. It was time for Able to meditate on these things and gather all he could

as they continued walking the great desert. Even practice of The First Great Story was to wait.

DOSSD WENT WITH SOME TREPIDATION INTO THE NARROW OPENING. The mighty rock edifice they were now entering had loomed large on the flat horizon of this part of the desert. There was a sense of awe when they first saw it, and it only increased as they came closer to it. Its deep purple colouring, its height, its odd shapes, and the fact that it was alone on a wide flat expanse, made it so. It seemed like the gigantic boulders that it was made up of were placed there for beauty as well as purpose. But no creature or machine of this planet could have placed these mega-rocks here.

As Able walked through the narrow gap between the mighty boulders, which had to be twelve meters high, he noticed that his skin now also had a purple hue. He was now lean and strong, and the colour of his skin was deepening. It was well over six months since his landing here, and he now most certainly felt at home. He had grown a little in height, and while still a boy, he now carried himself more with the bearing of an adult. The purple colouration made him feel good about his place in this new world, just as acceptance of his new life had settled his heart some months ago. He still missed his family, and his home, but survival and life here required almost his full attention.

He had asked Dossd many questions over their time together; especially after finding the Walker grave. Even though Dossd lived in The Spirit mostly, Able had asked him if he had been lonely out here alone, away from his clan. Dossd had shook his blonde bobbed hair and looked into the boy's eyes, and said gently, but unyieldingly, that there are less of the battering winds of ego when walking the sands alone. He had added that it humbled him and made clear his reliance on The All; that the challenge of it brought him closer to The Abiding

One, and that His Face was much clearer out here. He had finished, saying, “I wander in the Garden of His words, at dawn and dusk. In this Garden, my soul feeds and drinks, discovers mysteries, prepares for each day, and is kept well. I have known great joy with less between myself and The All.”

Able had pressed him on this, as was his need at the time, saying that while he did believe him, part of him did not. He could not even begin to imagine being alone for twenty years. If Dossd had not been company for him here he knew he would surely have gone mad; that is, if he survived long enough to do so. The curiosity of the young serves them well, and Dossd had replied saying that his purpose for his clan kept him close to them too. It was his love for them that drove him to find the Great Chasm, so that they would be released from bondage. His love for them, and his wish for their welfare, buoyed his heart and drove him on. He tried to explain that his purpose kept him alive and happy, and that no matter the pain, he must bear it, to bring them freedom. He said that they walked with him, and he was never alone, adding that his connection with The All kept his heart at peace when loneliness sought to attack him.

Able had been far happier with that response. The Sandwalker then added that maybe Able’s company was a gift from The All; for his efforts, and his strong faith over all those years. In *all* those words, the young man saw the true strength of this creature. This noble man-creature had done, what seemed to him, to be simply *unimaginable*.

Able’s mind now came back to where he was, as he followed Dossd. This was a strange place for them both and it told in their movement. They moved like cats, curious and cautious. They had circled the structure three times in an ever-decreasing spiral, to make sure there were no Icers, or other surprises. Dossd could feel an energy; one unlike he had ever sensed before, yet one that he somehow knew. As he rounded the corner out of the narrow

corridor between the huge rocks, he came out to a large circular floor of white sand; still surrounded by the great rocks and open to the sky. There were small rocks placed in a seemingly random pattern on the floor; all of which had symbols on them. Dossd turned to Able, and said, “There is an energy in the ground here.”

Able most definitely agreed, as it was tangible, not just an inner feeling, and he asked, “What is this place?”

“It is a key. Not a full map to the Great Chasm, but a key somehow. We must camp here, decipher, learn, and memorise it. It would seem that The All *most definitely* favours you. In all the time I have walked the desert, I have been given no clue, *nothing*.”

“How do you know it’s a clue to finding The Chasm?” asked Able, not sure whether his friend was only being hopeful.

Dossd looked at him with a little disdain in his piercing green eyes, and said plainly, “The symbols. The symbols I know from my training; from the tablets of Nov-Cikel, Edossd.”

Able apologised in Dossd’s language gently, and in a way befitting both their nobility. It was said only with love, as a gift, with no concern for himself or discomfort. Dossd nodded in response and showed its acceptance with a small blown breath. This blown breath, to Clanfolk, was to say that just as the wind, any hurt could not be held, and was now gone. Able had learnt well Dossd’s language and a good deal of his people’s ways in these six months. Walking the deserts gave him time and opportunity to allow focus on the language; the symbols that had played in his head had helped the process immensely.

Dossd went down on his knees to give thanks, and Able followed. As far as Able was concerned, God was God, no matter what planet or language. There was only one All, and

after Dossd had finished, Able added a prayer that suited the occasion. It was only the second time he had done so, as he had needed to *learn* and not wanted to disrespect his new friend's beliefs.

What became increasingly apparent to him as he walked the desert was that he needed to practise reciting any prayers or writings that he could remember from his own Faith more. In a place where nothing was recorded but inside you, he innately knew what he needed to do. He had also very much come to know their value in his time here, as *The Writings* guided him well and were a balm in the life he now led. He just wished he had memorized more of them.

THAT NIGHT DOSSD TOLD THE SECOND GREAT STORY. It was not a happy story, but he was clear in reminding Able before he recited it, that crisis is the chrysalis of victory in the Great Stories. He sat erect and composed on the sand outside the rock structure where they now camped. He breathed in and out heavily, and then, he began; again, in Able's language.

*"The Icers seemed not concerned with Vrata-na, Oraji. One of the great Icer Dynasties even sought to save Him from his fate. To take Him to the mountains of a great Icer Nation to the North, away from the dangers that His great claims were drawing towards Him.*

*His teachings had threatened the owners of power in that day, and strangely, those who had prayed, and still prayed, for His coming. They did not see Him and could not bear to hear Him. It was The Clans that stood against Him. Holding to their old ways; thinking him a*

*sorcerer, or a fool; a very dangerous one. They eventually slaughtered his followers and imprisoned Him.*

*He was imprisoned in the remotest reaches, to keep him hidden, and to decrease His influence on the Clans. But in the end, this only allowed more of The Clans in these places to grow to love Him too; this, to the point that they would refuse to imprison Him any longer. But those in power would move Him again and colluded to quickly destroy Him and His growing influence on the folk of the Clans.*

*Time and again they questioned Him on deeper themes and on the Writings of the Old Ways, and time and again he answered them clearly. Then one day, he was brought before the High Council, in the dying days of the Great Clan Empire, to be questioned by the most powerful, and the most learned. They asked him openly and plainly of his claim, as they thought this would make Him cower and recant. But he did not. He repeated three times that He was the One prophesied.*

*This threw them into commotion, as He said it with such dignity, and so definitely, that they immediately returned Him to his place of arrest, knowing that they must now end His life by a thousand spears. In time, this was done, and in fulfilment of prophesy from the Old Ways. The powerful, those who knew the particular prophesy, even tried to make sure that he did not die by the hands of the believers of the Old Ways. But it was to be so; as it was written.*

*On the day He ascended, a great darkness blocked out the Sun, but even this was not enough for the blind to see or the arrogant to be humbled. They then turned all their anger on His followers, and sought to slaughter, or cast out, all of those who remained.”*

Able waited a short time to gather the essence and theme of the story. Then he gathered the bones of the story; the few key things that made the story and marked its meaning and order. He knew he would have to learn this story too. The more he had practised remembering and speaking the First Great Story, the stronger his memory had got, and he knew that he would learn this story in a far shorter time than the last.

“Will you tell me a story of your Faith?” asked Dossd, breaking the silence, and into Able’s thoughts.

Able was very surprised. He did not think Dossd was interested. He had always asked of Able’s own life stories only, and *never* after a Great Story. There was only ever silence after any telling of a Great Story, as Able had recited the First Great Story on a number of their nights at camp.

“I can tell you a story of the Son of our Messenger.”

“This will be sufficient,” answered Dossd, a little curious about Able’s beliefs from the prayers that he had shared, both here and at the Sandwalker’s grave.

There were also some small sayings from the boy’s Tradition that the lad had shared here and there on their journey which the Walker had felt the Spirit rising deeply from. But while Dossd knew the boy’s beliefs were strong and good, he had thought that it was important Able come to the New Way, or the Beautiful Way, as it was called, as the young man was *here* now. He also knew that he did not know the Will of the All, and had to also respect Able, his family, and their way, so he never stopped the boy’s expression of his own Faith when it arose in conversation or in their shared reflection at the end of a day.

It was only now that the time of one Faith had come; one that could be seen and shared by all on his planet. The Icers had brought the planet to be somewhat one, at least in

basic law and order, but there was still a gap between them and the Sand Clans. Even the Clans struggled a bit with each other, as did The Icers with their own. All had to move on together now, and even though the Icers were a little lost in their own power they would fall to the great beauty of Nov-Cikel in time. Of this, Dossd was most certain.

He turned his attention to Able, as the boy had begun his story. Dossd was not happy with his own disrespect; as when one told a story, all must give due respect by their attention.

*“...The Master was held in exile in a prison city with His Father, the new Messenger, for decades. He went about making life more bearable for all His fellow believers that were incarcerated there, as a matter of daily work. He also washed and fed the sick, and saw to any in need, not just His fellows. If He could not do it, He would send someone in his stead or pay for someone to do it.*

*There was one man who was a free citizen of that prison city, who always harassed and abused Him; a man of another Faith. This man chided this exile continually because He was one of the prisoners, and of a new Faith; the man believing that he was following his own Faith by doing so. For twenty-four years, whenever this man saw this dutiful son of the new Messenger, he would defame Him loudly; even after the man became very unwell, and The Servant, as The Master preferred to be called, had sent a doctor for him, paid for his medicine, and given him some money.*

*The man even held his hand over his face while the doctor had visited that day, so he did not have to look on the face of The Servant while he was attended to. He did not let up in all those twenty-four years, until one day he came to The Servant and asked for his forgiveness; for having treated Him so badly, for so long. The Servant had always been forgiving, and kind, no matter the man’s verbal assaults. He instantly forgave the man; just as he had been forgiving him every day.*

*In the end, the man had to fall to the power of love, over hatred. Love is endlessly forgiving.”*

Dossd nodded his head in thanks, and it filled Able. The story, and the fact that Dossd would want to hear a story of Able’s belief in this holy place, was more than he could bear. In this joy the boy now again realised that he was beginning to lose too easily what was important to him. He saw, that while he was very much at home here now, and vary accepting of his new life path, he was losing consciousness of home. He then got up and walked out into the night and talked to his *Good Friend*, and to members of his family as if they were there. As he did, the pain of the effort of the last six months began to rise out of his being in deep sobs. It was something that just came on him. He let it have its course, as he remembered more deeply again his family, his world, his friends, and his Faith...as he remembered himself.

DOSSD REALISED WHAT HAD OCCURRED when Able had left him. At first, he didn’t; at first, he thought it was the boy’s respect. That he was leaving so Dossd could be alone with his discovery of the great Rocks and the map within; a discovery that he knew he had earned alone. But with the deep sobs, the Walker felt the boy’s pain. He did not know what thresholds the boy would yet have to pass through, but it seemed to him that this was indeed one of them.

He had seen the lad’s struggles and victories, but the smiling face of The All shone broadly on this young creature from another world. The fact that he had landed on Dossd’s single pathway within the endless deserts, at the exact time to be saved from sure death, spoke clearly of the grace that followed him. To a Sandwalker nothing could be clearer. He also now thought of Able’s strength which was born from very little hardship. Dossd finally

came to the deeper realisation that it must have come from the Words of his Messenger, and that the boy's Messenger must have also Mirrored the Power of The All. It was now clear to this Clansman that Able had been taken back to his own beliefs by telling the story; and he smiled.

On the boy's return, they talked about this new threshold that Able had forded, and his beliefs. They *had* talked generally of their shared beliefs before, but Dossd had not given Able the respect that his beliefs were clearly due. They continued to talk during the night, sharing more of the deeper meaning enshrined in their beliefs, and as both Able and Dossd opened the doors of the grace that flowed from their Messengers these companions saw how similar the realities which underpinned Their stories were. From the spirit of what Able now shared, Dossd knew that he could not separate the Great Ones they followed.

“They are One,” he pronounced.

“They are,” agreed Able, simply.

Dossd smiled as he finally saw how much humility this child had shown. He had shown such respect for Dossd's beliefs and ways, in seeking to learn from him; this, while holding beliefs of at least the same measure. This too, was evidence of the power of the boy's Messenger.

“Tell me. Tell me of one thing. Tell of how such as you, with no struggle, may be so changed?” requested Dossd. This question had been asked and somewhat answered months ago, but the Walker had seen his lack of respect for the boy that day and had even almost answered the question for him. He had not been curious enough, or too arrogant, to consider more deeply the reasons for the boy's resilience. Now seeing more of the boy's tradition, he had to ask again.

“I don’t know.”

“You *do* know. *Tell* me,” ordered the Walker, now almost passionately.

“Well, there are a couple of sayings, and I can only sort of say them; one is that my Messenger had informed people how copper can be transmuted into gold, long before it could scientifically be done on our planet. But He went on to say that the still *far greater* challenge was that of transforming *satanic strength* into *heavenly power*, in each of us. He that said only the Word of God could hope to bring that about.”

“In you, He has succeeded.”

“We are taught to read the Word and work on our souls daily, but I don’t know about succeeding, Dossd. I hope I am, little by little. If I’d been as strong as you say, I wouldn’t have played with the amulet.”

“But we surely learn by our mistakes. They are powerful. If we live the wisdom gleaned, they become hard ground under the sand ahead of us.”

“Yes, sure, but I was not swift enough.”

“Swift enough?”

“There is another saying about *being swift*; to move quickly along the spiritual pathway to His court, or more so, to instantly choose better actions at the time. There is wisdom and safety there; happiness too. If I had sought His Wisdom, I would not have taken the amulet.”

“Speak aloud the name of your Messenger.”

It was a sudden request, which surprised Able, but the Walker had heard enough and wanted to show respect for Able’s Messenger. The boy then did, and His Name rolled off the

boy's tongue like a sweet song, and the two companions felt the spirit come alive within their being.

No words were then passed as the Sandwalker lay back down to reflect and sleep. It seemed that was to be it for tonight, but both were buoyed by the discoveries, inner and outer, that this day had yielded. Their unity was cemented that evening, and both revelled in its spirit.

From that time on, Dossd and Able shared equally their stories, and were *sure* that they walked in the same direction. But Able would hold back on telling the actual stories of his Messenger for now, for even though he had Dossd's respect, he would not tell any of these stories until he was actually asked. It was the nature of his Faith to only give Water to the thirsty, and to Able, there was also something about not entering his friend's home without permission.

# *The Chase*

The strange creature hung by a rope; and suffice is to say that it was not its natural mode of travel. It turned with the movement of the rope and its struggling efforts; turning and swinging, yet its eyes were always intent on a spot on the great wide expanse. The pilot of the airship, from which the animal hung, checked the sensing equipment, and now again used a great long glass to magnify the view ahead; but there was nothing.

The pilot then returned to watching the animal dangling below. It swung and growled; still intent on something ahead of them. The pilot was totally unaware of what it seemed to be sensing. The creature was most like a small stocky dog, with stocky legs; like a bulldog. Its coat was short and deep green. It had no tail, and its ears were almost unnoticeable in the green fur on the side of its head. Its eyes were yellow, and very focused on what it saw.

Suddenly the animal cried out, and seemed, by its movement on the end of the rope, to have hit something solid. It kept crying out as it was dragged across something hard, then

yelping as it bumped into another and another solid obstacle; things that the pilot could still not see.

This airship was about a third of the size of the great airship that Dossd and Able had escaped from. The lone pilot it seemed was the only crew and was now making all effort to stop this smaller craft, as well as draw the animal back up. The Pilot wore a long sandy coloured leather coat that went to the knees, with a skullcap of the same material. Dark round glass goggles covered intense blue eyes, and a thin deep green cloth hung underneath the goggles, tucking into a high white buttoned collar that protruded from the high collar of the leather coat.

The flying machine was very quickly halted; an anchor cast away to the ground, and the animal hauled up into the gondola. The Pilot then made preparations to go down to the sand, as handheld instruments and a weapon were gathered from storage on the deck, and the animal, which seemed much larger now, was harnessed. The stone anchor held the airship steady as The Pilot lowered the two of them by winch. The ship floated there, now away to the west of the invisible structure. The Pilot seemed to be quite intent on finding the structure and did not seem to show any fear at all.

When they both made it to the ground, two simple clips freed them to move away from the rope. The Pilot then said to the green dog in Dossd's language, but not quite, and also different in the manner and tone, through what seemed to be metal breather that had now replaced the face scarf, "Let's go hunting, boy." The doglike creature let out a low growl and went with great intent in a large circle around the structure as it sought a scent. These creatures' strongest senses were of smell, and a wider sight of the light spectrum; an adaption, as yet, quite unexplored by Icer scientists.

The Pilot followed it warily, holding a long leash loosely to let it run, and when the animal finally gathered a scent, its master pulled out a short weapon. These two knew each other well and simple physical movements or reactions sufficed to send a message from one to the other. The animal then growled as he nosed around in the sand and suddenly looked up ahead of them. The pilot became more alert and powered up the small hand weapon.

# *The Pilot*

The small beast growled louder; the Pilot then signalled it to go quietly. The creature entered the corridor of the structure, and its long leash began to show where the walls lay hidden. The Icer then entered too, feeling the walls from time to time as they moved through the narrow corridor. The Pilot could feel the structure, even though invisible, and could also feel a strange and particular energy. They had entered the structure which was so clear to Dossd and Able, and the stubby doglike creature growled again as it entered the inner circular chamber; the Pilot readied for a fight.

The Icer now saw some of the rocks in the sand beyond the corridor. But the invisible walls still somehow disallowed a wider view of the wide-open chamber. What lay behind these invisible walls was blocked from the view. The Hunter readied, then launched out of the corridor brandishing the weapon all around, moving with real precision and covering the full area within seconds. A four-legged, stocky, spined creature then raced out from behind a larger rock, knocked The Pilot off her feet, and raced out through the corridor.

It had been like a small boulder hitting her legs, and her dog-like creature raced after it. She got up, removed the breather, and called the green beast back to her. The creature that knocked her down was a Driller. It could burrow deep very quickly and did so soon after its

escape. As soon as it found a dune outside the structure, it was virtually gone. Although these creatures walked the surface, they camped, and found food and water below the surface.

The yellow-eyed dog had been intent on the scent; not of the spiny creature, but of Dossd and Able. The Pilot already knew she was hunting a Sandwalker and was very impressed by the nature of this place; much more than she thought she would be of anything of The Clan's. Fortunately, the spiny desert driller had moved some of the rocks that gave clues to the pathway to The Great Chasm.

The symbols on the rocks were of an ancient language; a language from when The Power first made itself apparent, eons ago. They were symbols that Nov-Cikel, Edossd had translated in His Writings, but the Icers did not know of them; with the exception of The Pilot's mother, and those who secretly followed The Power amongst the Icers. The young lady had been raised in pure Icer ways, and had not known her mother, or of The Power.

The Driller had simply happened into the inner chamber; if that really explained its fortuitous actions. The Driller was of no consequence to this Hunter as she knew her mog followed another scent into this strange structure. These two had been following this Walker's scent for a week now. She now removed the goggles and the leather skull cap, regarding the stones. She had the brown hair, the blue eyes, and the just lightly purple skin colouration of her people. She walked around the stones changing angles, trying to *see* them somehow. It seemed that she was certain she could decipher their meaning.

For two days The Pilot and her loyal companion stayed there. She studied the inner circle of the structure and all the Icer charts of the wide desert that she brought down from her airship. Time and again, she tried, but no matter what she used to understand them, she could not. On the night of the second day, she almost growled in final frustration, deciding that she was wasting time and needed to keep up the chase on The Walker. She had no idea

that she was tracking two beings, not just the Walker. As she straightened her back and leant back to relieve it, she found herself looking up into the night sky. It was then that she could see part of the design. She had studied the rocks, and their placement, so intently over the two days that she had been here that it was now clearly evident to her.

She looked down excitedly, knowing immediately that the creature they had encountered had moved something. She was very good at puzzles; loved them intently, but she could only use the rocks that had not been moved as definite markers. The hunter had no way of knowing what stars the two out of place would represent, so she decided to use what she *had* found, and keep tracking. Using the stars and the markers that were true she would hopefully catch up with her quarry. She berated herself for wasting two days now that she had realised that the Icer ground maps would never have held the clues for a Sandwalker. They never walked the same ground, so they had to move by the stars.

DOSSD AND ABLE STOPPED TO MAKE CAMP. They had now walked another six months since leaving the great purple structure. They had kept a good pace, as from the star chart within the great rock structure they knew they had a long way to go to the next place; let alone the Chasm itself. Able, to all intents and purposes, now looked like a clansman. His natural hair colour was blonde, his eyes were green, and his skin was now a darker purple. It seemed that the orange light of this sun had affected his skin differently here; skin he now felt very much at home in, and but for his feet, he felt like a clansman. He had also heard many stories and learned many skills in his first year on this new planet.

That night Dossd honoured him with the Third Great Story.

*“Many of the followers of Vrata-na, Oragi died in the weeks that followed his death. One of those followers from a great Clan House, who was known for His selfless generosity, among other things, was arrested, chained, tortured, and kept in a cave under a great mountain. Many followers had been kept there for execution, but the leaders of The Great Clan Empire hoped that this particular clansman would die in the cold dank prison beneath the rock. He would later become known as Nov-Cikel, Edossd.*

*Those in power were very concerned about executing one from so great a house, especially one so loved, even though the doctors of religion wanted Him ended quickly. So, he was left to languish, as others in his company were slowly, over time, executed. But, as crisis comes before victory, and just as all seemed lost to Him and His fellows in that deep dungeon, He received the first intimation of His greatness. He was granted a flow of knowledge of the Hidden Things, even though He had thought Himself just a man until then.*

*Others though, had seen the greatness in Him, as He was a helper of all who could not help themselves. It was unknown for a person of such high rank to aid the sick and the dispossessed, and He had also refused any high position in The Great Clan Council. Nov-Cikel, Edossd had immediately accepted the message of Vrata-na, Oraji when He heard it, and now gladly suffered for the future of all The Clans, and the future of the Icers too.*

*His New Message, and that of Vrata-na, were a huge test for The Clans. That they should actually treat the Icers as brothers was far too much for most of them; that, and of course, the great affront of women being allowed to walk as men did. For women to walk as men did, and always had, had been railed against with great violence on the women who followed Vrata-na, Oragi. Such a commotion, such a change, threatened the fabric of the clans.*

*Nov-Cikel, Edossd survived his incarceration and was eventually sent into the desert; away, so as not to influence His Clans. Never would He be allowed to return. The Clan Council was too afraid to make a martyr of Him, so they had eventually cast Him out. He and his followers walked the deserts, sharing with those who would listen, the promise of the Great Unity that was to come.*

*They were sent further and further out from His home Clan-Lands, over time, and finally away from all the clans. The leaders had to, as His beautiful influence would affect those who came into His presence. He and His followers were driven away again and again by those in power; even when they could not fault His virtue. But again, as crisis leads to victory, it was in the final expulsion that the exiles journeyed to The Great Chasm. It was in that place that Nov-Cikel brought most fully to light, The Power.”*

With that, both were silent, and went off to sleep. Something tugged at Dossd a little though as he went off to sleep. Like he had forgotten something important; and so he had. He had been so intent on the instructions and directions of the star chart that he had been less erratic in his path, and a little tardy with covering his tracks. It was very important that a Sandwalker would never be where he might be found, needed to drift without pattern through the landscape, and make sure there was no *sign* left for any to follow. He had been so focused on the hope of finding The Chasm after these long years that he had been almost predictable. Even with all that, it had still taken The Pilot months to track them down.

She was not far off now, and she knew it. She was impressed by how fast he had been moving, thinking that maybe these clansmen should be called Runners. She had eventually realised that she was quite a few weeks behind him, as when her tracker-mog had originally picked up their scent, not long before finding the invisible structure, she had mistakenly thought they were close. The excitement of the hunt now filled her nostrils as she played with

some tracks in the sand. She even imagined herself seated across from this Walker, while he told his story. As even alone, the Walkers told their story.

She had studied them since she was a child; that, and the Icer sciences. The Icers had gathered endless technologies, and her father was a Hunter, so she had every chance to learn many new things. It was late in her seventeenth year that she set out to explore the planet; that was over ten years ago. She had learned so much more about these amazing Sandwalkers, and so much about the planet, its places, and its creatures, as she travelled. No one was ever game to hurt her, as her father was known from pole to pole on this planet for his deliberate ways. Everything was black and white to him, and he had no qualms with violent action, especially in what he saw to be right.

Dossd had drifted off to sleep, intent to remember his craft from here on. But he now woke suddenly, and looked over at Able sleeping, trying to sense if what he had just heard inwardly was from the boy. His face then showed some concerned concentration, as he moved to Able, shook him awake, and said, "Hurry, we go," in very low tones.

Able was trying to wake up; surprised that Dossd had not used the thought language like he did in dangerous situations. He then received the hand signal to stop all his thoughts. The young man did as he was bid, and they headed off quickly into the night. This Icer was *telepathic*. Dossd had realised it from her thoughts. He had never come across an Icer telepath. He held his thoughts to nil, as the two began to work their way away from her, or more so, her thoughts.

The young lady had smiled as she took hold of a rope which hung from the gondola of her airship in the early evening before. The winch had automatically kicked in from the renewed resistance on the line, and as she rose, she noticed what she had not noticed before in the waning light. She halted the winch with a release of pressure on the rope, jumping it a

little by using her arms. She looked down, realising she had been quite tardy. There were clearly two sets of tracks. Not that she had found much clear *sign* at all in her hunt, mostly relying on her mog's sense of smell, but she had not realised, or even considered, that the Sandwalker was not alone.

*"A young one, and an older one? The gait on the young one is wrong though. How could that be? And they always walk alone,"* she now reflected in thought, as she lay in her bunk.

Dosd looked up to the side as he ran, somewhat hearing her thoughts, yet still holding no thought. Thankfully, all the years of meditation had taught him real discipline. He saw clearly again, his failure in being *'As uncatchable as the wind'*. He would berate himself later.

It was at that very moment, that the strange energy within the great purple stone boulders coalesced into a vertically positioned circle of light. It was one metre in diameter and sat in the air above the map of stones. The driller-creature then wandered in again and moved the stones while sniffing for food. By this, the rocks were returned to their correct positions, and the creature then wandered out through the opening again. The light seemed to regard the whole space, and then was gone.

SUWNA SAT BOLT UPRIGHT. Her husband woke with her and asked what was going on.

"He's alive! He's *really* purple now, and he's still alive!"

"Another dream?" her husband asked.

"Yes," she said, now breaking down in tears. "Oh, God, they seem so real."

This was the third dream she had had of Able since that heartbreaking day on the bridge. They had given her hope, but even hope, while joyous, can be a double-edged sword; most especially for a parent of a lost child.

“Still in the desert, with his friend?”

“Yes,” she answered, as the tears continued to roll out. “Is this all my imagination?”

“I don’t know,” admitted her husband, “But these dreams have been very constant in content, so maybe it’s real.”

“I hope so. He seems *so strong now*. His bearing was *very assured*; yet still our gentle Able.”

“I am sure he will always be his gentle self. He will be well over thirteen now,” commented her husband. But his words did not have their intended effect, for as soon as Suwna heard them she began to cry uncontrollably.

Jeremy teared up too and held her close. They held each other, and after a while, he said, “You know what Grandpa would say right now, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she answered, coming up for air, “All is connected, all is good, and all will be well.”

“I think he should know better than any of us.”

“Yes, he does. *I just wish* my boy was not a traveller.”

“But *he is*, eh. He is his *mother’s* son.”

“Thanks,” she said sincerely, so glad for her deep union with this man, and glad for the assurance that came from the fact that *she too* had travelled far and wide. No great harm

had come to her, and just as she trusted in herself and providence, she had to trust in Able and the design of his life. She then shook her head and wondered at that strong young man who sat across from the Storyteller. She saw in his eyes, her boy; and yet so much more. She would have given her life to see those eyes again. How deep is a parent's love? There is no deeper.

She lay back down to sleep as her husband got up to wander out to the veranda. At times such as these, it was what he did. He went to sit, watch the sky, and let his thoughts wander. She was so thankful for him, as their union was *real* and strong. They consulted on things that they needed to, and let the rest be. Much too was shared unspoken between them, as there is with those who are truly in union. They had both seen enough of life to know what was important and what was not, and they both hailed from very mature societies in a reality simply called, Deeper.

She now let her thoughts wander again as she recalled the stories of the Storyteller. They were like many other stories; stories she had heard on every world she had travelled to. It seemed that the planet, which was as yet unnamed by the Storyteller, was coming to the time of planetary unity; unity of kind, as she could feel the spirit of the Age in which that planet found itself. She then remembered the creature's face, and again looked into the Storyteller's eyes as she had the other times these dreams, or connections, came. She saw an honourable creature; one who knew who he was, and his place in the nature of things. If her dreams were true, she could not have hoped for a better mentor and friend for her dear boy. She now even wondered whether this whole situation was a gift to Able; whether it was grace and providence, as these are sometimes hidden in the hardest things.

She fell off to sleep again, and in that sleep, she met a Pilot. They talked over many things. They shared their love for science, and their lust for adventure. They shared their

adamant intent as teenagers to reach out into the unknown and explore it, no matter what their fathers had warned of. They were strong, knew what would grow them, and also, which places and people would take their beauty from them.

Suwna then saw weapons, and she suddenly screamed out at The Pilot, not knowing why she felt such anger. She woke in a sweat, and on the planet of Temelj, so did The Pilot. Such a vivid dream was not new to this young Icer woman, but she had no idea she was a telepath.

A deep foreboding then filled Suwna's being, and she called out to her husband, while she prayed deeply and with great passion to her Lord to protect her boy and his storytelling companion.

THE PILOT SCREAMED IN ANGER TO THE HEAVENS. It had been a long time now, another four months since the night that she had felt her quarry within reach. Such was her frustration right now though, as their sign had not reappeared this time; not even with the aid of her mog's extra senses. So many times, she had lost her quarry's pathway through the sand since Dossd had realised they were being tracked, but she and her stocky companion had been patient and the Mog's sense of smell and its light-senses had regathered them time and again. But this time she had lost their tracks for three weeks; for three weeks there had been nothing.

The desert looked so large today as she looked around. Long months of hard tracking; and her quarry only felt further away. Her green hairy friend growled a little in sympathy for her anger, and as she looked at her childish, but trusted, ally, she started to laugh. She gave the animal a loving rough pat and let go to the greater reality of life. She took

hold of a knot on the rope hanging from her airship with one hand and the harness of her tracker-mog with the other, and with a tug on the rope the winch started to wind them up to the ship.

“We will have to use the star chart. We *will* hunt them down.” she said out loud to the mog as they rose, and of course, it agreed with a sure growl.

# *Virtue*

Able and Dossd now sat on a high dune. They had clambered up on this dune to take a better look when they saw it. In the distance, on a wide flat expanse, was a great assemblage of balloons and airships, seemingly tied together in a jumble, almost thirty meters above the sand. There had to be well over four hundred airships; ships of all sizes and shapes tied to each other, with three massive, spiralled ropes like a triple helix in the centre, anchoring them all to the desert floor. It was truly a sight to behold.

The great platted ropes seemed to have been made by giants, and were almost sacred, so no-one dared climb them. But in fact, this floating market had been here a very long time, and as it grew, more rope had been platted in, and more stone was gathered to fix them to the ground. Their triple helix form worked like a great spring and tether to the ground, holding all strong and steady, even when great winds blew. There were many other, single loose ropes of all lengths hanging down all the way out to the extremities of the seeming jumble of balloons and gondolas. A small number of these reached the ground, but most did not; just hanging loose high above the desert floor.

Able had ducked down at first when he had peeked over a lower dune, but Dossd had put his hand on his shoulder, indicating that this was a good thing. The two companions had

run out of water and food. They had even travelled away from what Dossd called wind-rivers, for a good while, to finally shake the one who stalked them. This Sandwalker had gathered much of his water from such places when he had wandered the deserts before travelling with the boy. These water places were also an easy place for trackers to find them, or gather sign, as water places were the places of predators too.

Able had sensed these wind-rivers but had not been able to experience them. The wonderful scent of water would caress his nostrils like the smell of new rain after a long dry season, so it was hard for him to hold himself away from these alluring streams of wet air. Only once, when they were extremely desperate, had Dossd gone alone to quickly gather water in one, and some fruits too. Able had not seen him go about his work, as these moisture laden winds only flowed in deep low places between narrow set ridges of rock or high dunes, so Able had to keep watch from high ground. They would have been blind on the low ground of the wind-river if they had both gone, so he had stayed to his job, while Dossd had gathered.

“What *is it?*” asked Able, amazed at the awe-inspiring and colourful sight, yet totally confused as to how that many airships, or *any* airship, could be a good place, and not something to fear.

Dossd heard his mind’s many questions, and said, “It is indeed a place to be wary, but it is a place where one may not be seen within the many souls that are there. It is a place of trade and is beyond all law. It works for the Icers and is a safe place for Walkers; well as safe as it can be. The Clans trade here too, so Sandwalkers are less obvious. We will share no thoughts when we climb to trade, and we will only speak my language. You must be focused.”

Able nodded. He had learned so much about having a wider sense of what surrounded him as he walked, but also about focus. Focus could produce great results, while a wider vision, or circumspection, too gave its own gifts. Vision and focus were brought very clearly and simply to light in surviving on this seemingly lifeless planet. A wider awareness of the landscape and the sky, and focus on sign indicating food or water, kept you alive out in these deserts, while effort provided it too. Dossd had taught Able how these two disparate powers intertwined well, and how a good awareness of them gave a Walker clearer vision.

Able now remembered back to his lessons on being fully present in the moment, with his inner senses and awareness active. Dossd had explained that focus and breadth of vision simply came from the awareness that they existed, and our outer senses more powerful when the soul was aware of itself; when one was detached. There was an instinctual animal element that Dossd had found helped him survive too. But it needed be ruled by the soul, or it could become problematic just as any other lower power could. *Both* the spiritual and the instinctual had kept Dossd alive all these years.

Able's mind then slowed as he looked off into the distance at the great floating market. He then readied himself; refocused himself in his inner being and looked out from there. He watched over himself from this seat of inner awareness, from this inner vantage point. Clearly in front of him now, were his attributes of mind and soul, his emotion and instinct. He would remain in this state, and poised in *the now*, to hear them and use them well; focused and aware.

IT WAS NOW LATE IN THE EVENING. The market was lit up, and on this dark night it lit the desert floor for some distance around it. There was a good deal of noise, and lights of every type and colour. It was a sight to behold, so alive in comparison to the quiet of the

desert life Able had known here. The two companions had reached one of the ropes that hung all the way down to the baked red ground below the market. These ropes were knotted all the way up, so the clan folk could climb up. They were intentionally not rope ladders, so that customers might be more exhausted when they reached the market. Those who were more tired, hungry, and thirsty, were better customers. At least that was the thinking of the traders who sold their wares in this place.

When they reached the top, they looked around a little, and then split up. Able would wander around limping, as he had his feet bound in cloth so no one would see his strange feet. His appearance was very much of a clansman other than his feet and his height, but he would just look sickly, and young or stunted, to others. Dossd traded with shiny metals and coloured stones which he had found on his way or in the ground when digging for food and water. The Icers were simply mad to him, trading these lifeless things for food, water, and useful implements.

There were two main walkways up here. They were crooked and went from one side of the market to the other in a very unwieldy X shape when seen from above. Gondolas hung beside them, and *also* carried them, with sellers calling out their wares along their length. These two main walkways were busy and crossed each other at right angles; well, as right angled as this hotchpotch of balloons and airships allowed. There were also other smaller makeshift wooden pathways that branched off them here and there. Everything here was tied to everything else, and thousands of ropes dangled like tendrils in the breeze below the walkways and gondolas.

It was at night that most of the trading went on, as the people of The Clans thought that at least in the night they had some chance of escape if something bad happened. The

Icers could never be trusted, and trading places like these were rough places. Traders and clansmen died here, and in some dark corners far more evil things had taken place.

Able walked around and looked with great wonder at the different food, animals, arts and implements on display. He kept just a little bowed over and talked as if he were a shy cripple, but still wandered here and there thoroughly enjoying the experience. There was every kind of invention, and odd fruits and foods. His look of wonder was not out of place, as being younger and cripple, and of course *'just, uneducated desert scum'*, his demeanour was not unusual to the expectations of most who traded there, even to the few Clan traders.

He became so entranced and distracted here that he now found himself lost in the small walkways. He realised he had lost his bearings, and now regathered himself. He had lost both focus and a circumspect attitude in all the sounds, smells, lights, and wonder. Just then, he heard a low growl. It was a tracker-mog, and it bared its teeth. Able then set back on his heels as the Pilot came out of her gondola. She looked at the cripple before her, and the mog growled again. Her eyes changed and her hand began to move toward her weapon. As whether it was from the type of growl, or something else, she knew this was one of the Walkers that she had been hunting.

Able ran, as he had heard her thoughts, just as he always heard Dossd's; and while he ran, he berated himself for totally losing focus and vision in this amazing, but dangerous, place. The Pilot was taken at how fast this cripple was, and how easily he navigated the bouncy roped-wood pathways. He ran like an Icer. She moved after him as fast as she could; the mog already in closer pursuit. But it wasn't long before she realised that she had lost him in the labyrinth of walkways. The mog then came back to her from around a corner of the walkway. It had lost him too.

She looked around and tried to sense which way he might have gone, while feeling a little thrown by the eyes that had stared at her in fear. They *were green*, but there was more behind those eyes; more than a clansman. There *was* a clansman there, but *what else?*

Just then, the mog growled, looking down through the wooden slats. She looked down where it did, through the walkway, and there, hanging on one of the many dangling ropes below her feet, was Able. She pointed her weapon at him, and said to her mog, “Well, what do we have here, boy.”

Able said nothing, as she indicated to him to climb up to the walkway. He looked down to the ground far below, and she commented strongly, “*Too far*, my friend.”

“Maybe it is better to die that way,” stated Able, like a true Walker, which had the Pilot again searching for the nature of her captive.

“Maybe it is *not*,” she said, simply, as the proud Icer woman she was, but with her curiosity growing.

Just then, a stick hit the back of her head, and at the same time the rope and wooden walkway fell away below her and the mog. Able caught the mog’s harness, and held the animal, while he still dangled from the rope. The woman was disoriented from the pain and was shocked at seeing the mog fall too, but she had grabbed and curled a rope quickly, to stop her from falling. Her mind could not contemplate why this Walker would save her mog. Neither could Dossd, and he called out to Able to drop it.

It was the strangest situation for all three; and the mog. Dossd, summing up the situation more quickly, swung down on a rope and back up to another part of the walkway, knocking the weapon from the Pilot’s free hand. He called out to Able again to drop the creature, but he simply could not. He called out that both their lives depended on it. But Able

could not. The mog could sense Able's intention, and so could Dossd, while the Pilot hung there trying to understand what was happening.

It was then that the link was made, or was it when their eyes met as he sailed by her on the rope? Dossd could see the Pilot's mind in those eyes, and she could see his. It was truly the strangest coming together in the history of life on this planet. Icer, Walker, alien, and mog, and they all acquiesced to the power of this strange moment; the Pilot frozen in its spell.

It was the mog that changed first. It relaxed, like a dog would when the work or fun was over. Dossd told Able to throw the mog to the Pilot, as he began pulling up Able's rope. She readied to catch it, knowing that her, or her pet, would not be helped back up onto the walkway by the taller Walker. Able swung the mog a few times, to time the catch, and the Pilot reached out and *just* caught it by the back part of its harness. It hung there with its face pointing down, as Dossd finished pulling Able up. The two of them then ran for their lives. They had to get away from the market as soon as they could. Enemies abounded here now that they had become known.

*"I can't hold on,"* heard Dossd in his mind, realising the Pilot was in danger of falling, and strangely his heart jumped in his chest.

*"I will send help,"* he answered instinctively, both the Pilot and Dossd not believing that he had just said that to a hunter; yet both feeling a deep flow of love between them. The emotions, and the message in her mind, a wondrous revelation to her, even in her predicament.

Dossd emotions tore at him and somehow his wish to save the Pilot passed to two men they brushed by on the walkways. He did not know *how* he did that, but he *did* know

that his intention to save her had become theirs as they raced to help her. It was life and death for all four of them, as the Pilot slipped a little more, and the two friends sprinted and dodged along the walkways, then slid and clambered down one of the three great ropes that anchored the market to the ground.

The two men came to the spot where the young lady and her mog hung, and only now regained their own minds. They looked down, and immediately started to pull her up. If it was any other person, they might have just let her fall and divvy up her possessions, but she was the daughter of Enom Clovek. She had made that very clear on her arrival at this floating village for her own protection. Enom was a great Icer Hunter and was feared by all those who stood outside the law; and everyone else for that matter. He was a seasoned Hunter and a deliberate man; a man very sure of who he was. Life was black and white to him, and by acting on it being so, he had won many admirers. To him the law was to be followed no matter what; no matter the price.

He had executed many of the aliens who had come through the portals, and it was his great airship that Able and Dossd had escaped from when they had hidden under the sand, well over a year ago now. He was so uncompromising that he had won the high regard of many, and the disgust of many others. He was seen by most as a hero stopping any alien invasion and the threat of disease on Temelj, but there were many others who saw him as a butcher. Icer society was not all in agreement on the killing of the alien beings that were cast here by the portals. There had been many debates, in many of the various Icer Nations, but the majority had always leaned to the side of “safety”, so it was lawful to hunt down and kill any creature that was not a native of this planet.

The Pilot had just held on long enough for the men to get her up. Even though she knew her ropes, as any good Icer should, the fall had been so sudden that she only managed

an emergency hold; the added weight of the mog made them far too heavy for such a single hand hold. She, just like Able, could not drop the mog to save herself. She now stood up on the walkway, a little dazed, and definitely confused, so just turned and walked back to her gondola, not even thanking those who helped her. The mog made sure that these men knew *he* was not *at all* confused, as he growled at them and shadowed her back to her airship.

She was what was culturally called here, the half daughter of Enom Clovek. She was the product of a dalliance before Enom was married, but he had taken her in as fully his own and raised her. He always followed the Icer ways and what he saw as honourable, no matter the cost. Her name was Eedra, an ancient name, which had its own story. Enom's wife though had struggled with her, as it was hard for her to accept one who was not hers, and as life would have it, they shared no real interests. Eedra loved science and all to do with it, and her mother was one attentive to the duties of the house and loved raising and nurturing her family. But these duties were so much her mother's purpose, that she did accept her duty to the child, nurtured her, and sought only the best tutors in the sciences for her. She, like her husband, fulfilled her duty no matter what. Duty was a rock on which this family stood.

DOSSD HELD THE STICK VERTCALLY, AND OUT IN FRONT OF HIM. Able took the stick with a real sense of honour but was not sure that he had earned it, especially so soon. Dossd, hearing his thoughts, said out loud. "You have *indeed* earned it."

"But I lost my focus, and I had no awareness, no vision of what was around me."

"You were *selfless*; and for a *mog*, no less."

"I nearly got us both killed."

“Yes, but you have fulfilled the pure essence of Message of Nov-Cikel. You have shown the great virtue of selflessness to such a degree that you honour me with your presence. Your kin shall honour you for this in the second life, and I shall tell the Fourth Great Story tonight in your honour.”

“Thanks, Dossd, but I just couldn’t drop the poor thing.”

“I *was* quite amazed to see that it did not *chew you* off that rope,” he laughed. “But *do not* underestimate your act. It was pure; and so *rare* in these days.”

“I don’t feel that way. It was that I just couldn’t drop it,” said Able, humbly, and totally naturally.

“It was the act of *all* virtues. Such an act of selfless love houses *them all*.”

“Well, maybe not moderation,” offered Able, smiling, and Dossd exploded in his loud cry of humour, and agreed that maybe it did not hold that particular one.

“The right power needs be used in any situation, and I most certainly would not have chosen selflessness. But how *great* it was; *how great was that moment!*” howled Dossd, as if it were prayer to The All.

Able smiled, as he was very happy that his mentor was so happy with him.

“Wisdom,” Dossd continued, “would say that there is always the need of a particular power, or a number of them, and in the right balance in all life’s varying situations.”

“I suppose so. It does depend.”

“But this one, *selflessness; this one*,” finished Dossd, in reverent tones, “*Is it not the depths of them all?*”

It was now the third night after their escape, and they drank thankfully while they prepared a full meal. It was not much, but all things are relative, and to them it was a feast. They had run hard day and night, stopping only to drink, eat a morsel, and nap at times. Dossd had thankfully traded for another skin full of water in The Market, which Able now carried. Now that he was more fit and stronger, *they* were stronger. He now carried the water skin easily, just as Dossd had prophesied those short years ago, and Able realised how much he had grown physically, and otherwise, since arriving here. He did not see a man yet within himself, and again felt that he had not earned the stick, but he did not see the child who had landed here; helpless and alone.

The two of them had made a plan of escape before they had climbed the knotted ropes to the floating market. Dossd knew that if something went wrong, they needed an escape plan, and if they were split up, they would need to know where the other waited. A Walker needed to plan as they went mostly, but forward vision was especially required before entering such a situation.

They now both lay back on the sand, looking up into the stars as they talked. Their fuller bellies made them drowsy, as well as both being worn out from their long escape run, but Dossd still asked the question he had asked every day of their journey, “What happened and what did we learn?”

There was no talk as both looked off into the stars and allowed themselves some quiet time to see more clearly. Reflection was paramount to a Walker, as everything learned, from gathering water to realisations of the spirit, was yielded up by it. Many things, including food and keeping free from the hunters, depended on gathering any learning granted by reflection’s glass.

In time they broke their silence and began to talk. The discussion was animated, and much laughter had about that dangerous situation that was now defeated. Dossd talked about *victory coming from crisis* as he did most times they reflected. This notion fit Able's family ethos well too, so he had taken strongly to such reflection and appreciated the nature of *struggle before the gift*. So many times, they had struggled to survive in the one and a half years since these two had met. In so many ways this planet had tested and challenged them. They had been talking for a while about things they had done well, and things they did not do so well at all, when the discussion came around to the strange nature of the situation that had occurred on the walkway with the Pilot.

"It was almost that it was meant to be. Such a point in time where nothing is clear, yet also as clear as the sun, is a special time. The boundaries of life are clear to me, but in this there were none," offered Dossd.

"Maybe it *was* fate," agreed Able, now aware of what had passed between Dossd and the Pilot, and Dossd finding the strange new power to pass on his intentions to others.

"Maybe so," mused Dossd, again feeling the connection to the person that had hunted them. He had never felt something so strange; something whose parts could not fit together, and yet did.

"You know, a lot of people talk about fate, as if everything is fate," ventured Able. "They talk about it all being the Will of God, but to me there are choices and fate. Where one ends and the other begins, I don't know. Maybe sometimes they're both at play within the same situation, I don't know. Maybe they are one thing. But one thing I know for sure is, that if I do not have choice, how can I use what The All has given me to be more, or to prove my love for Him? How can I be considered to have acted or chosen a good act, if it is done by fate? Why would I even exist if all is set and settled?"

Dossd's eyes went wide at what he had heard, adding that the Will of The All most truly lies in the Message he sends in each age, and while our nature and life experience produces much of our life, that we do no doubt have choices. He was so taken with this awakening spirit, this burgeoning young man, that he thought that Able must tell a story tonight. The Fourth Great Story could wait, as he wanted to hear more of what had educated such a mind; such a soul as this.

"I believe this meeting was *surely* fate," mused Dossd, "but from what you have just shared, maybe we should be looking to reflect on *our choices*. After all, it is our choices that measure us. We can gather much from reflection on them, and what they produced. Maybe then, you may grace me with another story."

"Really?" said Able, not sure why Dossd had insisted, but feeling honoured that he was asked tonight. It had been a hard slog these last three days, but tonight; so much honour had been given him. He did not feel proud, he just felt blessed and humbled, and that was a large part of why Able, was Able.

"Yes, most certainly," Dossd assured him.

Much was gleaned from looking at their choices, and the actions that followed them; so much became clear. After all, it is more about *how we respond* to what comes to us than what it is that comes to us. Able and Dossd finally sat themselves up, and though both very tired, a story had to be told as reverence and thanks for their safety. They had no chance over the three days of their flight, and now, they sat up higher with backs straight, and Able began to tell his story.

*"The Master, the man also known as The Servant, was much older now and lived in a place near the great fortress city where He and His Father and family had been imprisoned.*

*He continued to share the Great Message brought by His Father, who had now ascended. It was at this time that a woman of great wealth and standing was travelling nearby and came to hear of Him.*

*Despite her wealth and a good social life, she had found her life quite unsatisfying, and was given to constant, and sometimes great, sadness. She sought out The Master and was quite taken by Him; staying close by Him for a good amount of time, and every time he greeted her, right from the first time he saw her, he would greet her with the phrase, “Be happy!”*

*She loved this, but she soon realised that others of her party were not greeted that way. This then began to trouble her, and she asked someone to ask Him why he always said that to her. He had answered that, “I tell her to be happy because we cannot know the spiritual life until we are happy.” It was then that her shyness fell away, and she allowed her sadness to be seen openly. She cried deeply that day, and in time she begged The Master to know what a spiritual life was. She had been religious, but no one had ever made it clear what it was to live a spiritual life.*

*The Master told her that she must take on the characteristics of God, and so she considered what they may be, from generosity to love, kindness, justice, mercy and many more. She spent a day reflecting on this and contemplating it. This divine puzzle made her so happy that she forgot all else that day, and she began to understand.*

*She would always remember the words of the Master, “Characterise yourself with the characteristics of God!”<sup>1</sup>, and she came to know a spiritual life.*

The two friends then lay back to contemplate and sleep. Sleep came quickly to both, as it was always going to after such an effort, but Able had much to celebrate and fought his

tiredness for longer. He had thought that it would take years of hard work to earn a Sandwalker's stick, but it had been achieved by a single act of virtue. He wondered at that and began to contemplate the nature of what we may *believe* is valuable and the nature of what is *truly* valuable; what *really* holds meaning and honour.

AGAIN, EEDRA DREAMED OF A WOMAN FROM ANOTHER PLACE. Able's mother's sleep was disturbed as she found herself once again in the presence of this young woman, but she did not feel the imminent danger she had in her last encounter. Eedra, now seeing this same woman, and especially now that life, the strange happening with the Walkers, had peeled back layers of reality, seemed to know that this dream was a real connection. An excited feeling rose in her as she became lucid within the dream.

It was a misty and muffled connection. Like a signal from far away, fuzzy, and coming in and out; just some thoughts and feelings coming through a mist. She could sense questions and feelings and waited like radio operator with a dish attempting to gather the signal and make it clearer, while listening intently. The biggest feeling coming through was a mother's concern for her son and something about a weapon. There was also a question of why a scientist would seek to kill other sentient beings.

Suwna, Able's mother, was asleep and dreaming, her soul simply interacting naturally in that state, which was part of the reason the link was unstable. The language of dreams is very different to the added conscious presence in lucid dreaming, so the link was more in sync the last time they connected, as then, they were both in the full dreaming state.

Eedra now remembered back to the nature of the first dream. She remembered that it had ended with this woman screaming at her, and that she had had the dream at the time she

was hunting the Sandwalkers. She somehow then knew that she had been hunting this woman's son, and that was why this link existed. It was a *knowing* in her; even though she still had a thousand questions, as this was all so new. She wondered which of the two Walkers this woman's son was, and the answer came through that it was the young one. The question of a Sandwalker with a mother who was a woman of science, certainly puzzled her. Was there still more to these creatures that she did not know? This link was very exciting and quite scary too, but she held her courage and sent a clear image of two Walkers making it clear over the sand hills and out of danger.

With that, the link was severed, as the answer had woken Suwna. She shook her husband awake and shared the good news; news that came in a dream. Then she began to cry again. She was thankful for the connection; the help, hope, and faith within it, even though a little unsure if it was just her sleeping mind seeking to placate her. Yet it *was* a gift, and being a mother of a missing child, she held to it tightly; still worried, but hopeful. She had not seen The Storyteller since her nightmare of the Pilot, so had thought that something bad must have happened. She now held out more hope that she would connect with him again; and see her boy again, someday.

Eedra woke in the morning and remembered her clear cognizance within her dreaming. She had felt a mother's fear for the life of her child and had seen clearly her own lack of even scientific morality. It was then that Eedra became very sure that this mother was from another world. The boy too. That was why he ran so well on the walkways, as she knew no Walker could have. It also explained the strange look in his eyes.

She stared off into never as she saw just how much things had changed. She was in league with an alien through her link with its mother, and her link with the Walker. But was

she in league with him too? She was very torn, and so much confusion had come with all this change. So much change all at once.

She then returned to the clear message within the dream, now asking herself why she had hunted the Sandwalkers? Her connection with this mother, a woman of science, and her deep link with Dossd, had made her aware that her cultural conditioning had blotted out her respect for life. This outsider's view from far away had shown her actions more clearly to her, and she now felt like a mindless mog, favouring only its master. Then she became very aware of what felt like a strong creature within her, and it began protecting itself with weak arguments. It was animal in nature and took her mind from her. She watched it, and saw it clearly usurp her being and her mind. More questions then followed on the tail of all this; questions as to what *was* her, and what *was not* her, and it started to shake her. How could she be watching herself?

There were so many questions, too many questions. Her mind now tried to come to grips with the endless mental ropes that she now found herself tangled in; along with this entanglement came a strong fear, that if she did get free of all the ropes she may perish there. To be tangled in rope, or to fall, were the great fears of those who rode the sky; her strong will to end the confusion only adding to the heat, frustration, and pain in her mind. She could not seem to escape or gather ground, no matter what tack she took.

When it became all too much for her, she threw her arms up in surrender. It was a relief, but it became clear that there was truly no quick escape or remedy. She saw that she needed to allow the process its time and embrace this internal fight with some courage. It was strange to her that *courage* was what stood between the unknown and the known *within* her. She only knew courage as an *outer* force within life; but she knew it well. She regained her mind from her lower self with it, and she began slowly working on those ropes, one at a time.

Courage is a power of the soul, and as all virtues, takes us back into our higher nature, and there, she remembered her father's words, "Action due to fear is not courage; it is fear. Courage stands against its insistence, and poised, awaits a vision of the true course."

# *Choices*

Able and Dossd lay on their backs. It was mid-afternoon and they had only just found the moist air current; a wind-river. The Sandwalker had let the lad come with him this time as his thirst to experience such a place was great, and they had been walking for some time on flat country, so it was best they were out of sight for a while. They were very cautious as they neared and entered the small gorge; the wind-river coming out of a large cave mouth and passing back into one about two hundred metres away at the other end of this narrow chasm. These moisture laden winds came off the Icer Mountains and wandered around the planet, above and below the surface.

Able had no idea why they were now both laying on their backs on the sandy floor, when suddenly plants, small flexible tree like saplings, rose up out of the ground, projecting themselves into the midst of the moist current, gathering water. They were a metre or so in height and almost completely green; their trunks dark green, their few huge unfolding leaves a bright light green, but their fruit was the colour and seeming texture of the sand. The many pear-shaped fruits now sat motionless in the moist breeze, and Able's mouth salivated.

Dossd then gave thought instructions, and with a small delay, and in unison, they jumped up and grabbed as much of the fruit as they could. The plants drew themselves

quickly back into the ground, as Able grabbed some fruit and laid them aside. He then lay back down to gather from another tree if the plants rose again. Dossd, on the other hand, had held the plant and picked from it. The plant was strong, but Dossd was stronger. Apparently, they only grew in sand below these wind-rivers, and where the sun could reach them. The Sandwalker had been very thankful of the number of wind-rivers they had encountered recently in this part of the great desert, even though they had only once partaken of their gifts here, due to being hunted by Eedra.

Dossd knew her name. He had gathered it in his experience with her in The Market. He did not know how this Hunter had found them, but on reflection realised that it had to be a coincidence, as she had seemed as surprised as they were. He gathered so much of her in that short exchange; an exchange like he had never experienced before. He saw her science and her lack of empathy for The Clans. He saw also a deeper well within her, and he knew it came from her mother. He had mused for some nights now on this rare creature and had even tried to gather her mother. Dossd meditated often, and when his pond was still, he sought out Eedra's mother in what was exchanged with the young woman. He knew that her mother was special somehow, but also that Eedra was somewhat ignorant of her. Her mother was linked to what she called The Power. The feeling he had then gathered from his intuitive vision of a Circle of Light, was one of endless love and knowledge; deep and ancient.

He now laughed at Able trying to dig down to find the plants that had retreated below the sand. Able looked around; then smiled too, as he knew he was being impatient, but he just could not help his young self. Then they both began to laugh aloud at his futile effort, as Able dug a little more. In the end, he just kept digging for the great feast of laughter they were both now gathering.

Eventually they had gathered plenty of fruit, so began to put up the cloth to gather water from the breeze. Whenever the air was wet Able thought of home. He came from a place of green hills and missed greatly its emerald beauty. The colour green had almost faded from his mind, as he had known only the earthy colours of the desert for so long; only now realising that the orange sky too, was now not odd at all to him. But the bright greens and the moisture here were like breathing in a bit of home again, and he remembered his family, and the joys of childhood. He remembered the love, and many bits of discipline that were now becoming quite humorous to him. He saw the child he once was and was so glad for his childhood.

That night they ate like masters of the desert and joked easily about their day. After a time, Dossd set to meditate, but Able wanted to talk with him about this new skill he had gathered on the wooden walkways of The Market. It had been some weeks since their encounter now, and he thought he had been patient enough in waiting to reflect with Dossd about this particular experience. He had found Dossd quite inside himself lately, knowing he was chasing answers about what he had experienced, and about the nature of the Pilot. He knew Dossd took whatever time it took to self-reflect; to calm the storm of too much unknown and unconsidered, before reflecting with Able, but the young man could wait no longer.

“May we talk about what happened in The Market?” he pleaded, gently.

“Do you wish to talk about your performance again?” stated Dossd, looking serious.

Able shrank a bit, but then changed. “*Yes*, and yours,” he said, with some confidence, a sliver of bravado, and a little humour.

Dossd smiled, and then looked down, saying, “Yes, we have waited long enough. You must forgive me. I have been away from you, even though I have been near.”

“It’s all good, Dossd. It seemed to me that you needed time, so I let you have it. I’ve been very patient, even while my curiosity tortured me.”

“Such insight, and yet, from a crying child,” said Dossd, in the way of clansman humour, and with a little reminder of humility for the boy, as he knew how ego could stunt this young one’s spiritual growth.

He was always thoughtful of what he praised, and how often. The problem with Able was that Dossd would have liked to celebrate the boy’s thoughts and actions a lot more than he actually did. Able had made great strides in so many ways, and he had done the almost impossible; impressed a Sandwalker. In any case, humility had to be engendered strongly, as overconfidence in the desert could kill you, and after all, this great power is also the gateway to The All, and to wisdom.

“I have had *much* to consider that is new to me. There has been so much, and many questions,” added Dossd.

“Then let’s find the answers. Who is she?”

Dossd sighed a little, and said, “She is the daughter of an Icer, a Hunter it would seem. I did not gather his name. He was simply Father to her. Her birthmother is an Icer too, and yet somehow of the Clans. She was of an old family, and allegiant to *The Power*. I do not know of this belief, but it has power...great power. It is *strangely too*, and *somehow*, my *own* belief. But I *strongly* believe Eedra’s mother was psychic.”

“Eedra is the Pilot’s name?”

“Yes,” answered Dossd, plainly.

It was like a cool drink after a hot day of walking for Able, as while they had talked and reflected together on the goings on that night they had not gone into these details and the depths of it. Dossd had discussed what he had deemed necessary at the time. He had been trained to this; to allowing time to see things more clearly before acting, as he was to have no companion to speak with in his quest for The Chasm.

“So, what passed between you?”

“So much; in such a short time. There was a deep connection of heart as well as the sharing of her thoughts. I don’t believe she gathered my deeper thoughts and memories; only my feelings it seems. It is like we have always been connected and it was the time for it to be so in the outer life. I now see that my twenty years in the desert was indeed not that I had failed to please The All, but that He had this plan for me.”

“Inost! That’s *wonderful* Dossd,” cheered Able, so glad for his friend to have found this meaning in his pathway.

“*Rayer*, inost,” answered Dossd, but deeply pensive. “I trust there is great meaning in our meeting.”

“Meaning is like water, eh?” said Able.

“Yes. Meaning is life. A lack of meaning is death and the cause of every evil, every madness and addiction. Those who live in The Market are lost in such meaninglessness; many souls there are lost in the endless addictions of the material world. I have heard how many of the Icers are lost in their nations, too, and have many addictions and lost ways that they even see as quite normal.”

“*Sure,*” said Able, becoming a little clearer on the wider nature of addiction, but then self-reflecting suddenly, and asking, “What is *my* meaning, Dossd?”

“Your meaning is in your love for The All, *who* you are, and *how* you act. Then, there are all those you are *connected* to; who you love, and what you *do* for them. This is *anyone’s* meaning.”

“I only have you to give to,” said Able, sadly, again feeling deeply just how far he was away from those he loved.

Dossd cried out a laugh, as he liked to do when this young man missed the point altogether, and said, “You have an honourable code. You are bonded to your Creator. You live nobly each day. You do your part to keep us alive, and journeying on. You are good company, and you do your family proud by all this. What can you do but each day, and do for those who grace it? Your meaning is also in that we seek together The Chasm, share our stories and our thoughts, and aid and protect each other. Who knows what meaning will come to us each new day, and most surely, just as we gathered in our reflection, meaning lives within *what we do with that which comes.*”

“So, seeking The All, being who I am, meeting life, connecting and doing things for anyone; these are my meaning?”

“Yes. God is God, good is good, and *water, meaning,* is most truly in what we *do*; most *especially* what is not for ourselves,” stated Dossd, now shaking his head the way Walkers did, and wondering how Able did not know this. Sometimes he forgot that Able was still a boy, as he acted with great maturity at times and had become more a friend now.

Able smiled, as he realised more deeply now, that it was in the simple things and acts of life that meaning is found. He knew growing up, that he had to find and give out what he

was naturally good at, and also put into society in any way required, but this explanation ran deeper and was more essential. He then laughed out loud as he realised his serious lack of vision on this subject. He laughed as much like a man as a boy, and in this, Dossd now clearly saw that his Time would be soon.

“So, *what* connection of heart?” asked Able, just gathering an aspect of what Dossd had shared about his experience with the Pilot.

As he asked it, he saw the tall slim Sandwalker turn deeper purple, his blonde-streaked hair only adding to the evidence of it.

“When you are a man, when it is your Time; maybe then, but not now.”

The way Dossd had said it, made it clear that this subject was not open for discussion. Able thought that no matter when his own *Time* was, he would wait for Dossd to share when he wished to on that particular subject. “*What concern of mine is it anyway,*” he thought, and he apologised to Dossd.

Dossd was glad of the apology, but then did open up to share a little of his thoughts on the matter. “I have decided that I will not go back in search of her. If it is the will of The All, then we will meet again. I have never felt such a connection, but I know, even while fated, I must leave this thing to the winds of time to build a dune; if indeed, one is to truly grow there.”

EEDRA HAD GONE OUT EARLY TO BUY BREAKFAST. Each day she would buy breakfast and gather food for other meals from the sellers on one of the main walkways. She had decided to stay here at the floating market, as it was the best place for her to contemplate the great changes that were brought on by that fateful night on the back walkways, and also

the strange link in her dreams. She now sat looking out into the desert through the low wide window of her gondola, eating slowly. The mog sat beside her on a long soft bench seat, and she caressed it with her other hand as her mind wandered.

She had been taught that Sandwalkers were vermin, and never to be trusted, as they would take an Icer's life '*as quick as look at them*'. To the Icers, Walkers were crazy zealots who led many clans out into the desert to die; as away from the farmlands, they could not survive. She had come to doubt almost everything she had been taught, as her experience had made clear that there was much more to the story, and now, even the nature of life itself. The Walkers knew the desert well and the thoughts and feelings that passed between her and the tall one were strong. As a scientist she could not discount her new knowledge; even if now, still a little out of focus.

One thing though, was crystal clear; she was telepathic, and until that night she had not known it. Actually, at first, she thought it may be that the Walker had played with her mind, but she had found herself gathering the odd thought in symbol form from a person here and there, and there was also the link with the short alien's mother. She had found that the shared thoughts of others in this floating town only added to her confusion, so had blocked them out, providentially finding that she had control over this gift. "*A gift!?*" she now mused in thought.

Only Walkers were known to be telepaths, and then, only men. To Icers, it was part of their disease, so she was now even *sick* in the eyes of her kind. She had untangled most of the ropes of thought that bound and confused her, but the nature of things was still not clear, so she had waited here for clarity. Her father had always told her, that given time, and action if necessary, clarity would always come. He had taught her to trust her judgement and stand upon it, but yet always seek to learn. She was thankful for all of this and loved him, but much

was still up in turbulent winds and until she could get some purchase on the ground, her anchor down, she decided she would stay in The Market.

The Market was a place where almost all were passing through, even those who traded here moved from market to market, and almost anything was okay here. Those who did not normally mix in the societies of Temelj could do so here; here and in other markets like it. Eedra wanted time here to study the people of The Clans too. She now shook her head at herself, realising that all her learning, where these people were concerned, was from far away through a long-glass; from books, or from accounts from her father and others. She realised her distance and arrogance now clearly, and almost reviled her own ignorance.

Courage, again, and an acceptance of her acts until now, brought her to the clarity that she had to move on from what she once knew, otherwise the past would be like great boulders holding her down and she would never fly again. This young lady had plenty of courage and now clearly understood the nature of her life; that it had relied *only* on the mind, and survival. She had seen herself as honourable until that night, especially now that she had felt the heart of a Sandwalker. She had seen her darkness in the light of that bright spear of love that struck her somewhat darkened heart. She needed to get to *know* The Walker's kind. It was not just science any longer.

But how would she be able to talk to them? She did not know, as she had never done so, and then realised that this was another thing that kept people apart; otherness. She had only hunted this kind, or passed them at a great distance, with no account to their being. She then wondered how she could keep safe here in the market without her mog and her weapon, as she certainly couldn't see any of them wanting to talk to her with the animal in tow and a weapon stowed. It was just then, as she decided to take the risk imbedded in a choice to act, that she felt just a little helpless for the first time in her twenty-nine years. But thankfully, a

little faith seemed to naturally come along with it, and it felt good. She knew something had begun to grow inside her by that one simple, but difficult, choice to now engage with these people.

ABLE MOVED LIKE A ZOMBIE TOWARDS DOSSD. He looked at him blankly, and Dossd gave him an instruction to turn around. Able then fell down on the sand, laughing loudly.

Dossd was not impressed but allowed himself a smile. It had been two months since they had fled the Market. They had been trying for a while now to reawaken the power Dossd had used during their escape.

“Sorry, Dossd,” said Able, getting up and brushing the sand off. “I don’t know how you got those men in the market to do what you willed.”

“Maybe they had weak minds.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” said Able, as none of Dossd’s efforts had any effect on him at all so far.

“Maybe it was in the heightened immediacy of dire times.”

“Maybe, it was love,” offered Able, before he could take it back, and sure that Dossd had just blushed again.

Dossd tried to hide it, but it only grew, and so he grunted and walked off toward a high dune to climb and think.

Able smiled, and called after him, “Maybe it was because the two of you were there together.”

Dossd turned, realising his own childishness, and returned to Able.

“We must try again. It is too important not to keep trying.”

“Yep, it sure would save our hides if we come across hunters again, and maybe you can use it on animals to find food and water.”

The tall Sandwalker enjoyed having such an active mind around him. Dossd was most definitely all of his age, but he did enjoy the lighter energy and passion of a younger soul around him. It was a little tiring at times, but this young man kept his mood lighter, and many of the ideas that came out of him gave Dossd fresh perspective. He had definitely been blessed by The All when he had seen the white ribbon in the sky, those few, yet very long, years ago.

“Let us try again.”

“What did you do there, that was different?”

“I had two sticks,” said Dossd, wondering why he had even said it.

Able tossed his stick to Dossd and asked what else.

“I was linked with Eedra.”

“Mmmm, that makes it difficult,” mused Able, thinking that a connection would be impossible, and even, if possible, dangerous.

Dossd was feeling a strong confusion between his feelings and this exploration for a few seconds. It was not long before he realised the futility of a re-enactment, and he went to say so, when he suddenly felt her inside. His eyes went wide, as he saw her in the company of Clan folk.

*“I talk with your people, and I come to know you.”*

With that Dossd cut the link, and said, “No more. This ability will have to come naturally, or not at all.”

“But you said it was too important not to keep trying a minute ago?”

“That was a minute ago,” stated Dossd clearly, as he reeled inside from the depth of love he had felt again. He headed off towards a dune, for time alone, and some contemplation.

He did not know how to deal with such strong feelings. He had not been trained for this, let alone no real experience with such things, and it had been too quick and too strong. He was sure of his choice to leave any reunion to fate though...*or was he?*

He then recalled the sure knowledge within him that it *would only* come in its time; that no matter how he felt, each of them needed time to gather more from life before they could or would be together. It was a knowledge Eedra now held too, as she had seen more of Dossd this time, and she smiled, as she looked up to the sky revelling in the surety and the love that now filled her being.

WORD, AS IT TENDS TO, HAD SPREAD. It had been some months now since Eedra had sought a new path, and stories of her had finally reached Enom Clovek. Word would have got to him much more quickly than it did, but there was a good deal of trepidation on the part of anyone who passed it on. To talk negatively about the daughter of this Icer champion may have invited harm from those who supported him, or even worse, from Enom Clovek himself.

In any case, he now knew that his daughter was on a far-off market and seemed to be living there. There were also rumours that she conversed, freely and often, with clan people. Enom could not imagine what had happened to his child and was incensed that she would do such dishonourable things; *if* the rumours were true. He would go with all speed to save her from her obvious predicament and punish any creature that had tainted her mind. He *knew* it could not be by her own choice, as she was *his* daughter.

But then, he felt a reminder of something deep in him; an old fear that had subsided long ago. He shook himself, telling himself he did not truly care for the noble creature that he had loved, and had Eedra with, and with that, he charged out to complete his mission. Truth be known, he was running from love and shame, as well as some deeper questions, and he knew it. It bubbled out of him, and his anger slowly grew again. She had died in childbirth, which had devastated him, but had also set him free, because she had held an ancient belief now shunned by the intellectually evolving Icer society. He could feel a power within her that was not with others, especially as she had told him much about the prophecies of their times and times to come.

All this assailed him; feelings and beliefs that could not sit in the same heart with his Icer ways. Enom was a man of the heart, even though a violent and deliberate man. His own being was now rising up against him, and many ducked away from him, almost cowering, as he barked orders to his men to prepare his ship. He was a man on a mission, no matter his confusion. There was no choice to be made for him, for there was no doubt in him that he would find his daughter and end the Walkers who had attacked her.

# *Wanderers*

Able Jones stood tall on the dune as he thoughtfully looked off beyond it. He was now fifteen years of age, and with all his experience and now dark purple skin he *was* a creature of the desert. He and Dossd had wandered very far since leaving The Market. The star chart they followed had taken them on a very long pathway, and great care taken to stay hidden from the Icers had made for a longer one. It was almost a year since the encounter in the markets, and while Dossd had at times felt the link with Eedra, it had faded away.

“Su trus!” came the call, from Dossd, meaning “We go”, and Able ran down the dune to gather his load and head off again.

When he got to the camp, Dossd was already four hundred metres away. Able grabbed his load on the run, slinging the water skin easily over his now taller frame. He had done it so many times now that it was just like breathing. He had now also learnt to easily walk in the Spirit Place and had discovered many mysteries in meditation. He had also gained

spiritual insight from the creatures, and day to day life, of the desert; as well as daily interaction with the, still much taller, Sandwalker. Able felt strong and alive; appreciating the power of doing each day, and making each action his goal; as *all was The Goal*.

Dossd had begun instructing Able in deeper meditation, as he had thought it valuable after the boy had lost focus at The Market. He needed him to be able to control his mind better. Able had learnt so much and had gathered the ability to *physically* live alone in the desert, but he needed more soul focus, both in his being and in his actions; as life after all, is *being and doing*. Silence of thought was very different to silence, and if he and Dossd were separated, or worse, he had to have the spiritual discipline to see clearly; to watch from higher awareness in any situation. Great inner discipline was required to walk the expanse alone. Spirituality was certainly no escape for a Walker, it was life, and informed all doing. To them, the soul, in awareness, needed to guide the mind and the hands.

Over the almost three years that these two companions had walked the desert together, Dossd had been busy with one focused meaning. That this boy should become a man, and so most of what he did with him had been for that purpose. He was quite proud of this elegant soul that now easily wandered along behind him. He contemplated from his now quieted being the grace that literally swam around this young one. He had not known the like of it, and He prayed in thanks to The All to have been graced with the boy's company, and for the immense meaning he had found in being the child's mentor.

He could not believe what he may have missed if he had wandered alone, and he now revelled in the hope, that once at The Great Chasm, he may be married and be honoured with his own children; to be given this chance again. It was then that he decided, that beyond even this, he would mentor other youth; he would aid them to reach for understanding of The All; to come to themselves, to understand the power of humility and service, and other things that

would empower them and mature them. As he contemplated this for a time, he also realised that in the past he would have only thought to train boys. Now, from his link with Eedra, and his experience of her ability, he had come to the realisation that girls could, and should, also be educated in the ways of the desert and the freedom of the Spirit.

# *Lost*

Eedra could not link with Dossd unless he opened himself to it. He had not done so since that very short window, but he had still seemed to be there, just beyond her door somehow. Over time though, she too had felt his presence there slowly fade, and when his presence had faded out altogether, she had set out to find him. She had felt very lost when the connection to him had finally slipped away, and the Icer itch to get out into the sky of Temelj also drew her to action. At the time, she was beginning to feel a little too couped up in The Market, and it was wonderful when she had cast off again.

She now breathed deep as she recalled setting off that day. She always revelled in the wide orange sky, and the desert's *forever*, both these, enhanced by the view and the breezes of a moving airship.

She had spent some months living in The Market, which was more than enough time to contemplate and learn, and to reset her reality. It was a busy place, but a great place to come to know those of The Clans. She had learned a good deal from them and was a little taken with their ways, even while enduring the judgemental faces of all Icers there; man and woman. Because of her father she was not afraid of them but was still relieved to leave there when she did.

It was a good while now since she had taken to the air again in search of Dossd and the alien boy. It made so much sense to her now that a Sandwalker would not be travelling

with one of his Clan; but that a Walker and an alien should team up was still a little beyond reckoning to her Icer sensibilities. She realised that the two great vermin of Temelj had turned out to be much more than that. She had never met an alien but was now sure that there was real good in them. She laughed as she remembered the young alien signing his own death warrant by hanging on to her mog. There was a magic to that moment; a moment in time that changed her forever, and she was sure, Dossd too.

She had turned off her motor some weeks ago, laying the sails out below the gondola, as the winds had been good. She could feel the promise of *The Passing* coming today, as the strange and strong wind eddies it produced were growing, but she didn't care; she allowed them to take her as the night came in, and as she followed the star chart. Her chart was not complete, but it was all she had to find Dossd. She now looked out into the changing sky with the stars blinking on here and there, as she hoped to find the soul she needed to be with more than life. Eedra could still not get over this deep, strong, and yet gentle feeling inside her. The bond was real, as if it had *always* been.

There was still more than *some* concern in her though about what her father could handle when it came to this taboo. Then she thought she was a fool even contemplating it, as her father would *never* accept it. She knew it may come down to a choice between these two men, and their ways, in the end; but she only knew her own course and that she must follow that. She then cast this concern aside as a problem for another day. She had struggled with so much in The Market that she was quite over her thoughts; she had realised on and off that she could not think it all out anyway. This unknown, had become about living it out, and seeing to it as it came.

A future with a Walker was seemingly impossible in itself, but she had experienced a lot of the impossible lately. She couldn't see Enom ever accepting him and was concerned

that he might have already heard of the goings on in the market. She knew that he would be seeking her out, as he cared so deeply about her. He would think her *lost* in many ways and would be coming to rescue her. When he finally found her, she knew that they would both be tested, and that it may even be him who would be lost and need rescuing. She did not want to hurt her father, but she knew that she could not turn from her course, or she would be forever lost. She now finally let her thoughts drift away into the starry night sky as she sailed on the growing winds of Temelj.

Eedra had been right about Enom seeking her out, but *seeking* was not the word on Enom's mind, as he had pushed his crew on for months, hunting his own daughter. He had missed her at the market by some weeks, but Enom had his own Walker; one he had captured long ago. Instead of killing him, he had decided to use him as a tracker. This Sandwalker had found out much more about the young lady for him, yet, he had also certainly held some things back. Some things would never pass his lips; other things would only be divulged in time, as he knew the great hunter would need time to process such a huge change, especially in one so close to him.

Enom would not admit it, but he had formed a strong working bond with this fellow. The Walker also felt the bond yet did all he could to take Enom off the track of any other Sandwalker. To his regret though, this older Walker, called Lessd, could not hide the alien souls from Enom, as the Icer science could detect the energies that came long before the portals opened, and even from a great distance.

It was their practice to reach the place of impact before the portals opened if they could. But sometimes, this could not be done, so Enom would use Lessd to track them. He had saved a few, but even so, he knew that the desert would end them more painfully, so he did not feel bad for the ones that he could not save. Walkers were creatures of Faith, so he

also saw the demise of the body as not of great account. The soul was eternal, not just their physical being, to these telepaths. The Icer hunters on the other hand, were very intent on this life, and all its consequences here in the material realm.

Sandwalkers were very selfless creatures too, and Lessd had never thought of himself from the time he had left his clan. He had walked for thirty years before he was captured, and in the service of Enom Clovek for almost ten years now. He could have easily escaped again, but saw the opportunity to aid his brothers, and all of The Clans, by staying. He would save more Walkers this way, and therefore more clans had greater hope of reaching the Great Chasm.

Enom too had his own cards hidden. He was no fool and knew that this creature had deceived him at times, but he saw that as brave and honourable, and would not hear the accusations some of his men made against this Walker from time to time. There was something else about this creature; a feeling that surrounded him, which reminded Enom of the woman that he had loved and had a child with. These two men had their reasons and their ways. They lived as they did, and even though they were enemies, they somehow trusted each other.

In any case, now in the night, Eedra sailed on, while in the late afternoon Enom raged, and Lessd sat back viewing with greater scope what was to come. The Icers at the Market had been very forthcoming at Enom's arrival; all fearing him and trying to curry favour. Lessd had tracked a few of the clan folk over a week on the ground and had returned with his findings to Enom; well, what was of no real consequence to his Sandwalker brother, and what could be borne by this hunter. The Clan folk had run and scattered quickly from the market, as they knew there would be no mercy from the Hunter Lord if they stayed there. The news of his imminent arrival had come to them on what they called '*The deeper river*'; the Icers of

the Market wondering what had happened to them all so suddenly. That is, until Enom Clovek's colours had appeared on the horizon.

AN ALIEN IN A LONG OFF-WHITE COTTON CLOAK, with a hood covering its head, sat on a high dune. It seemed to be wearing a white shirt and long black pants below the cloak. Its demeanour was one of regathering. This one had survived '*a hunting*', or '*a cleansing*' as the Icers called it and had even brought down the airship that had destroyed its ship and killed all its compatriots.

These aliens had voluntarily entered a portal, not knowing where it would lead, and were trained and ready for anything. This one didn't know if it agreed with that assertion right now but was thankful for the training and the courage of its cohorts; both these had kept this alien alive. All its companions were gone, and so it now dug deep, seeking the way from here. At least now it knew where the spaceships had gone and why they did not return.

The universe is tremendously large, and space farers were often lost without trace, but eventually the growing intensity of lost ships of well-travelled races had called for some examination. The disappearances of spaceships were already being collated and tracked, and in time, a report of a ship disappearing through a sudden opening in space-time by a support ship came, so they finally had a possible answer. Over a very long time a predictive model had been formed and tested, and this alien and its cohorts were sent through one of these suddenly appearing wormholes in another galaxy.

He had been wandering lost for a week now, and while he had gathered good provisions from his ship, the alien was starting to wonder how big this desert was. He had decided on a direction and kept his course true since burying his comrades and leaving the

devastation. He was a strong creature, and in all his life he had never been bested; well, maybe once, when he had a situation with an angel and was not watching his back. Part of him was happy that he had to destroy the enemy that had taken his friends here, as these hunters would not quit; even when it did not matter anymore. He had run across many sad creatures, but these ones, for some reason unknown to him, were about the business of extermination, not victory. He did not like creatures with no honour.

He now breathed in deep, got up, and walked down the dune to continue on. This one always continued on, and while he was lost, he was indeed not lost. He had a mission to fulfil, and he knew that he had to return to the woman he loved and his three children. This man would never be lost; just as a Sandwalker, his purpose held him up, and his love drove him on.

DOSSD HAD LOST THE SKY. The night sky was new to him. It had changed.

“There is something amiss,” he commented.

“Nice words, Dossd,” said Able, quite impressed with the Walker’s still growing use of English.

“The sky has changed here.”

“What do you mean? Stars don’t just change position.”

“This is a *different* sky.”

Able looked up, and seeing that his friend was right, wondered at this strange happening.

“We have entered *another place*,” said Dossd. “We camp here for the night, and we pray hard for guidance. At worst, we can retrace our way back to the sky of Temelj.”

“This makes no sense,” said Able, wondering why Dossd was not as weirded out as *he* was. “Why are you so calm about this?”

“It is soon the time of The Passing. It does strange things, and maybe this is one, or some precursor to it. I have seen only one Passing before, when I was your age, and it is not a time to expect what is normal,” explained Dossd, even though he knew somehow that this happening was something beyond any story that he had heard of that recurring event.

All on the planet learned of The Passing, even though it only happened every nineteen years. Such were the changes, and dangers, that came with it, that all had to be well aware of its nature.

“What is The Passing?”

“It is an awe inspiring, and terrible event, that comes to pass every nineteen years. Our calendars run to its clock, as you would say.”

Able smiled, and said, “I would never have said it so beautifully, Dossd. But I still don’t know what *it is*.”

“Yes. Forgive me. It is so stamped upon our reality that we can’t imagine we would have to explain it to anyone. Sometimes, something is *so* clear to us that we hold the image in our minds and imagine the other person sees it too.”

“For sure, Dossd. But, *what is it?*”

Dossd let out his cry of humour, and then said to a now smiling Able, “Stremiti, another planet in our solar system, passes very close by each nineteen years. It brings with it

many strange things, and from what I have learned from other Sandwalkers it refuels the portals and creates strange crossings in reality. We see it like the *time of youth*; unpredictable, but yet reaching into other realities. Also, after striving and being challenged as we go through it, we reach to the solid ground of maturity. It is The Passing.”

“So, what happens?”

“The winds change and become unpredictable. There are sandstorms, and your ‘lightning’ comes to our planet from Stremeti. There is even rain on the desert. Such is the difference to other times.”

“Rain on the desert is good,” offered Able.

“Yes, and the desert blooms, but it is a short iridescence, and ‘*Great rain only comes with the strongest winds.*’ It is *surely* as the time of youth.”

“I can hardly wait,” said Able, now almost with an aching need for the feeling of rain again. It had been so long since he had felt it, and again, as he had many times since arriving here, realised the great abundance of his home world; that indescribably beautiful, small blue-green planet. He had also come to feel more strongly about the failures of humanity’s stewardship of it since he had become lost here, and if he ever returned, he would add some weight to the effort of its natural health.

The rising new culture on Earth had indeed brought much good to the health of the planet, and the science of reclamation of degraded and desert environments was growing, but there were still much to develop and places where material support and education could change the outcomes of various ecosystems. Much damage had been done, and the living globe was still choking on endless plastics. Many other things, both obvious and hidden, had poisoned the ground to the point that it even threatened food production. Such was the greed

and foolishness of those end times, and such was the ethos and effort needed to change the things that had nearly damned humanity.

In these new times on Earth, even science and intellect were now very clearly beginning to be seen as not enough in themselves. Spiritual wisdom, loving kindness, discernment and scope, long term vision and considered thought, *as well* as science, was required. There was still a good deal apathy and self-interest though, and still much to do as humanity continued to climb the mountain of maturity.

“You may have to wait another nineteen years to experience The Passing, because this is not the sky of Temelj. We have transitioned to another reality,” explained Dossd, now sure from the smell of the air and the sounds of the night here.

Able felt robbed of the chance to experience the simplest, but most wonderful feeling; that of the rain on his face. He looked up to a different night sky, and now feeling the planet beneath him. There was a different hum, and a different motion. They were still in a desert, but they breathed in a different atmosphere and different smells. There were also more sounds, as on Temelj there had really only been the wind. Able had not realised how silent it was all those years, until now. Only the market had been loud and busy, but this desert, and its few sounds, still made the silence of that great desert planet now very obvious.

Able automatically opened his inner vision, closing his eyes the world about him, and allowed an answer to come. He was naturally doing what Dossd had trained him to do; what they always did. If the direction was not clear from any point, one had to reach deeper for guidance.

“That way,” said Able, after a short time, as he pointed southwest. “But we must, at a certain point, head to the North, somehow.”

“Yes, I agree,” said Dossd, very proud of his young charge. “The turning point will become apparent.”

With that, the two walked on. They walked on in the night; in the mystery of this experience, and with a deep faith in life’s perfection.

IT WAS THREE DAYS LATER THAT THE TURNING CAME; three glorious days that Able had been able to enjoy the light blue sky, and the wispy white clouds, of this new place. It was almost like he could breathe again; though, for part of him, it was strange not to see the cloudless orange sky of Temelj. Able had seen no clouds there because the two companions had been travelling as far away as they could from any Icer mountains. When they saw any small sign of moisture in the sky above the horizon they would immediately turn. Able had been curious about Icer places and had craved to see green growth and some real clouds. But it was not to be, for all his time on Temelj.

It was clear to both of them when it came time to turn to the North. Their inner senses were not required, as in their pathway was a great marble rock archway that opened to the north along their south-eastern trajectory. It was enormous, and they had seen it towering above the horizon from a set of great dunes on the second day. It was made of an almost gleaming white marble, with many symbols carved in it. These symbols went only one fifth of the way up the archway, and were on all four sides of its two, thick and a little unfinished, rectangular rock legs. These legs tapered down in thickness, and curved to join at the apex, as they rose; all, the clear white marble.

The two friends were like ants in comparison to its size, and it struck real awe in their hearts; especially up close, and especially now up against the deep dark blue sky of late

evening. It basked in the sun's fading light as the sky began to turn black, and they decided it that it was good to camp here for the night. They had been travelling in the daytime for the last three days as the night sky here with its own stars was of no use to them to guide their steps. They had to feel their direction and use the inner senses in relation to the terrain they encountered as they walked. There were great sand mountains in their path, and open meandering pathways and valleys, which required them to move in a moment-by-moment course; yet hold to a clear direction. Occasional sighting of the great archway on the higher dunes helped fix their course as they neared it more.

As they settled for the night, they began to commune with The All, together. Prayer was a little more often communal now, as Dossd had begun to see its power, and the greater bonds of shared purpose it created between the two cohorts. Its duration depended on the nature of their day. After eating though, they would normally reflect together, share stories; then reflect and pray alone, before drifting off to sleep. Mornings were usually spent alone in communion with The All, but only because that is how it had naturally evolved between them. Just before dawn, they would both walk away into the dunes to talk with the Creator. The revealed prayers and writings of both their Faiths were, to their souls, just as food and water were to their body; they were required, so satiated and strengthened them. The words returned them of the Place of the Spirit, rebalanced their souls, and renewed their poise, so that they could walk in the Spirit; *walk in communion* with The All.

They also sought *guidance*, together and alone, in prayer and from the power source of the Creative Word of their Messengers; they sought within it the Knowledge of the Holy Spirit. This guidance was for inner change and growth, and for outer challenges, or decisions on which pathway or direction to take. Other times, they would simply hear or feel an answer intuitively, just as Able had done when they had entered this new place. Tonight though, they

prayed for acceptance of this sudden and recent pathway, and for trust in what was to come from it.

After this time of prayer, they discussed the realities of food and water sources on this planet; which was not Temelj. They looked to their provisions, and while they decided to walk the path north through the great archway, they would also remember the way back, and backtrack to water and food sources if nothing had become apparent. That is if Temelj was still where they had passed through into this place. Both of them somehow knew that the path for them was the one they now walked, and both knew they may not even turn when the time of low provisions came; such was their surety. “Nonetheless, one should not be a fool,” Dossd had said, putting some balance in their reflection.

In any case, they would *walk*, and they would *do*, and they would *learn*, as it always was in life.

As they finished their reflection and planning, Dossd declared that now was a good time to tell the Fourth Great Story. It just seemed right before this great archway, and before they stepped away into more of the unknown.

*“The Chasm was a hard place, and those in the company of Nov-Cikel, Edossd had much work to do. While it was a place of banishment, it became home, and from the shadows of this place came Water, both real and of the spirit. Many of the Clans sought Him out there, and returned home reinvigorated, to share the beauty of His Words with the others of their clan who would listen. Those who did this though, somehow forgot the way back to The Chasm, as The Prize of reaching this Place was to be earned by those who would seek The Message in the future times. Over time it had fallen to the Sandwalkers to take the perilous journey of discovery.*

*Nov-Cikel wrote to the Great Clan Councils, and to the Rulers of the Icer world, telling them to turn to His message and save much time and struggle, while exhorting them to look to the care of their people, not to their own position, or fortune. All but one gave a courteous and respectful answer, and even this one, while measured, failed to reach the humility it would take to grant a less furious pathway to the future for Her people. Nonetheless, Her line was blessed; even though the people of Temelj would have to walk the harder and more torturous path to unity.*

*Bit by bit, day by day, the light of The Message would have to become more apparent in the increasing darkness of the ignorance, greed, pride, and violence of this world. Like a youth, this Light continued walking its path to maturity; and as some youth seek Guidance and walk within the Light, others do choose to learn by the experienced failure of the harder and darker pathways. The latter, it seemed, was to be the main pathway for the full body, the one creature, of all the peoples of Temelj.”*

In this new place, this other place, this strange place, Suwna and Eedra had joined Dossd and Able. They found themselves in The Spirit, and all four were aware of each other as the Great Story was told. As they listened respectfully to the story, they watched each other, and felt each other’s hearts. Suwna almost drowned in tears as her son looked to her, and with real acceptance of where he found himself, showed her the depth of his love and thanks. Eedra watched in awe from her dreams, as she regarded those in that place. Dossd was amazed at such a meeting and felt the varied bonds of love that tied all four together. The time was short, yet much was shared, as the story ended all too quickly.

Jeremy was woken by Suwna again, and she cried and talked of those who had listened to The Great Story. She did not stop crying as she told him about their son who was

now so grown and strong, and as she told him of the feeling of trust and completeness that existed in that telling of the Great Story; a surety like she had never felt.

“Mum was here! She was here!”

“Yes, and Eedra too. I am glad to have gathered her, and your mother. I see now where you get so much of your courage from. You are blessed to have had such a true heart to guide you. I saw her deeply and have thankfully seen that Eedra has come a way along her pathway to where we need meet. I hope we can return in time to Temelj, and I hope we will find her.”

“She will find us, I think. I shared our path with her,” said Able.

“You did! When?!”

“Just now.”

“You have done well.”

“Well, you were a bit taken away by your emotions, so *someone* had to be awake.”

A cry of laughter burst from the lungs of the Sandwalker at this boy, and he realised that his Time *was now*. The boy had become a man; so quick is such a change. There would be many more lessons of course, but *the change*, his Time, had surely come.

“Tell me a story,” said Dossd. “Tell me a story of change in awareness; a story of when one steps from one state to another and sees a different life.”

This request challenged Able, just as most of Dossd’s requests did. But as Dossd felt Able’s inner struggle, he added that it was an *easy* task, as *all* stories, and definitely one’s worth telling, are stories of reaching new perspectives. The lad did not even realise that the call for silence after a Great Story had been put gently aside tonight.

Able smiled at his tall friend's instruction, and even though he wanted to relish the contact with his mother, and talk of it with Dossd, he focused, and went to task. It was a test, as Dossd too wanted to see into their experience during the Great Story and revel in its magic, but now, he wanted to see if the boy would detach. He would not be a man if he didn't, and this was the strongest opportunity he had had. If he could detach now, he could surely detach any time he needed to.

Able held back his emotion and cleared his spirit. It was not easy, but he knew there would be time. He knew what Dossd was doing, and he wanted to test himself too. Dossd was not his master, he had just offered a gift that Able could take or leave. He took it, and in the peace of detachment he gathered the story of a girl he had heard of at school. One of his teachers had shared the girl's story with his class. Able composed himself, knowing that they would talk late into the night about the amazing contact that they had just experienced, and he began to tell his story.

He was not the child he once was and now easily told his stories with gentle honour and meaning. His language had also been influenced by Dossd; his general language, the Clan's way of words and storytelling, and the understanding of the importance of story.

*"Her name was Halley, and it was some seven years after her school days when cancer had struck, and so much so, that there was no hope for her. She did not want to die; she now even wanted to grow old and wrinkly. She had only just begun her life, and now, it was to end. She craved life so deeply, especially now that it was to be taken from her, and it hurt deeply.*

*She had much to reflect on as she saw herself drifting away; her body slowly but surely becoming less and less. She saw clearly the insignificance of the endless little whinges of daily life which all of us perpetrate. When your life is going, so much changes. It puts*

*clearly in place what is truly significant, and what is of little, or no, account. Family was significant, time with them was significant, reflection on life was significant, the struggles of her friends and others were significant; not some little thing that went wrong, or some person who had crossed her path and failed somehow in kindness or care. These little things were of no account. They were as nothing to her now.*

*So much in life was to be enjoyed, and so many problems were little ones. Real loss and suffering were not really known to most in her country, and she now saw clearly that the glorious blue sky, breathing the fresh cool air, and taking in all the wondrous beauty of nature, was a better use of her time; rather than thinking about petty problems, or judging another soul. She now loved, or more so, appreciated the simple things of life, like walking on the frost all rugged up in warm clothes, among other things. She had so little time left, so she would wake early and get out into the day.*

*Driving her car had strangely become like a metaphor of life for her; people constantly interacting on the roadways, working to get where they needed to, working together, being selfish, making mistakes, having accidents. She had realised after her diagnosis that she was different in herself as she drove. Once, she would be angry at people's mistakes and selfishness, but now, she would not. She saw them as others whom she had to help get safely to their destination, as life was so important. She had realised a natural patience; so strange at this time, when her life was so much shorter.*

*She saw clearly too, that if she followed the road rules, people were clearer on her intent, as sometimes, when she had tried to be over-helpful it had just confused the other driver, and once, nearly caused an accident. She saw the roadways were just like society, a shared structure that required rules; rules to help things roll more smoothly, provide for the*

*many varied purposes of the people within them, and to keep people well. She came to know, that more than just sometimes, rules were a freedom.*

*One thing though, was clear to her above all else. It was that in the experience of driving we may see ourselves very clearly, and our attitudes to life and others. Even when she was eventually unable to drive, she would watch the attitudes and reactions of people who kindly drove her around, and saw just how much, and how often, we sweated the small stuff.*

*These insights, and others, were the gifts she gave out to others mostly in her short remaining days; well, other than the great gift of them seeing someone who was so young and vital leave the planet so gracefully. She would often say gently how fortunate they were and help them be aware of what was actually important, and what was not. Also, that they had their whole life to go out on life's roadways and create good things, but mostly, that their bonds with those who loved them, were their greatest treasure.*

*The glass on her own mortality, created by her impending death, had magnified what was important and what indeed was not. She wandered in the spiritual, knowing clearly of her true reality, before she left. She cried for those she loved, and for leaving them, mostly, and she left this world long before her body did."*

"Crisis and victory certainly lie deeply within this story, Able Jones," commented Dossd, as he came out of reflection.

Able had told Dossd of cars, and explained the nature of traffic, on his home world a few times in their travels, so had not needed to explain it within the story. The construction of story always depended on people's experience, perspective, and knowledge, unless it was a Great Story. Great Stories were not to be changed.

Doss'd comment on the story was to be the only one, as they were both bursting to talk about their shared experience during the telling of that night's Great Story, and what a wonder it was to all who had been there. Providentially, Able's story had added a flavour to his own reflection of this strange event that would not have been there without it.

For Able, the connection, and feeling the love between him and his mother was a gift he could not have imagined. He knew, or at least hoped strongly, that the connection would come with each Great Story, as Suwna had been there for all the Great Stories and made that clear when they met there. But the most important thing to Able was that his mother now knew he was alive, purposed, and living well. No matter if they never saw each other again, this was the most important thing to both of them.

“OUR SON IS MAGNIFICENT!” exclaimed Suwna.

“Tell me more,” begged her husband, with a broadening smile coming to his face.

“He is on a planet called Temelj, and he is so grown and purposed. He wanted us to know *that* mostly it seemed. That young woman was there too, but she wasn't somehow. In any case, it seems that these three are all friends, and engaged in something of great meaning. At least, all of them were like rising suns, beaming with newness and adventure, and rising to a shared purpose. They're all linked; *we* are all linked, through The Great Stories, it seems. So much passed between us...The Storyteller, oh, what a creature, *my goodness*...His depth and strength are like none I've ever encountered, and I've encountered *my share* of beings. He actually thanked me for the gift of our son; that Able honours him every day with new purpose.”

“*Wow, that’s really something,*” expressed Jeremy, with his eyes changing and welling up.

“*It is real, Jeremy. Now, I know it.*”

“Then, that’s all that matters,” stated Jeremy, glad for the joy his wife now felt.

She had been lost for some time after Able’s disappearance, and before The First Great Story. She had been despondent during the one long gap between stories after that, but Jeremy Jones was now again seeing the young lady he had fallen in love with, as she continued to talk excitedly about her experience. He had accepted more easily the reality of his son’s disappearance. Not that it had not torn his heart in two for a long time, but as a Protector he had been forced to learn a good deal of *acceptance*. Being a Protector was dangerous and selfless work; work which he did for many years in the *deeper realities*. It was tough work, but he had loved it, and he now remembered back to when he had to leave it; when he decided to be with Suwna, here on Earth of the Outer Realities.

He had had to give up his job and his world, as he and Suwna were shut out of the deeper realities by their decision to live on Earth with Grandpa Jack. Jeremy did have some regrets about not talking Suwna into staying in the deeper universe when their son went missing. But right now, he had no regrets at all as he listened to the woman he loved happily talking about their son. It seemed that his son was being graced by his new reality, and some joy and thanks rose from his heart for that too. It was a little bittersweet though, as he had not had the chance to see his boy through these special years, and he knew that this woman he loved had so much to give their boy as well. It was as with all parents, there or absent; the wish to give all they can to their children, maybe even, after they are grown.

THEY WALKED INTO AN INVISIBLE WALL. It seemed like thick rubber, so had a little give in it, but there was definitely no pushing their way through. They had set off to go through the great archway to the north and had both hit it at the same time, as they were side by side. It was then that a muffled voice came through from the other side.

“*Wait, wait.* I will be back with your question.”

“What question?” asked Able, loudly, calling through the wall.

“No patience, *as usual.* It is *my* task to ask *the question*, or you will not pass. So, stand back, take hold of your ‘*self*’, and *await the question!*”

With that there was a lot of what seemed to be shuffling of papers and moving of books; opening and closing of books and draws, along with sighs of frustration as the creature sought *the question*. Able smiled, but Dossd stood in respect before the invisible wall and did not react at all. He somehow knew it was to be respected above the obvious humour, waiting in humility for what was to come.

Able was a bit uncomfortable with his own reaction, but Dossd made clear telepathically that the boy’s response was *his* to make; partly due to the joy in those his age, and partly due to a misunderstanding of what threshold he was standing on.

“What threshold?” asked Able, out loud, before he realised he had asked another question.

“Patience,” said Dossd, plainly, trying to quell the boy’s confusion.

“Yes, *patience...and I ask the question!*” came from behind the threshold, followed by a ‘*phew*’...to express that the boy ‘*just does not get it*’.

With that there was more shuffling, and books hitting the floor. “Nobody told me you were coming. Definitely not from *here*, that’s for sure. Who do you think you are anyway?” The question was really a statement, or was it, as footsteps and more books hitting the floor ensued.

Able looked across to Dossd and gave him the ‘Is that the question?’ look.

Dossd then let out a howl of happiness, as he knew the boy was lost in reactivity to the situation, rather than being within himself. He made this clear to Able and the lad then settled into his higher consciousness.

As if on cue, and in answer to Able’s silent query, the voice from behind the closed portal answered, “There are many questions, at many times, and there are many thresholds, but this one is a great threshold and should not be taken lightly.”

The two friends then settled and awaited the question. It was after some minutes of carrying on, and movement behind the threshold, that the question came.

“Okay, this is the question. Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“For what?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said you were ready. What are you ready for?”

“You asked if I was ready for the question.”

“Oh, so I did. Mmmm, are you ready?”

“Yes.”

“What for?”

“Maybe I’m not ready,” said Able, surrendering, and again returning to the *place of observing*. The man behind the wall had distracted his focus, and by his carrying on had easily pulled out the chair of inner poise that Able thought he was sitting on twice now. But now Able was truly safely in the spirit, curious, not reactive, and the man behind the portal sensed it.

“Mmmm, very good. I will ask the question.”

Things then went very silent behind the invisible gateway, and for a long time. Behind the portal an old woman and an old man were in fits of silent laughter. The man was down on the floor on his back, and the woman rolled around on a wheeled chair like she was blind and trying to find her way. They just had so much fun when these young ones came to the threshold. They were so wet behind the ears, and easy prey. These two did not do this for their own amusement though, as *every* small interaction was one more measurement of, and one more opportunity for, the soul that stood before the closed portal.

Then came a clearing of the throat, and again more silence followed that. It felt like an eternity to Able for the first five minutes, a challenge for the following five, and then, thankfully after that, the peace of powerlessness dawned on his soul’s awareness, as he finally and more fully surrendered to the silence and its test.

These older creatures were good at their game and always saw to make it clear to the person who stood at the threshold of maturity that they still had much work to do. Humility was the path to learning, and all are continually tested. Able had been prepared by the ones behind the threshold to hear the following words...

“Before I ask the question, I must say, that there will *always* be more to learn, there will *always* be more challenge, and *all* must continue to grow. You have been found wanting.”

This hit Able right in the face, and he was beginning to think that this creature, while right, was still playing silly games for its own amusement. With that thought came these words...

“When the mind becomes arrogant, even in true confidence and trust of its own spiritual advancement, it is a sign that the lower nature is still driving it.”

Able stood there beginning to realise that his ego sought to pass beyond the threshold, not his heart. He thought himself so grown and prepared, and just as in the market, he had failed. He simply stood there now, a little shattered at his own lack and his ill-conceived expectations of his advancement and readiness. He was humbled, and he awaited the lesson, which came in these words...

“Growth is an eternal quest. Any virtue, especially humility, cannot be feigned, as it must simply reside in one’s actions. The quest for maturity is life-long and never won. The truly spiritual attributes cannot be held within your mind, or be put on show, for as soon as they are, it is surely, and only, ego. Spirit flows; it is The Unfathomable’s. We are simply channels, and such must be our humility.”

Able stood there beaten, but thankful. He could see that he had not reached an end, but rather, another beginning, and it was then that the question came...

“What is your question?”

It was now clear that the whole process was to bring Able to humility, and into the spirit, so he may answer *the question* well. Humility always asks a question, and Able, now

sitting in deep humility, waited for the answer. He did not seek to use his mind, to ask the ‘right’ question; he simply awaited it. Then an answer came, as *a question* came to his attention; an answer, a question. His mind was unsure of it, as our minds often are, but he trusted it, and asked, “Why, with such knowledge and science, do the Icers not use reason?”

A sigh came from all three; the two behind the portal *and* Dossd. The sighs were ones of great pleasure, and the old woman began to cry. The old man welled up, and Dossd stood taller, humbled by the surprise that can come from the young ones. Able did not notice. He just hoped it was a good question, or answer.

The old woman composed herself and began to speak gently, “Reason is not knowledge. Reason is subjective and relative, as is logic. Reason is not knowledge. Through investigation and reason, we most certainly can ascertain what is true, yet only *with* knowledge, real effort, and least bias. Reason by itself, without these other things, is not knowledge. It is something else.

The Icers ‘*knowledge*’, which indeed it is not, is different to yours, so their reason and logic are different. They do not investigate and make no effort. They stand proudly on their attained knowledge only. Reason may only shine light on knowledge that is found within the will to investigate something fully, and in an attitude, a posture, of learning. Reason needs to be motivated by the search for truth, and for the sake of love.

Reason is relatively valuable, solely depending on the level of true understanding, or the depths of the foundations of real knowledge, within a soul. Learning creatures can never be said to have absolute knowledge, only relative knowledge, and therefore relative reason. Freewill creatures are learning creatures and require a Source of Knowledge from age to age, to be given solid foundations, and therefore, renew reason. Knowledge is first. Knowledge leads to knowledge. Reason is a beautiful plant that needs to grow from a rich foundation,

otherwise it is like a breeze wandering in the desert; while cooling, it is most certainly no foundation.

In all systems, chaos and breakdown seek to ensue over time, and communities, and whole worlds, drift into the darkness of lesser knowledge. The great choking vines of the types of '*reason*' that rise and grow in this dark place can even see true science cast aside for various ideologies, and also see science become void of the human heart. As these vines grow, they become more and more destructive, choking the life out of what is left and denying these the Sun. These drive *true* reason further and further into the darkness, as true knowledge of all kinds is forgotten, and generation by generation the night deepens.

Reason is a joyous force; a great investigator for the pure of heart, and a gentle creature. But it can turn into a ravenous and destructive beast from lesser, flawed, or narrow '*knowledge*'. When knowledge becomes only of the narrow material reality, or is left in the hands of children, and fear and ego rise too high, then true reason is lost; even though it is believed to be found, and even believed '*self-evident*' by the blind who wield it. Too many accept the thoughts of others instead of investigating for themselves and using *their own* reason to seek the truth.

The Icers generally live in fear, and only in the material world; a single animal life. They have forgotten The Power. They, like all, will again be Reminded, and inevitably evolve. Their science is grand, and worthy, but their rejection of the truths of the spirit makes them ravenous wolves with their own particular '*reason*'.

Take care with *reason*. Seek real Knowledge, the wisdom of love, the power of justice, the *full* truth of a matter, and life in the Spirit. Don't let your lower nature choose what will advance your ego, or your own self-gain. Your *reason* may then shine, and please

remember that even then all will depend on your striving and humility. Challenges await you. Pass through.”

The doorway then opened to even *another* place, and the two travellers passed through.

ENOM HAD NOW GROWN MORE THAN TIRED OF THIS CHASE, as now another month, on many others, had passed. He had no idea where his daughter had gone no matter the amount of information he had gathered as he went. It had been a very long chase, and with so much time on his hands he had become quite lost in some of the talk and stories that he had heard about his daughter at The Market. It was fortunate for those who spoke of her that he was an honourable man. He had wanted to burn that foul place, and let it, and all in it, fall to ash in the desert below. Such was his anger at what this place, and these people, had allowed his daughter to do. He knew she was not harmed, but she had consorted with the clan folk. To him, that was like letting her walk among the diseased.

He looked out at Lessd just then, seeing a noble creature. This was not what he wanted to see at all right now, and it just made him more confused, more frustrated, and more incensed. Humility was almost unknown to him; such was his strength and competence. He had always driven on through anything when all others had given up or lain down. He only wanted to save his daughter; a daughter who might not even want to be saved from the talk that finally reached his ears about her and a Sandwalker.

It was then, that another voice, very quiet before this moment, stopped simply standing just beyond his door. It began knocking loudly, calling out, and seeking access. This was not just the voices of past love and old prophesies. It was *his* voice, and he reeled

internally at its conviction. He reeled at its antithesis to all that he believed he stood for. A greater struggle then grew inside him, and the intensity of his will against his own will increased his confusion to the point where he saw his animal instinctual being get him up and send him striding into the communications room.

It was strange watching himself do this; like he was on automatic pilot. He had never had such an experience before. He did not even know if he believed in his own anger right now, but his being had acted, because for a deliberate and bounden man to find himself in a place of such doubt, and with such deep questions, was far too much. He had to act. "*What had to act?*" He screamed inside, and in greater confusion still, his intense, lost, and staring eyes looked at the signaller. He leant over the communications desk with his hand on it for a few seconds; seconds that seemed like an eternity for him, *and* the signaller. The crewman's breath was shallow, as he was more than a little afraid right now. The whole crew had been more and more on tender hooks as the chase had worn on, and as the strong man they drew strength from had become more and more threatening to them.

Then, Enom changed; something in that moment came to him with razor clarity, and he decided. A feeling of freedom came to his chest, but a darkness came over his eyes as he released himself from his sudden, and seemingly unwinnable, internal fight. He said to the signaller to call *all* his ships to the search, and any other Captain who would honour him to join him at the Southern Wharf of the Great Mejne Gore; a great mountain range in the far north. He would form a net with these other ships to cover more ground as he searched. He had not done so before this, because he was out there seeking his daughter, and honour had dictated that it was not the Icer community's responsibility. But it had now become clear to him that the *very order of things* could fall, so he would put out the call.

The Icers of the northern mountains were not to his taste, as they were of a persuasion who sought to show mercy to the aliens and the Walkers. It was easy for them to think this way, as they did not rely on the clan folk to grow their food, and the portals did not threaten them up here. They had machines to farm, and even then, many of them had deigned to lower themselves to work the ground with their hands. He would not like gathering there, as he had little time for the weak, but a gathering of the airships of the other Great Kingdoms would also be an elegant show of the support still held by the Western Lords within, what they called, The Majority Order.

To him, The Majority Order had to stand. But Enom's own daughter had fallen, and even his own resolve in the Majority Order had now been threatened in his own inner struggle, his own voice, and questions on the true nature of things. If he and his daughter could fall, *all* could fall, and the Icer world would be brought to chaos. He could not allow it, as again the wisdom of Eedra's mother's words, the prophesies of The Power, and his own doubts, assailed him. He saw now, all too clearly, the playing field. His father had even warned him of this very danger as a young man. In all this, he saw something that he could not stand to see, and if he had to cut out his own eyes, he would refuse to see it again.

# *The Passing*

Dossd woke from a dream and sat up feeling a little lost. He looked over to Able, now realising that he was sitting under an orange sky again. It settled him, but then, he wondered how they had gotten back here. He remembered a small walled city which had appeared as they walked through the library beyond the portal. He remembered two older souls escorting them part of the way to it, and then turning back to continue their work.

The two companions had entered through a western gate when they reached it. The gateway was large, and open wide for any to enter. The white walls that surrounded this small city sat on the edges of an island in a wide dry riverbed that flowed from north to south; two smaller streams parting from a single flow before reaching the city, and re-joining again, once past its walls. It was towered over on its eastern side by a huge mountain range of drab desert rock that tapered down to the south, a good distance downstream. The city seemed very small in its surrounds as they had walked towards it, and even though the river was dry now, Able wondered how this city could stand up against any flood that may engulf it.

This place had many white walled and golden domed buildings within its walls, and as it turned out, it was a centre of learning; a place of humility, discovery, and inspiration. The two companions had wandered together, and separately, there, gathering learning of all

kinds from each of the places within this place. The streets were not too busy, but inside the buildings with the golden domes there were beings of every kind; learning together, sharing knowledge, and seeking answers together. There seemed to be no teachers, no one greater sharing their knowledge, except as a service in a few instances, so it was easy for Dossd and Able to take part wherever they found themselves. They were able to put themselves into the exploration of a science, the creation of an art piece, or be a part of a discussion seeking understanding of a certain truth.

It was a truly wondrous place, thought Dossd, as he came back out of his thoughts. His mind was not clear on all of it though, and Able had not yet woken. He struggled for any memory of leaving that great place, but there were none. He then sat up to centre himself, just as Able woke up with a start. He jumped up and looked around as if something had been hunting him in his dreams. He looked over at Dossd with a blank and questioning look on his face, and Dossd simply shrugged, offering no answers.

Able relaxed, although not at all easily, and sat next to Dossd. They both sought their centre in The All as they meditated, and then opened their eyes to the sands and sky of Temelj. Able realised that he was different somehow, and communicated it to Dossd, as they both stood up. Dossd eyes went wide with wonder, and a small smile, that would not quite bloom, appeared on his face. Able looked at him and asked why the funny look.

“You are taller,” he simply answered.

The young man was six inches taller and had growth on his face. The strange thing was that it was shaven. Dossd explained what he saw to Able, and the boy stood up straight showing that he had also grown in width across the shoulders.

“You have grown!” said Dossd, now with that resistant smile blooming.

“How could it be? We weren’t there that long,” commented Able, feeling stronger and more assured than he once was.

Dossd then remembered that when he last saw Able, the boy was talking to a young woman in the street. At the time, a dancing being had sought Dossd out, wishing to learn about where he had come from and the nature of his culture. Dossd remembered dancing with the creature as he told the stories of his people, almost telling them through the dance. Dance seemed to be part of the language, or the way of passing on meaning, for these creatures. It was a magical experience. But he had no memory of Able after that; actually, no memory at all. Able was then still his younger self, but Dossd certainly felt no older. It was clear to him that this was a mystery, but sure that the boy must have experienced more time than him.

Able looked at Dossd, and Dossd looked at Able, and they both shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders at the same time.

“Such wonders!” pronounced Dossd.

“Such wonders,” said Able plainly; both feeling the greater inner maturity in the nature of his saying it.

IT WAS NOW MANY DAYS BACK WANDERING THE DESERTS OF TEMELJ. Able and Dossd simply walked, occasionally talking as they regathered all of their experiences from that wondrous place. It was now that Able recalled something, and he laughed, remembering the old lady and her joyous sense of humour.

She had congratulated Able on his entry very formally, and then as they walked towards the Appearing City, she had danced along beside them talking about how much joy there was in her work and how she loved it. The young man had very much enjoyed her light

energy as they walked and talked. The man had conversed with all seriousness with Dossd on some subject, but Able was busy with the lady.

They talked about a number of subjects, as Able sought any wisdom he could from one of the old souls who had graced him with the challenges at the threshold. They talked about life, connection and purpose; mainly within the theme of love and family. Able had gathered many gems, when the discussion came around to the subject of community and the current nature of society on Temelj. It leant on a discussion of the importance of unity being first, then of effort, and that all and each soul had to put this effort into the whole they belonged to, with no reasonable exceptions. Able understood the nature of unity and its requirement, and the beauty of effort, but, one thing that hit him, and the thing he now contemplated, was an idea that she had shared in their meanderings on that subject...

“Voluntary social cooperation is a good marker of a group’s evolution, and a very high form of justice for peoples of any community; small or large,” she had explained.

Able had seen such ideals growing and becoming real in the new culture on Earth. It had not reached everywhere, or fully soaked into the social fabric yet, but it was growing. There was no will, or need, where justice now truly resided for any type of rampant greed or any ideological social control. There were still those who endeavoured, who had great talent, created or built great things, but they shared the profit with those who endeavoured with them. They also shared back in a tiered tax system, and voluntarily in various philanthropic efforts. People knew that they were working on their own future *together*, and they felt real connection with those around them. They felt empowered, and a strong sense of belonging, as they all participated, and strove together towards the future.

The world had changed greatly, especially as Artificial Intelligence (AI) had grown. So much change had come, so much advancement in technology, and so many challenges

with it, but eventually, more people remembered their souls. The coming of the angel had certainly played its part, but the Message of The Persian “I Am” had formed a foundation that all could grow on. Humanity generally had entered a new evolutionary phase from His Wisdom, and the advancement of the spirit was growing to match the material and scientific advancement of the centuries before it. They used the power of what had come in science more and more in a way that did not harm or destroy, and which actually protected and nurtured the peoples of the world. His Writings had provided understanding of how to wield science with wisdom and justice. Able’s Earth had a way to go yet, for certain, but it was in an inevitable process forward, and he saw that clearly, in contrast with the current reality on Temelj.

He now reflected back in wonder of what was happening on that beautiful blue marble. But he was now of Temelj, and had to be concerned with *its* reality, *its* struggles, and *this time* in its evolution. To work on the exigencies of every age, in every place, on every planet, was the responsibility of its peoples; *all people*. With this thought, he felt something; something he could not recall, but felt very deeply. *Somehow* the future of Temelj, and his part in it, meant so much more right now; even to the very depths of him.

Dosd then broke into Able’s thoughts as he commented on a wispy fog high up in the orange sky. It was something that Able had never seen here.

“We will have to find some fire-stone. I have been too intent on reaching The Great Chasm, and there have been too many distractions. I have not served us well. We must find some fire-stone, and a good deal of it, as a deep cold will come with The Passing.”

“How do we find it?”

Dossd showed Able a picture in his mind of Able digging in the hot sun, while Dossd sat in the shade of an overhanging rock.

“You are quite funny, *for one of Temelj*,” commented Able, with feigned indignance toward the Walker.

“I am quite serious, *Earth-man*,” replied Dossd, in a very strange way.

He was still working on the humour of Earth and was yet a child at it. But Able smiled, making it clear that it was not bad ‘*for a Sandwalker*’. Even though it was *really bad*. Dossd gathered the truth from Able’s thoughts, and called out his cry of humour, as he began to explain that there were certain rock formations where the warming rock could be found, and that they had a little time yet to find some.

The fire-stone needed to be hit to activate it, so they had to be gentle unearthing it. Dossd explained that not much of this rock was required, as it gave forth long lasting heat, and that if they wrapped up it, keeping stones kept separate, that it would not ignite. “Much like a soul kept too safe and warm cannot ignite and give forth its heat,” finished the Sandwalker.

ENOM HAD ALSO BEEN TOO INTENT ON DISTRACTIONS, as The Passing had come upon him too. He would now have to seek ground and shelter for a time in the Great Mejne Gore. He would have to be much more cordial to these weak fools, and stay longer, than he would have liked, and was not happy that his gathered Armada would look far less threatening wrapped up on the ground. He would also be less threatening having to cower in the halls of the Northerners. Another problem was that the great winds of the Passing would delay the gathering of the many airships that had now pledged to join him. Nonetheless, they

would come before or after The Passing, and that they *did* gather was of most importance. Life had decided the timing, and he had to accept it.

He had found much peace and solace in the week after the height of his mind's fever, and all on board had been relieved, seeing the old Enom; strong, sure, and on task. While Lessd too had felt less in danger from the Icer Hunter Lord, he was sure that Enom's cure for a fever of the mind that was so deep was not without consequences, and he knew that once Enom found his daughter that this fever would most probably, quite violently, rise again. What would be the outcome then? He did not know. But he was ready for it, while all about him foolish ignorance of Enom's true state encouraged the work of the crew. It was like they just forgot those many months and were happy to be back in the 'safety' of the leader they knew.

Lessd was not fully aware of the reverence that these men had for Enom. They would follow him whatever he decided to do, even if it was against their own will. He had gathered his crew over many years, and had rewarded only one thing; obedience to orders. They were, one and all, united behind the single mind of the strongest creature they had known. Fools do such things, yet the power in a unified crew was indeed to be feared and sometimes celebrated. There were other Hunter Lords, who had many ships like he did, but Enom was most definitely king among them. His crews were like a personal guard, and everyone knew that too.

Unity is a wonderful thing, but can be used for ill-purpose, for power, and has been used so in the annals of the history of endless planets; endless galaxies. What a group, or a people, unite behind is of great importance to the future. Weak, yet seemingly strong; shallow, but seemingly deep; leaders, had taken many peoples unaware into endless wars and strife; into the darkest of places. To Enom there were no Messengers from the Creator; to

him, *all* was Icer society and The Majority Order. Truly, the somewhat democratic process of The Majority Order was, by its voting system, a fair system, but it usually required the wrestle between only two main ideologies on the nature of life. These competing ideologies swapped power in various places and fought for ascendancy through childish carrying on; their members seemingly oblivious to the good within the other's way, let alone to other endless possibilities that merely two ideologies, or more singularly focused views, could not hope to see; much less gather, beyond the incessant fighting.

Enom now stood upon the deck, sure and clear, as they kept their heading northwards. Eedra on the other hand was down on the sand, a little perturbed, and not going anywhere. She had found tracks, some time back now, and she and her small, but feisty, green friend had decided to follow the trail. She knew she was not tracking a Sandwalker. She knew she was tracking an alien. The gait and depth of the tracks made her wary. This one was big; one whose stride was less than Dossd's, but far heavier.

The Sandwalkers lived on little and were never large, though very tall. They walked the sand gracefully and easily, while this one did not. It struggled on the sand a little, but it seemed to be fit, as its gait had not changed over a very long distance now. She would have to be cautious, because if it survived a cleansing, it would most likely want to kill anyone or anything in a balloon. Then she realised that she was thinking of the alien as an 'it'. It didn't seem right to her, now that she had met an alien and had come to know some of the Clan folk.

She looked at the tracks and thought that the alien, although maybe not an *it*, was certainly a fool; as it had not covered its tracks at all. The tiny hairs then rose on the back of her neck as she thought that maybe it did not seek to hide for a reason; that it may want to be found, and that it was not afraid. "You should be afraid," she said out loud, as if calling out a

warning to it. “You are on a planet full of Hunters. If you knew that, my *it*, my friend, you would bury yourself under the sand and cower until you died.”

*Even that* was not her new friend’s biggest problem right now. The Passing was almost upon them, and she knew from the forecasts that it would be strongly affecting this area of the planet, as the rotation would bring it strongly here this time. The Icers had ways and means to save themselves much of the pain of The Passing that The Clans did not. The Clans mainly sheltered in any caves, or other more open but sheltered places where the great ranges met the sand. The Icers had never allowed those of The Clans shelter with them; even the Icers of the north, as the fear of insurrection was too great.

Eedra had to forget this creature for now and leave it to its fate. She had to bunker down somewhere, and so, tugged the rope to be hauled up. She had to check her charts and find a safe port for herself, but mostly, for her airship. She had good ropes and large insulation sheets to wrap her vessel, but she had to find the right place to somewhat disassemble her ship and anchor it down.

IT HAD BEEN A WEEK NOW, AND NO FIRE-STONE. Dossd had known it to be everywhere throughout the desert, thinking that a few days was all they would require to find enough for their needs. He could feel the cold coming, though the planet, Stremeti, was not yet to be seen in the sky where they now wandered. It was only his second Passing, but he knew there was bitter cold when Stremeti blotted out the sun for the three days of passing. He remembered mostly the fury that rose before it and the great loss that followed it.

He had learned much of the nature of this time from other Walkers who had crossed his path, especially the old ones. The older Sandwalkers, although unsuccessful in finding

The Great Chasm, were held in higher esteem, as their knowledge was a great gift to any younger one. Their knowledge was always given selflessly...“As it should be,” Dossd had said. Walking was a singular, yet much shared endeavour for all those who believed in Nov-Cikel, Edossd.

This was not the first time that Dossd had struggled with a lack of knowledge, or unfavourable conditions. He always made it very clear to Able that his great purpose, and more truly the *meaning* within it, made any struggle or fleeting joy as nothing of great consequence. To Walk was not to seek ease or run from challenges; it was to fulfil a meaningful purpose. Meaning was life and joy to him. He simply continued walking now, not saying anything to Able. He was calm as he kept good eye on the ground, and nearby for the right rock or formations.

He did not bother Able with any concerns or inner questions; he fought these storms alone, as he had always done. He had had no choice before the boy had issued forth from the ribbon of light and did not seek to burden the young man with any of his current concern or confusion. Dossd simply walked on.

“Look!” called Able suddenly, and with some urgency in his voice.

He had been keeping a wider view, as Dossd had been more focused on looking for signs of the presence of fire-stone. It was their practice that when one of them needed to be focused on something close, particular, or some inner work, the other would widen his view, scan the horizon, and generally be more circumspect.

“It comes quickly! *Run!*” called Dossd.

A huge and powerful dry desert whirlwind had formed from the changing pressures in the atmosphere, and formed very suddenly, probably a mile away. There were dark clouds

beginning to form above it, like they were being produced by it. They grew black and ominous above the huge whirlwind extremely quickly.

“It just formed and touched down,” called Able, as the sky now even darkened over the top of them. Then came the wind.

“This is the *rain* you have wished for *Earthman*.”

Able smiled, as he knew Dossd was using his rudimentary humour to encourage him.

“This is not what I had in mind,” replied Able, as a gust suddenly blew them both off their feet and ended any more humour.

The gust lifted and rolled them both, on a totally different tangent from their intended course. The winds came before the vortex; the strong winds coming in gusts; falling away in intensity at times, before another great punch would come. In each lull the two would seek to come together, hoping that their combined weight would help, but they were never able to as the gusts only grew in power and turbulence. So swift was the vortex that it was now almost upon them, and Dossd knew that they were lost, as there was no digging into the sand with these winds. Winds like these would soon uncover you, or bury you so deep, that there would only be death awaiting you.

The higher winds from the extremity of the vortex then hit them; the swirl of the sand taking away all vision. Dossd reached for the lad but could not find him. He walked with the wind trying to find Able for some minutes, before deciding to lay low on the ground and into the wind. As he started to crouch, he gave instruction through his thoughts for Able to do the same. Just then, a strong arm reached out and grabbed Dossd high up on his arm. Then, a Walker’s stick was offered for an even greater purchase for his other arm. Dossd grabbed on and was slung by both, and the wind, into a low cave mouth. He was not sure about such a

place's long-term safety, or who his saviour was, but in this situation any port was now good. His mind then reeled as he thought of his young friend, while trusting that Able's best hope may just lie in his *own* best hope right now. The whistle of the wind sounded like a low screech that came and went in this small wide cavern, and Dossd looked up from the floor that he had been slung to, to the creature that had saved him.

“By *The All!*” called Dossd, out loud.

“The All *graces* you today,” came the reply.

“The All graced you when you were born, Earthman,” said Dossd, as he and Able smiled widely at their deliverance from the terrible tempest; that, and the running joke, which was maybe getting a *little* more humorous.

“That change *came quick*,” offered Able.

“I did not know you had become that strong.”

“I didn't know either, but I had to try and grab you.”

The two sat down up against a rock wall, and as they caught their breath, they looked to the entryway. It was not a totally natural structure, and its square, wood-braced opening was becoming bigger with the storm. It seemed that the winds had uncovered its entryway. The sand being blown away from the mouth of the cave settled Dossd's concern for the safety of this place, as if the winds were different, it could just as well have become a crypt.

Dossd now just stared. It was the largest amount of wood he had seen in his life, and said, “This is an old structure. This is from a time far gone.”

“It could be an Icer building? They have wood,” offered Able.

“Not wood that thick, and if they did, it would not be so rough-hewn. It would be treasured and carved. Even *they* know the value of wood. I have only seen one such piece of wood; single, and shorter than these. It is buried in the sand near my home village. We keep it from the Icers, and Clan folk from other places visit at special times to view it, and to touch it. It holds many of the old symbols; ones that spoke of the past and ones that engendered strong hope of the future.”

With that, Dossd stood up, and walked away from the natural cave wall to the building’s doorway.

“They are here! The symbols are here too!” he called out in cheer, as he rubbed away the accumulation of dust on the round, rough-hewn, logs.

Able could not remember Dossd being this animated before, and as he got up to look at the markings he tripped on some rocks on the sandy floor of this cave-building. Dossd looked back to smile at the young man and pass a comment about the failure of all his new-found strength, but his eyes did not smile like his mouth did; they took on the look of deep gratitude, as Able had just fallen over enough fire-stone to see them easily through The Passing.

“You are blessed by The All, like *no other*, Able Jones.”

Able smiled as he picked himself up. He thought that Dossd had finally got a grip on the nature of Earth humour; now playing with him about his clumsiness and his change of luck. But as he realised what the rocks were from a new picture that Dossd had now placed in his mind, he gathered the true meaning of Dossd’s words. Able had always been told how graced he was, or lucky he was, since he was small. He just saw his life as any other’s life,

and he stood there humbly, going ‘Oh well’ with shrug of his shoulders, and an ‘Isn’t that great’ with a look at the fire-stone and a smile.

Dossd smiled wide at this tender soul, still a little in awe of the providence that surrounded the young Earthling, then, lent his attention back to the symbols on the wood. As he did so, he gave thanks to The All for the crisis that brought them here, and the victory of being in this place at this time. He knew that it was not only a safe haven; much would be learned here, as he sought to translate the meaning of the symbols that had been carved into wood so long ago. This was *so* precious to him; even more than water, and it showed in the reverence of his movement and demeanour.

ENOM WATCHED HIS WELL-TRAINED CREW GO ABOUT THEIR WORK. He had now spent time with the other captains whose ships had beaten the winds to get here, and they had dined on his ship over the week since his arrival. So far, he had totally shunned any contact with the Northerners. There would be time enough for that, and he did not want it to look at all like he feared them, or The Passing.

He had anchored on desert floor, just beyond the Southern Wharf, but the other Lords and Captains had tied up on the great stone projection reaching out from the mountain. It was a natural wonder, and it had allowed the Northerners to trade easily with all Icers. It was a hub, which over time, had created the main flight paths of trade on the planet. Enom and the Western Lords were envious of the power it gave them, but *never* would they admit it.

Truth be known, it was fear of the Northerner’s wealth and technology that had help keep the hunts alive; because in this, the Western Hunter Lords were kings. They gained technology from the ships, and influence in the Icer world far beyond their small mountain

kingdoms. The Majority Order also kept them safe from the power of the Northerners. So, to a Western Lord, this institution *most certainly* was to be upheld at all costs.

There were ten other hunter ships that had made it to Southern Wharf. There would be no other ships until after The Passing. For now, they had to prepare to deflate the balloons, tie down and sheet up on the ground tight into the base of the range. Under the great stone wharf was a perfect place to shelter; well, as perfect as it could be in the chaos of a Passing. All options presented risks; the main danger of sheeting up ships on the desert floor anywhere, was that the great winds might bury them so deep that they would not be recoverable. Even great wide green Clan fields had been lost to the sand at such times.

Enom's ship and two other larger ones were now being prepared a little differently to the others. They would be disassembled and strapped down to natural rock formations in a higher rock valley, yet still near the sand. It was a risk being so high with the winds that would come, but Enom was not going to waste any time having to dig his ship out after The Passing. They thought that being bigger ships, and having just enough shelter, they should see the winds off; that, and good Icer ropes tying them down *of course*.

DOSSD SAT DOWN IN FRONT OF THE GREAT WOODEN BEAMS. He had finished reading the symbols and now knew exactly where the Great Chasm was. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he telepathically gave the news to Able. The young man saw clearly in the Sandwalker's face that now was a time of contemplation and prayer for this brave creature, so he just sat and waited for Dossd to finish.

It took some time, as Dossd had been out in the desert for nearly twenty-five years now. This was his life, and even though he had sought The Chasm, he could see that what he

had come to love was coming to an end. He was elated that he could now guide his clan Home, but he would also grieve for his life in the desert. He realised in that reflection, that he had always been blessed, just as his young companion had been. Knowing too that he would gain union with other great Walkers, and other great Clans, buoyed him further, as he began to accept the change coming to his life. He never thought he would feel this way, or mourn at all, the hardship of his search.

When he finally rose to stack and activate some of the fire-stone he had already made the inner transition; he never dallied at any threshold, be it of growth, challenge, or change. He was now full of joy for his clan, accepting the fulfilling feeling of his achievement, and excited that he may finally be able to study the texts of Nov-Cikel, Himself. He knew there would be plenty of water, and work in building a new society there. He liked that idea, and he now shared these thoughts with Able.

“Yes. It will be good my friend,” said Able, strangely feeling a little older as he said it, and while respectful of Dossd, knowing he was now becoming more an equal. There was also a strange feeling as he then imagined what the Great Chasm might look like. He could see it clearly in his mind, in all its detail, like he had seen it before. This was certainly strange, as it felt so real, but other than being a gift from The All, it had to be his imagination.

“We shall have to tell the Fifth Great Story tonight, in honour of Nov-Cikel and reaching this place.”

“That would be *great*, Dossd!” agreed Able, excitedly, as he felt the expectation of being able to communicate with his mother again.

Dossd too smiled inside, as he hoped it may also reopen the link with Eedra. He had been waiting to tell the Fifth Great Story, but no matter the contact that he and his young

companion received on the last telling, he needed to tell these stories when it was right that they be told. The telling of a Great Story was never about self-need. It was about its time, and he had always made sure that Able mastered the earlier stories perfectly before he would tell the next.

The boy had been very patient, even though he knew that there was a chance he would be in contact with home with the next Story. Dossd had seen him grow, and he had faced many challenges in his time with him. The boy had seen hardship here, and Dossd was glad of it. Hardship was the only way to some spiritual places and waiting for this story would have been one of them. Yet not a whimper had he heard from this now much grown pup on his own behalf; on this, and many other things.

“It is time to sit by the fire-stones. It is the time of The Passing. It is your *Time*. You should feel honoured, that both these, and finding guidance to The Chasm, should converge. Again, providence follows you, and tonight you will pass into manhood; to adulthood.”

As he had talked, Dossd had activated the stones, by rubbing them hard on each other and smacking them together. It seemed *they too* needed a good amount of hardship to light up and produce their gifts.

“Is there a test, or a ceremony?” asked Able.

“You have passed all tests in the path you have walked since coming here on the ribbon of light. We are desert people and have no need for ceremony anymore. Such times passed with the coming of Nov-Cikel.”

“So, what do we do?”

Dossd smiled a little, and said, “We sit, and we talk.”

“Okay,” said Able, a little nonplussed.

“You have *walked* to adulthood in the deserts of Temelj, *most surely*. You have *already* earned your *Time*. You *have* been tested. *This* Passing is *not* one moment; it is *all* the *effort* towards this time that makes it so, or not so, for some do not reach it. But know that it is in *continued walking* that you will also continue to grow. It is in all life’s changes, surprises, struggles, hardships, joys, celebrations, and nurture, that The All will *continue* to create you.

The Great Stories, and the Word of Nov-Cikel, will bring you to your spirit, and remind you of what you really are, and what is good. *But* it is in how you *walk* your life, and in knowing that you are the *only one* who can walk your life. In this you will gain the fruits of this existence. You have earned your *Time*. My belief is that you will earn much more, as your life is just beginning, young soul.”

The Walker then added another fire-stone to the pile, and it lit from the others without need of rubbing or bashing.

“Once your light is strong, it will easily light strength in others. We are here to bring through light. It is not about our form, or our life, even in the spiritual. It is about what flows through us; creatively, generously, lovingly, and in nurture of, and kindness to, other souls. We need light other souls by first finding The All, then we may find our true selves; then we may shine our light and give forth our heat.”

Dossd then made some shadows on the wall with his hands. It seemed there was a hunter and something akin to a Mog, but bigger.

“It is in this first life, this shadow existence, that we must first stalk our lower nature; the animal that seeks to eat us. We must track it, watch it from the ascendancy and eyes of the

soul, and be ever watchful, as it will seek even to use your mind against you. Whenever you feel pain, it has you, and you must by the great powers of the soul available to you, quickly release yourself from its grip.

But yet, you must also tame this lower creature, and care for it, so it may serve you well and allow you the gifts of The All in the material world. But you must never serve *it*, that is, it must *never* be master. *Remember*, whenever you are in pain, it has you. Turn quickly and return to the world of light; run quickly from this shadow world and this shadow creature. Regain the higher ground and be circumspect. The darkness never lies beyond us; it always lies within us. We must always seek to be the wary hunter who looks on and sees the animal, and its tricks of the mind.”

Dossd then made a circle with a finger held up in the air, and reiterated, “When we find The All, we find our true selves. We must find Him first, and so then, aid others.” He then pointed to the wooden doorway, and continued, “In the symbols of this great wood, it talks of other Messengers before Nov-Cikel. They prophesied His coming, and where the Chasm would be. We need seek Guidance from Those Who Bridge Us to The All, while being careful that the animal within us does not seek its pride in its own imaginings over the wisdom that which comes to us through Them. The mind can be its playground, and it can see itself as great, as the power of the mind is great, even if it is limited, and prone to error. We must hear deeply and often the Words of His Messenger, then, we may truly come closer to His likeness. There is no other way, no matter what the mind may seek to tell you or the animal whisper into your heart.”

Dossd had raised his hands to The All as he kept speaking, and now pulled his hands down, and drew a circle on his heart.

“With Him alone in your heart, you are free, and all will be available to you. Freedom will be yours. All love may flow from you. All power will be given to you. Until, that is, you notice the first whisper or small whimper from the animal that stalks you. It sneaks up on you, and it often feigns injury to bring you close. It seeks the power of your spirit, but it cannot wield it, for once it takes hold on your heart The Power will be gone. The spirit and the animal cannot exist within one heart.”

The two friends sat there in the warm glow of the fire-stone, and the spirit, contemplating the meaning of this Time, and what Dossd had shared; while outside the wind had reached far more than ferocious speeds. The rains came thundering down; so hard that its drum was heard through the rock roof of the cave. Great lightning bolts now grew in between the two planets, as Stremeti began to come close enough. Hundreds of thousands of kilometres long, they flung themselves, one planet to the other, then fading out to be followed by more. The Passing had surely begun in this area of the planet, and Able now reaffirmed his belief in his Messenger as he would have at this age at home. The power of that act quite overwhelmed him. It was far more to him than he had thought it would be.

ENOM CLOVEK’S RAGE TORE OUT OF HIM LIKE A TOURTURED LION. He stood up, smashing his fist on the strong wooden table and leaving without excusing himself from the company he ate with. Hedden Spron smiled inside at the sport of it. Especially as he saw some horror taking form on the various faces of the Northerners, as Enom now strode out of the great-room. They were not used to such behaviour; at least, not from adults. The other hunters there tonight followed him out; all except Hedden. This Western Hunter Lord was much older than Enom and had grown old enough not to be toyed with by anyone’s words or opinions.

“My apologies, Lord Spron. I did not mean to tax Lord Clovek to such a response,” said a young Northern Lord, who was sitting in the seat of honour.

Spron laughed, and said, “It is not your words that ail our friend. It is the frustration of many months of search for his daughter, and the winds that shake our world.”

“We are safe here from The Passing’s winds here, I assure you.”

“No, young Lord Buden, I talk of the winds of change that are stirring in our world. Deliberate men like Enom are seeing the changes coming but seek to ignore them for the sake of clear conviction. Change is bubbling under the surface of our planetary order, as it surely must.”

“My goodness, I never thought I would ever hear such an admission from a Hunter Lord.”

“You are lucky that you have heard it tonight, as I hold firmly to The Majority Order until that change comes,” stated Lord Spron. “*Be most assured of that,*” he added, in a clear tone of warning. “We must hold to it until the chaos rises too high; then we may let go to change. That day is very far off yet, for most; but for many, the time of change will be sooner, as all change is process and relative to many things.”

“My *dear* Hedden Spron,” said the mother of the Northern Lord. “It seems some wisdom has finally graced your small mind.”

The company of all kinds held their breath, as suddenly Hedden Spron stood up. He then belted out a laugh so loud that it massaged all the stress out of that room. “My Lady, you are *too* gracious; for *never* has a Northerner spoken so *well* of me!”

The room then allowed itself some rolling mirth, as the old woman realised deep in her heart and soul that her world was finally changing. They were moving on, and she sobbed deeply and openly, much to the surprise of all present; all except her son, and Hedden Spron. The old Hunter knew that the change would be far greater, and quite different to what even these two Noble's imagined. This world *was* changing, but he knew that it would not be remade in the Northerners, maybe kind, but also somewhat lost, image. He had come to know of a far deeper force, and the power of transformation it bore.

*“NOV-CIKEL, EDOSSD'S PEN NEVER RESTED in the years that followed in The Great Chasm. It was far enough away from the Icer Mountains and The Clan lands, that it did not seem to concern the powers that sought to silence Him. They could not find the Place wherein He wrote in any case. Even those in The Great Chasm who worked on building a new order could not know the Place wherein He wrote,”* said Dossd, as he narrated the Fifth Great Story, and after a pause for the best effect, continued, *“So many tablets and instructions were drawn from the Deepest Well, and brought into this world. Some of the tablets then left that place, and went out into the world, to move the hearts and inform the minds of the people of Temelj before He passed from this world.*

*So great is the volume of His work, and each phrase so full of meaning, that the Well of His Writings is far too deep for any person to see but a little way below the water; yet anyone could drink and be sustained by it, all their life long. The relativity of the mere mortals, caught in their varied ignorance and within the relativity of time, meant that no one can truly fully comprehend His Revelation's full meaning, or fully gather His vision; yet may still seek Guidance and true understanding from it. It will take many hundreds of years of*

*history unfolding, and much activity of souls who labour in its work, to understand it more fully. Even then, much will remain a joyous mystery; as such is the nature of Revelation.*

*He set in place the blueprint for the future of the Beautiful Way and that of the new world; the complete transformation of society which would arise in time. By his appearance, and that of Vrata-na, Orajī before Him, this world was changed. The deeper order of life had been reset to suit only that which mirrored the Will of The All for this day. The portals of knowledge and science too had been opened wide, deep within the nature of things. The grace of The Word will permeate our planet in time, and the great levels being attained in science, will also be attained in spirit. In that place, in that inner place of balance and poise, and within the outer place of chaos, the maturation and unity of this world will come to be.*

*Nov-Cikel, Edossd, has given forth His Message, and now passed from this world. He even promised that in time there would be Another, as all continued to move forward in Creation; in the endless worlds of The All. He made it clear that change is inevitable, relative, and progressive, with a new Impulse being sent by The All from time to time; just as it had always been. There was never any change in the ways of The All.”*

Whether it was The Passing that disallowed another meeting with Suwna and Eedra when the Great Story was told, or whether it was providence that had allowed it to happen even once, sadly for the two friends, this time, it was not to be. There was a great measure of disappointment in both companions. Able simply stood up and walked over to a corner where he had laid his bed cloth, and Dossd stayed seated, staring into the fire-stones. The stones were not much smaller than before, and Dossd was happy that they were of good quality; that they would surely last the passing, despite other disappointments. “*The All challenges us,*” he thought out to Able, “*and The All also provides nurture while He does.*”

Some water had also entered the cave, and Dossd had pooled it by digging a depression. It seemed to be back-soak through the now high sand in the mouth of the cave, so they were hopeful it would not flood them. He looked at the pool, and then over to Able to check his demeanour. He was glad he did, as the young man looked quite disturbed.

“Where is your sight?” asked Dossd, in his language, as he looked down into the fire-stones to allow Able some emotional and spiritual privacy.

“My sight is on my heart,” said Able plainly.

“Where does your sight reside?”

“In my soul,” answered Able, like a student being reminded of something.

“*Yes, so do not be unhappy. Time is existent only here. It will pass, and you will again meet your family beyond it. The soul has eternity, and so do you, with them; eternity. Bonds of love are never truly lost and are never broken.*”

“Thank you, Dossd. That helps a little.”

“Life has much to teach us; especially when we are in pain. When I am lost or in pain, I ask, ‘What are you saying to me?’ It is asking me to have faith right now; faith that I will see Eedra again.”

“Ask what life is saying to you?”

“What is it saying to you, and what is your being saying to you? But take care what part of your being is asking the question, and what part is answering it. It is good to allow pain and emotion show us things, as they are innocent and simply talk, but we need to see with the eyes of The All when we ask these questions, and we need remember how short *this life* is. In such times of hardship, I allow my experience, and I listen, but I seek to regain the

vantage point of spirit and be guided in what I need do; both, from my inner feeling, and through The Words of The Messenger.”

“My mind is saying let go. My heart is saying hold on to them. My soul is saying I will see them soon enough, but life is saying to have faith,” said Able.

“Life is *always* saying to have faith, in *all* things, in *all* moments, to *all* people, on *all* days,” stated Dossd, with the surety of one who has known it.

“Yep, there is a freedom there, and in detachment,” nodded Able, sitting on his bedroll with eyes intently forward, like he was staring into something too. “But I feel as I do for now.”

“Honour your love, but as I have said before, do not tarry. You will always be asked to be more. There will ever be trouble and hardship to take you forward. There will also be mistakes, failures, and pain to teach you, grow you, and force you back to your higher self.”

“Life is *definitely* a process,” offered Able, now looking back over the years he had spent here, and the years of learning before he came to this far galaxy.

“Yes, *all* in this life is a process. This simple wisdom *alone* may starve the demons of impatience in us and allow us to walk more slowly on the ground. It happily discovers what lies beyond the next dune, rather than scream and rant, or seek to have done now what will only be done in time. All is through walking; not words. We need accept our frailty and the gifts it affords us.”

“And to do something badly is better than not doing it at all. My Grandpa used to say, that life is not about comfort. It’s about the challenge to make the *unknown* known, and the *unloved* loved.”

“One would need to ponder quite a while on that. There is much there. Maybe it will take my thoughts from the more painful places for a time.”

Dossd then returned his focus inward, as he continued staring at the glowing stones.

“I hope *sleep* will stay me away, Dossd,” expressed Able, in the poetic language of The Clans. “It is as losing them more again. Even within the wisdom of life’s nature my soul will labour to put to rest my heart.”

“Small steps to great goals; that is also the way of it,” offered Dossd, in kindness, as both settled again to reflect and sleep.

# *The Stranger*

Eedra sat there in her gondola. It was now wrapped in the insulated protective sheets, and all she felt was danger; danger outside, in the great winds and lightning, as well as inside her cocoon, in the challenge of this alien who now sat across from her. Her mog was very heavily tied up and looked quite forlorn as it now looked to Eedra, and to the stranger, and back again.

Before the onset of The Passing Eedra had found a rocky outcrop that she had known before and was glad to find that it had not been swallowed by the sands. In fact, it had been unearthed more since her last visit to this part of the desert. She was a natural pilot and had a sense of direction that rivalled the best of the Icers. She seemed to have an inner sense; one she grew more confident in as she grew older, and she had ventured further and further into the great deserts.

She had decided to bring up most of the sails below her craft, and was glad of it, because The Passing was making it hard to use them. She had not pulled them up when the stronger winds came because she wanted to use these winds to get her quickly to this great rocky outcrop. She looked at the great long ramp of rock that jutted out of the sand. It was about a kilometre long, and its high front looked like a wave. The years of sand and wind had

made it so. She had been very glad to see that it was providentially positioned for protection against the current prevailing winds of the rising tempest. The greater winds of The Passing never turned; they swirled, but only moved in one direction.

The wavelike front of the huge sandstone rock almost created a tube at one point, like that of a wave curling to meet itself. As she was nearing it, from above, she had calculated that it was definitely long enough to house her craft. But as she had then looked more intently at it, she saw him; the stranger. The alien was about a kilometre from the rock face. He was lying motionless on his side with his arm slung over his face. She had then positioned herself over it and sounded the great horn on her ship. The creature did not flinch.

She was very wary of the creature below, but needed to know that she would be safe in the protection of the wave-rock. She did not want any unwelcome surprises when her airship was wrapped up on the ground there. Even though the alien now seemed either dead, or unconscious, it had lasted a very long time in the desert for an alien. You were either a Walker or a Pilot out here; none other could survive, and even many of those who had the skills had fallen to the fierceness and mercilessness of the desert. It was then that she decided to lower the mog.

As the dangling mog was lowered closer to the ground, the more its hair began to stand on end, making it look more like a fluffy green ball. It had then growled more deeply as it hung just above the head of the creature. The mog then seemed confused, and it relaxed and looked up at Eedra. It could sense no life there, and just as the dangling green ball and Eedra relaxed, a creature drove out from under the sand, cutting the rope that held the mog, and tugging on it to start the winch.

Eedra ran to cut the power to the motor that worked the winch, but just as she reached it, so did the stranger. He had a weapon, and he just said "*Nah'ah!*"

She knew what that meant but drove at him anyway. Her father had taught her never to allow anyone physical ascendancy over her, and to strike quickly when poised. She hit the winch control as she dove at him, and both went over the side and hurtled towards the ground. She took an Icer hold on the rope, and quickly stopped the winch with a certain tug on the rope, hoping her assailant would fall to meet the sand below; *and* her mog. As she did, she saw the stranger manage to copy her hold, just in time. She then quickly swung back away above him, and using the sudden stop for momentum, she swung forward smashing her feet into his midriff. The being was not cast from the rope though, and unfortunately for Eedra he only used the impetus of the strike to swing up higher on the rope and renew his hold. He was above her now and pointing the weapon down.

The look on the alien's face said 'surrender', but she again tugged on the rope to lower her and her adversary to the sand, and to her now, *very* angry, green friend. The stranger tried to work the winch again, to take it back up, but Eedra's command had locked in this action. Strangely then, the alien smiled. He looked like her father had looked at her sometimes. It was a look that said, 'Good on you, you surprise me well'. A little transfixed by his expression, she let the rope bear them to the sand and the mog jumped for the weaponed hand.

The stranger deflected the mog away with a deft move, broke Eedra's hold on the rope with his feet, and tugged the rope to again take him up to the airship. He had an inkling that once they hit the ground that the winch would reset. He smiled all the way up, as he looked down with a 'You don't beat the old man, *that easy*' look, which made Eedra more than angry.

"Enjoy your time aboard my ship! You will not last a day! The Passing comes. You are *already* dead!"

The alien then talked to her. “Takes *a lot* to beat me, darlin’. Don’t beat yourself up.”

“Come down here and say that.”

The alien laughed loud and hearty, as he sat on the rail, enjoying the fight in this young woman. He liked spirit in the young.

But Eedra’s spirit was still to be heard. “You won’t last one day without me, *old man!*”

“Ooo, that hurts *so bad*. Do you talk like that to your little girlfriends?”

Eedra found herself dancing around on the sand and venting all her anger upwards; that is, until she wore out, and sat down on the sand, punching it a number of times for good measure.

“When you settle, we can talk. Got nothing against you people, even though God knows I should. Your lot killed my good friends when we crashed through.”

“I don’t care about *your good friends*,” said Eedra, looking down at the sand.

“I think you *do*. I can *see* it in you, girl.”

“How do you know my language?” she charged, looking up, and cooling *just a little*.

“I come from Deeper. All these outer realities have the same foundation. There is only truly one language.”

Eedra looked down again, at *those particular words*, trying to hide the expression on her face. Her biological mother was a poetess, and her father had hidden much about her from Eedra, but the girl had been determined to know more about the woman that she knew her father had loved so deeply. She had found a friend of her mother’s, after some time and

effort, and come to know her birthmother well through this lady. Her mother had left many poems; many that Eedra did not understand, or even her mother's friend for that matter. One phrase, 'There is truly only one language' had been a regular line in her works.

The young lady linked deeply with those words, and as she did, an inkling of Dossd passed by her inner senses. It buoyed her, and she strangely now thought that providence may have sent this alien her way. She *had* wished to save this creature's life when she had tracked it those weeks ago, and as she settled, she realised that he had only protected himself. He could well have injured her, or even taken her life, with his obvious skill.

Eedra was on very new ground, as even though she had come upon an alien before today, it didn't mean she now knew them or would be at ease around them. She realised that, just as with the Clan folk at The Market, this was the beginning of a new process. Enom had taught her that all things in life were a process, and over the years, had constantly reiterated it. It had helped her greatly to keep up her effort in anything she learned or sought to master; knowing that it was only time and action that stood between her and success or understanding.

She now sat across from the alien and had just shared a little more on the nature of The Passing with him. He then said that it was probably what created all the space-time portals on this planet. He commented that gravity and space were fickle friends, and that when they fought, *time* would get dragged into it. The scientist in her, and the inquiring mind of youth, had sought some understanding of what he had meant by that. The answers were as challenging as this whole situation was. No matter how comfortable she grew with this creature, she was still uncomfortable. Such is the nature of change, and the changing view of reality that it brings.

They had brought the ship down into the embrace of the wave rock. The airship's bladders were deflated, and all placed on the insulation sheets with the gondola set on top. The insulation sheets were slung over it all, and then tied down with good rope. A small fly, for air, entry, and exit, was positioned under the cover where it would face the rock wall. Even though this creature had helped her, she was still in fear of him. She could sense good intentions in him, and knew she was being too proud, but she could not help it.

"Sure glad we're in here," said the alien.

"You're glad *you* are in here; *I am not.*"

"After *all* my hard work; and *still* no appreciation of the old man, eh?"

"What is your name?"

"My name's of no account. I'm here to do a job, not make friends. That's especially so, now that I don't have backup. Tell me, why did your people attack us? I mean, it wasn't fear, or even greed, there was *no* quarter. They were a *death squad.*"

"Oh! it's not like that," said Eedra, almost by natural response, but now not so much believing in her own words. She would not have seen herself doing anything but kill this creature, until recently.

"*Oh!* it *is* like that darlin'," put forward the alien, with a serious look on his face.

"Yes, so it would seem," she answered, demurely. "I was a hunter too, for a short time. I simply saw it as right, and even my duty, that aliens and disease would never be allowed to ravage my world. Hunters see themselves as protectors."

"*Protectors!* I'm a Protector. I keep order over a jurisdiction that takes in endless worlds. I can tell you that *kill squads* are *kill squads*, and *fundamentalists* are

fundamentalists, no matter their ideology. *Protectors*,” finished the man, with an expiration of air that meant the same thing in any language; disgust.

“I am sorry we killed your friends,” said Eedra, the words sticking in her throat due to her own guilt. “I can *see* all this now, but I couldn’t see it before. I just couldn’t.”

“No young lady. There would have been a time, and maybe many times where you questioned your people’s ways in this; maybe even as a child, or a youth. You decided not to see what was right, somewhere along the line. You gave your mind a sentence that freed it from its discomfort; a patch to mend your soul. But it didn’t mend your soul, it only covered it up, so you wouldn’t see. I grew up in hell, and I stood up anyway. I knew what was right, and I fought for it. *I’m a Protector.*”

Eedra was now wishing she was out in The Passing. Not sitting in here with this man’s torturous words and her conscience.

DOSSD FELT EEDRA, AND THOSE WORDS ABOUT ONE LANGUAGE. He saw her mother again and The Power she was devoted too, as he had done before. He also felt the presence of a man with her, and that she felt threatened. Hers was a fleeting experience, but his was much more. He even gathered exact bearings on her this time.

“It seems the link with Eedra is returning. I think she is in trouble, but it was the Old Religion of the Icers that powered our link. Her mother fits in there somewhere too, but I cannot tell. There is so much I do not understand.”

“Isn’t all religion *one*, anyway?”

Dossd suddenly fell backwards from his sitting position, as he was struck by a flash of inner sight that seemed, by its intensity, to have physically hit him. It was a light that seemed finally released from where it had been held. It charged out filling the Walker with many visions. The symbols he had learned as a young man, and the symbols on the wood, were just part of a far greater language that now made itself fully known to him. It was a telepathic language; a language that did not have to be learned; one that simply was.

There was a circle of light too, and in it he could feel The Power. He suddenly knew very clearly that there was no separation in the purity of The Power; that his belief, the Old Faith, and Able's Faith were all one. He then saw that Eedra's mother was in fact a follower of Nov-Cikel, Edosd, and that the Messengers were one. Life was all one.

"Of course, it is," he said out loud, before the buffeting rendered him unconscious.

*Dossd now found himself walking with the Old One of his Clan. He could smell the fresh green shoots of early growth before he saw them. The fields were green; a glorious glowing green.*

*"Much will happen soon. You have been given sight of all that has come in the past, for the benefit of what is to be in the future, on our planet. Much has been hidden for a long time. Spoilt children have come to own our hearts and minds because we have forgotten the stories of what has come before. History, for a people, is like the memory of a single person. It allows for learning and grants it the ability to grow stronger and wiser. To learn from our past is essential for our individual souls, and more so, for our collective soul.*

*There must come a time when enough historical understanding, on any planet, allows it to reach into adulthood. Experience is to be valued, and well used. There comes a time to no longer be a child, but an adult who learns from its mistakes, and finally breaks out of the many 'Cycles of same error' marked by childhood and youth.*

*You are given this as a grace, and it must be shared openly and widely. It has been given you to share.”*

*“I thought that I would help guide youth when I reached The Chasm, and help build the Beautiful Way there,” explained Dossd.*

*“What better place to use such knowledge, and share such understanding? The young renew and reinvigorate society. How will they learn the value of what they are doing if they do not understand what came before?”*

*“I see. How will I remember it all? It hit me too quickly to recall most of it. It has helped me understand, but to share it...I cannot even know the many stories that passed my soul’s eyes.”*

*“Focus will access any part you may require. Just focus on what you experienced, as it is a key, a doorway, and you will draw down our history through it. But understand that this drawing down is not of Revelation, it is a gift for your efforts and for all the Sandwalkers who came before you, and all the guides of the Clans, who kept The Law true, who came before them.”*

Telepaths had been responsible to hold the Old Law true among the Clans, before the coming of Nov-Cikel. His coming had brought on a change in their role in the Clans who now bowed to His new Message.

*The Old one then went on to talk of things that Dossd was taught before leaving his clan as a young adult. “Clarity is in where we focus, where we aim our vision, where we aim our thoughts, where we aim our attention, where we aim our minds, where we aim our soul’s eyes and ears. The clarity of our vision also relies on what we hold in our heart.*

*There is learning through your experience, there are libraries, there is the Guidance of The Holy Word, and there is drawing down by inner sight; use all together. These are powerful together. All are required for wisdom.*

*Take impetus from your love for The All, sit back, contemplate, and reflect in the spirit. Guidance from the Great Ones, your experience, and being detached in the quiet of the soul will bring clarity. If it is not available in these, one must be brave enough to take a step and to act to see, even to be wrong, to be a fool, or thought to be one; all these of no real consequence but the step itself.*

*There will be much to do. But you will persevere, even in going out, and no doubt of it is there. As it hath been said,*

***“No capacity is limited when lead by the Spirit of God!”<sup>2</sup>***

THE SAND PILED UP HIGHER ON THE AIRSHIPS that had been wrapped up, and tied down, on the ground. Even the three airships in the rocky fold higher up were being covered more and more. It was only early in The Passing, and with every least grain of sand that landed on his ship Enom Clovek breathed less. It was like *he himself* was being covered, such was his will to be out there and find his child; but more so to end this pain deep in his being. He would rather be out in the winds, and die under sail, than suffer this inner torture and inaction, or be gaoled here with these heretics of the North.

He had thought himself settled when he had set himself and many other ships to the task of finding his girl; shoring up to the nature of their society, and The Majority Order, as he did so. He was a man of action, and being held by The Passing within walls, especially Northerner walls, frustrated him. Yet deep in his heart he fought the love and knowledge that now stirred him up against himself again. The longer he waited here, the stronger it was getting.

The thing about such a man is that in such times of doubt, their strength can be their undoing. He was never one to falter. This strength and surety had been his whole life and that which he *very* was. No matter what his heart may tell him, no matter what his eyes may see, he would take great pain, and hold to, for what he believed was his duty. The sad thing is that such duty may bring great hurt on others, as these great powers of strength and surety may encourage others away from the natural truth and hold them back from the evolving nature of true understanding. Any honourable trait, focused in the wrong direction, slows the future, clips the wings of growth, and can be very destructive. It stops those who may turn earlier, suffocates others under an oppression that takes air from their lungs, and bars any advancement and potential that may have laid within a new focus.

Such beauty there is in those who stand their ground for what is good though; and they are honoured in history. But there are many who mistakenly or selfishly stand for what is not good, even though the majority may even agree with them at various points in history. These do not stand the test of time though, as they tend to end in the violence created to enforce their view. Those who stand firm on what is truly good and for the good of what can come from change, need not attack anyone. These ones who stand for good know that they need simply stand, live to these things, and that which must come would come. Such souls live in a place of selflessness, as to stand against what society *sees* as good, when they know it is not, is to sacrifice. They stand in the buffeting winds of derision, give their gift to younger ones, and to the future.

The fire now raged in Enom's being, as he thought again of those of The Markets and all the varied darkness that lurked in such places. He certainly stood for decency and basic nobility, which he had seen eroding at a great rate on his world; especially amongst the Northerners. They had fallen to many a vice that they saw as 'okay', which had even held the other Kingdoms, the majority, against their other higher minded and progressive views.

Enom stood for destruction of *all* things that threatened The Majority Order; for the customs and cohesion of Icer kind. He would stand for the defence of his world from the Northerners, the aliens, and the crazy religion of The Sandwalkers.

Enom cried out loud inside, but somehow heard these inner howls reverberate out loud through these Northerner Halls. They seemed imprisoned by these ignoble walls as they echoed through the labyrinth both under and above the surface of his mind. Like a wounded animal, he cried out again and again, as his own thoughts assailed him. These inner screams were not heard or shown to others, as now, more than ever, he needed the confidence of his men and others like him.

But sadly, the outcome of such inner turmoil from a growing awareness in an honourable man can only end in one of two outcomes; that a man will be broken, and in humility begin to walk a new path, or become a tortured soul, half mad, coping, and in constant pain. For what becomes known to such a soul cannot be forgotten. Purity of heart calls for truth, no matter one's convictions, and for one who holds such purity even deep and hidden within themselves, there can be no true rest in ignorance once the light has entered. Ignorance can only survive in the darkness of ignorance, where one is still hidden from it, or the light, the purity, of a soul has been usurped by other loves. Once knowledge has dawned on such a soul as Enom's, it must deal with it.

We are all noble by nature, and we need the light of love and knowledge. We *are* love and knowledge. These are our nature. We cannot deny them, lest we suffer. Even in innocent ignorance of these we suffer.

DOSSD WOKE FROM HIS DREAM. Able looked down at him as the tall creature woke on the floor of the cave, and asked, “Are you well, old friend?”

“I am well, young Able. I am *so* well, that I can *never* be unwell again.”

“Okay,” responded Able, surprised, and more than a little curious. “That sounds good.”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Dossd, as he sat up. “There is so much more I understand now. I have been given some limited insight, but also a deep and complete understanding of our planetary history. I even know this place now.”

“*Wow...How?*” asked Able, smiling gently, with eyes eagerly awaiting the answer.

“I don’t understand, myself, but our history is important, and I must share our planet’s memory, for our kind. It is not something I would have aspired to, yet it seems perfect, as it also seems linked to my experiences with you and Eedra,” explained Dossd, shaking his head in disbelief of his experience, yet knowledge.

Before Able could ask how he and Eedra were linked to this experience, the Walker commented, “How can we know what lies in our future, when all the while, fate seeks to teach us more and surprise us once again?”

“I certainly had *never* dreamed, such a dream, as walking this planet with you. I do *so*, *in heart* relate, Dossd,” said Able, using the older language of The Clans, to make clear his point.

“Ahh, yes. I feel honoured when you use my old language. I am so *buoyed!*”

Able had seen Dossd a little animated here and there, *even* in deep reverence and a little awe at times, and other than his finding the symbols on the wooden beams of this place he had not seen such an emotional display of expressions from him before.

Dossd then turned to Able, and said, “Sit by the stones with me now. Sit with me in this place of my forebears, the place where Nov-Cikel, Edossd, once stayed on His way to the Great Chasm.”

“He stayed *here*?”

“Yes. He came to be here when he was unwell, and the kindness of the settlers here was given him. Strangely, they came here to wait for His coming, but did not see Him when he stood before them. Like many before them, they saw with the eyes of their own understanding, and so failed to recognise Him.”

“That’s a shame.”

“Yes, it is, as the words they carved into the wood, show clearly that they knew the prophecies to the point of even knowing where the Great Chasm was.”

“That, is *really* sad.”

“There were many who awaited His Advent, but failed to see him, and so grew new creature-made faiths off those that came before. There was one soul who even knew the date of the New Era, he was a Northern Icer, but he and those who knew he was right had expected the Return from the clouds above, and definitely not among the Clans on another part of our planet.”

“It doesn’t seem right that they knew the time, and some, the place, but missed Him. It’s just not right,” protested Able, a little.

“It is as The All wills it to be, and I would believe the answer to that lies in the nature of pure hearts and the veils of the mind.”

Able sat there and contemplated a little on Dossd’s words, especially the last ones. But it was not long before Dossd asked, “Now, tell me a Great Story,” as he had now seen the power of history, he wished to know a little more of Able’s people’s stories. It was also to honour Able’s adulthood, and to take the opportunity to sit in this particular place to tell the deeper stories. “It shall be the *Sixth* Great Story,” added Dossd.

“I only know the ones you have taught me,” said Able, with a questioning look on his face. Not realising what story, The Walker was asking for.

“The Stories of all the Great Mediators between us and The All, are Great Stories. Tell me a story of the Perfect Mirror you follow.”

Able was a bit taken back, and for some reason felt a deep tearful joy; one of deep meaning, which surprised him. He remembered back to when he had decided to only tell stories of events *around* his Messenger, not *about* Him. It had taken a long time for the Sandwalker to finally ask, or to wish to drink from this particular Cup. He now took a deep breath and a little time to free himself, from himself, and he then opened his mouth to tell The Sixth Great Story.

*“When Bahá’u’lláh was still a child, the Vazir, His father, dreamed a dream. Bahá’u’lláh appeared to him swimming in a vast, limitless ocean. His body shone upon the waters with a radiance that illumined the sea. Around His head, which could distinctly be seen above the waters, there radiated, in all directions, His long, jet black locks, floating in great profusion above the waves. As he dreamed, a multitude of fishes gathered round Him, each holding fast to the extremity of one hair. Fascinated by the effulgence of His*

*face, they followed him in whatever direction He swam. Great was their number, and however firmly they clung to His locks, not one single hair seemed to be detached from His head, nor did the least injury affect His person. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him.*

*The Vazir, greatly impressed by this dream, summoned a soothsayer, who had achieved fame in that region, and asked him to interpret it for him. This man, as if inspired by a premonition of the future glory of Bahá'u'lláh, declared: "The limitless ocean that you have seen in your dream, O Vazir, is none other than the world of being. Single-handed and alone, your Son will achieve supreme ascendancy over it. Wherever He may please, He will proceed unhindered. No one will resist His march, no one will hinder His progress. The multitude of fishes signifies the turmoil He will arouse amidst the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Around Him will they gather, and to Him will they cling. Assured of the unfailing protection of the Almighty, this tumult will never harm His person, nor will His loneliness upon the sea of life endanger His safety.*

*That soothsayer was subsequently taken to see Bahá'u'lláh. He looked intently upon His face, and examined carefully His features. He was charmed by His appearance, and extolled every trait of His countenance. Every expression in that face revealed to his eyes a sign of His concealed glory. So great was His admiration, and so profuse his praise of Bahá'u'lláh, that the Vazir, from that day, became even more passionately devoted to his son. The words spoken by that soothsayer served to fortify his hopes and confidence in Him. Like Jacob, he desired only to ensure the welfare of his beloved Joseph, and to surround Him with His loving protection."<sup>3</sup>*

"A Great Story, *no doubt*," expressed Dossd, in strong reverence.

"It is," said Able, plainly.

As Dossd contemplated it, he knew that *he* would learn it, and seek as well, the story of this Jacob and Joseph. It *was* a Great Story. It brought great joy to his heart, and with it, much more respect for those of the Earth. So deep was his respect for The All, and for peoples of story.

IT WAS THE THIRD DAY OF THE PASSING. Eedra and the stranger now ate together. The stranger ate with great relish; almost as much as he had drunk his fill of water when he had taken the airship. It had been his first action, as he was only *just* able to overcome this younger lady. His body had needed replenishing after his long walk in the desert and knew that his health, and physical strength, were the servants of what he served.

“What were the colours of the airship that took your friends?” asked Eedra, fishing, just in case it was her father’s airship.

“They were my colleagues, and it was charred black.”

“Charred black. That is not a colour we run, and never a single colour flag. You have lied to me about your friends.”

“It and that ship was charred black after I finished with it,” said The Stranger, not looking happy about it, just serious. He despised taking life. He was a Protector, not judge and jury, so while part of him was okay with what had happened, another part of him would never be. This was the first time in all his years that he had taken life. It did not sit well with him, but he was not a young man, so he had seen enough of life to give it up to nature of things.

“Noo, you could not have brought down a ship.”

“Sure did, sweetie. *I had to*. They just wanted to kill. There was *no* mercy in ‘em. When I saw them, point blank, execute two of my wounded cohorts, *that was it*. They just *had* to be brought down.”

“To survive the hunt is one thing. But you’re lying about the airship, as sure as I sit here,” charged Eedra, simply not believing him.

“I am definitely not. As sure I sit here eating *your* food,” he answered, as he threw some meat to the mog; and then, some more. He smiled at the green dog-like animal for the mog’s future alliance, and added with great confidence, “*I am a hard man to kill.*”

“You were lucky that you did not meet my father, and his ship in battle. You would not have prevailed,” said Eedra, emphasising it. They had talked of this before today, but she was still fishing for the colours of the airship he had encountered; well that, and placating her dented pride, in challenging him.

Deveroux, only saw a proud fool in her words, and said strongly, “For *God’s sake*. Do you not get it *at all*? I don’t *give a damn* about how good a fighter your father is, or *why* your people are like they are. We came here to find out what was happening to missing spaceships. To find out why they were disappearing; why the numbers were rising so high, and where they went. Now that I know *where and why*, we *will* stop *all* your people, or make sure they’re *stopped* from ever hurting another innocent soul. *Do you understand that?*”

Eedra dropped her gaze and nodded, saying, “Yes, I understand. Part of me, it seems, still lives in my past, but I certainly don’t see you prevailing over my whole people.”

“There are many sayings on such things, and you would be surprised what is possible when lead by the Right Spirit. What I need to find right now is a portal.”

“You won’t find any for a long time. They grow and grow until The Passing, and then they settle for at least one orbit of the sun. You have come at the wrong time.”

“*Damn*. There has to be a way. There *will* be a way.”

“You have great faith. We Icers are more of science.”

“You Icers are more of ignorance, it seems to me.”

“There is good in our people, and many do not like the hunt, but The Majority Order has to stand, and for now the hunt is legal and what most seem to want.”

“*Boy*, so *most* of you are on the side of fear and insularity, eh? People of science aren’t usually *that stupid*,” charged Agent Deveroux, as he threw some more meat to a now much happier mog.

# *Alliance*

Hedden Spron looked out the large strongly reinforced circular window of a large lounge room he now sat in. It had a high ceiling, and the grand table and comfortable lounge chairs made the room very comfortable. Its strong stone walls, great oak doors, and various ornaments and other furniture showed the wealth of the family that hosted them. Hedden, Enom, and the other hunter captains now regularly gathered here. It was a room away from the eating rooms of the local Nobles. They did not like the company of the Northerners, and not having any concern for courtesy on this matter, had ignored them mostly.

The young northern Lord would visit at times and send people at other times to see to the needs of the Hunter Lords and their cohorts. It did not matter that courtesy had not been shown him, as this young Lord never let anyone else's behaviour change his. He was a good man, even though a little too accepting of the greed and depravity reaching more and more

into the vitals of his society. Most here thought these changes in culture were normal and a *freedom* from the blindness of the past, but with them, character, and caring about others slowly drained to lower and lower levels here. Activities and ideas considered as generally okay in the current times, and by the majority of Northerners, were now strangely viewed through the glass of *so-called* little wisdoms that allowed for them, and each day, this society wandered further away from reality and what was healthy.

It was the last days of The Passing now, as the three days on either side of the three days that Stremeti passed the winds and weather was still quite destructive. The winds were still far too high to relaunch and fly the airships; well, except for a very brutal hunter, simply called Plenilec. He was not a Hunter Lord, but he had many ships. His great-grandfather's name had been taken from him due to his honourless actions in the last of the internal Icer wars. So, Plenilec only ever had one name, but he wore it as a badge of honour. Hedden Spron laughed as he saw five of Plenilec's airships now struggling in the winds and working their way through them to tie down on the great rock wharf.

*"Only Plenilec. Only him,"* stated Hedden, followed by his loud and joyous laughter.

All the attention in the room turned to the window as Hedden continued to enjoy watching these fools fight the winds. Some smiled as they looked out, enjoying the sport, while others grunted. Plenilec had only friends or enemies; in this respect, even more pronounced than Enom. Enom even had the respect of *many* northerners, but they only feared the likes of Plenilec, as all should fear a mad hungry wolf. Enom smiled, and somehow felt a bit better seeing his courageous friend, and his *'never say die'* out there for all to see. There was great respect between these two, as their ideologies were quite well aligned; locked down hard, and rigid.

Enom had ignored the lower creature in his friend, just as he had ignored it many times within himself, and just now another part of him, that calling voice deep inside him which confused and angered him, called out a warning. It sent a strong and uncomfortable shock through his system. He had been happy to see his friend. He had felt a feeling of support for who he *really* was, and what he did, with Plenilec's arrival; but now, again, he had to fight this intruder within him. Enom smiled outwardly though, as he did quite enjoy watching this fool, and the fools who followed him, risk all for one landing.

After three of the craft were finally tied up tight on the moorings, Enom went to see his friend. Again, the stabbing feeling of deep discomfort attacked him. His father had talked to him quite often about the animal in all of us, which sometimes made us strong, but also weakened us. He had liked to see this part strong in his boy, though often warned that to pretend that this lower nature does not exist gives it the power to play its games and take control of our honour; our character. Enom knew that it was his character prodding and fighting him right now, and he was not at all comfortable with this change.

Lord Hedden Spron had seen the strong lower nature within Enom and had sought to make him aware of it at every opportunity. But thankfully, he had also seen within his boy a sense of higher honour, of nobility, which he also fed as often as he could. He was the one who had introduced Eedra's mother to Enom, as while Hedden was a Hunter Lord, he believed in the honour of the Old Icer religion. His heart had been affected by this woman; by her words, and her spirit, and secretly knew of her allegiance to Nov-Cikel, Edossd. In truth, a deep and confusing experience in in his life had changed him even before she came to the Western Kingdom, but if Edron Clovek, Enom's father, had known of her allegiances, her life would have been quickly ended. None knew but a very select few, as some secrecy was required for followers of the new religion in the Western mountains.

Her old Icer religion had guided her airship's course to The Great Chasm, some years before she met Enom. Alone she found her way to that sacred place; unheard of for a woman of her time, and something no Icer would naturally do. She had learned of the ways of Nov-Cikel there, and had in time, '*gone out*' again from that place to bring its spirit to the Icers of Temelj.

"I'm chasing an alien that brought down one of my ships," said Plenilec, almost with a hiss.

"No alien has brought down an airship," stated Enom.

"This one did. Its tracks led away from the burnt-out wreck of one of my best ships."

"Surely the desert, let alone The Passing, would have ended the creature by now," offered Enom.

"The Passing may have washed away its sign, and maybe killed it, but I feel it still lives. I hear you look for your daughter, so we can help each other. It is all for the good of the Majority Order; and for *us*, old friend."

"Come and eat, we will make our plans for what ships we have. We can add others as they join us," decided Enom.

"After you dig yours out you mean," said Plenilec, laughing, and rough housing his friend with a hard slap on his back and a rough hand through his hair, as they walked. Enom smiled and feigned a move and a stern look of battle, which had the two, play acting for a short time, before they proudly walked these Northern halls as if they owned them.

Enom loved the simplicity of mateship and wished he could ignore the evil he now saw all too clearly in the deep blue eyes of this old friend; eyes rife with pride, and a

meanness which took joy in the death and pain of others. Enom could not believe he had not seen these in him before; or more so, that he *had* seen these things, and ignored them. The Hunter Lord *had* changed, even though he still fought it. What he had now learned and seen, and that which now challenged from him within, was knowledge. Knowledge, both old and new, were coming together to raise his sight. Knowledge changes us, as it must, unless like Plenilec, our soul has fallen to ash or stone. No water may bring life to such things.

# *Knowledge*

It had been a long wait in the gondola; waiting for *The Passing* to end. Eedra had eventually taken to picking Deveroux's mind about the worlds deeper, its science, and his work. He was not so forthcoming on his work. He kept saying the word 'secret', which really became annoying after a while. Sentences like, it's a *secret*; I am a *secret* agent; that is '*need to know*', so it's a *secret*. The most annoying aspect of it all was that he very much enjoyed saying it.

Anyway, in the time they spent in their little cocoon, she learnt much about physics, astrophysics, and the biology of other worlds, and she just revelled in it. She asked question after question and put forward her thoughts as they talked. There was so much in the universe, and now she could see that she was only given to know such a small part of it. This Agent, this *Protector* talked of endless worlds; both '*deeper*' and '*outer*' worlds.

Agent Deveroux had been a little cautious as to what he shared on matters of his work particularly, as he had to have an advantage if this creature ever turned on him. She was still an unknown quantity, so he played it tight. His training always made that a baseline with any

creature, on any world, as he did not know her culture or how others may misuse *any* knowledge that he imparted to her. He also knew that she was very able, smart, and strong, so he would keep his guard up.

He now remembered back to when Eedra and the mog had been hoisted aboard, after their first encounter, and she had stood eye to eye with him. Well, maybe she was looking down a little, but the Agent's pride would not have that at all. He was well over six feet tall, and she was about the standard height for a young woman of Temelj.

"Boy, you are a *tall* girl," he had said, feeling short, and a little old with his greying temples.

"You are a *little old* man," she had replied, with a wry smile. "It is a wonder that you prevailed over me."

"*Damn* sister, you people just make a man feel *more* and *more* welcome here."

Eedra had laughed out loud, knowing she talked with a warrior, and strangely, only feeling good intent towards him. She was certainly enjoying the continued competition; even though he had bested her. She also wondered if this one would even have bested her father.

"Depends on how serious he is about his work," Deveroux had replied, hearing her thoughts, only then making it clear to her.

Eedra was not happy about that at all, and she wondered if that was how he had bested an extermination crew. She had then silenced her mind and began to take care with her thoughts.

Deveroux needed allies if he was to survive here, and that took trust. So, it was *almost* full disclosure for him, especially right at the beginning, or there would not be enough trust to

create a new alliance. He needed her help, and somehow, he just felt in his gut that she was up for it too, so he had said, “I can only hear *you*. I have gathered some things in you, bits, that make me think we could be useful to each other. Didn’t hear those other clowns,” referring to the ones who killed his comrades, “but their intent was *very* clear anyway.”

“A Hunter’s work is singular.”

“*Tell me about it*, but I’m feeling from you that you may need some backup too, and one way or another, I need you. You are obviously a courageous girl, so how about it?”

“I don’t believe a man like you needs anyone.”

“Well, damn girl, you sure can turn on the charm when you want to.”

Eedra had laughed, and said, “You can hear my thoughts, so I have to trust you, and I can feel your intent is good. Some of your thoughts are coming through too, so you are a *Protector*? This is your designation?”

“You got it, girly.”

Eedra had smiled at this strange man’s ways. She had known kind men, but never a kind one who was also so deliberate and able as a warrior; well, other than her father, but his kindness he kept for her and his family almost exclusively.

It was only now, as they waited out the last of The Passing that she opened up on her secrets and her needs, saying, “I know another like you.”

“What!?” said Deveroux, now seeing that this girl could control her thoughts better than he thought. He gathered himself quickly and got down to business, saying, “Like me, or just different to you?”

“He has the same feet as you.”

“The same feet, eh,” commented Deveroux, looking down and wiggling his toes.

“Yes. He speaks *our* tongue, just as you do. But he is one of *your* people.”

“Like I said, I don’t speak your tongue, darlin’. I speak the One language and so do you in a way.”

“So, is it telepathy?”

“No, like I said before, I only have some telepathy with you so far. But I can communicate in any language out here.”

“How?”

“I come from a reality closer to The Source; or more scientifically, from a deeper expression of reality.”

“So, you are speaking *your* language, and I am *hearing* it as mine?”

“Sort of, I’ll fill you in later.”

“But I need to know,” asked Eedra, in true curiosity.

“Okay, where things are closer to The Source, everything is more unified. There is a part of you that is of a deeper world than even the one I live in, and part of me lives there too.”

“So, people from deeper communicate this way?”

“No, there’s a universal language in the ‘deeper realities’ and there is usually one on more evolved planets in the outer realities. The old languages and local dialects are spoken too, to keep the richness that each gives, but we have one language for all the worlds deeper.”

“That is wonderful,” said Eedra, almost entranced by the thought of so many worlds speaking one language; one song, as her mother had put it in some of her poems. It was the mix of what this man shared and the intimations of things that were alive in her birth-mother’s poetry, which then brought her to a state of awe.

Deveroux waited a little, just a little, for Eedra to gather what she needed, He then said plainly, “You can think more on that later, young lady. Right now, you need to snap out of it, and tell me about this man with the same feet as me.”

“Yes. Sorry,” said Eedra, slowly coming back from her thoughts.

“Well!” said Deveroux, a little keen, and knowing he needed to break her away from her thoughts to get her focus back to here and now.

“Sorry. Well, yes, I have not seen his feet, but you walk the same way. I am tracking a Sandwalker and this alien is in his company. The Sandwalker is important to me, so I wish to find him.”

“What about the alien? What do you know about him or her?”

“Your alien brother is young and is marooned here too. Aliens don’t get away from extermination, but you two have.”

“Has he been here long?”

“Long enough to walk with a Sandwalker as a brother. Some years I would say. He is kind of like you.”

“So, you’ve met him? Talked with him?”

“The three of us, make that four of us,” said Eedra, looking down at her mog, “had an experience, as adversaries. Your alien friend and my Sandwalker got away, just after they

saved me and my mog from a sure death. We have also connected once in a strange and magical way.”

“You’re an exterminator, aren’t you?”

“I was, for a Hunter for a very short time, but I have since travelled to learn more about my world for a good time now. I am no longer a Hunter. I will even *protect* these two.”

“A good word to gain my respect, girly,” said Deveroux, feeling the feelings that accompanied her memories. “I can feel your love for this Sandwalker. Better think about that young lady. Attraction does not equal love.”

“We joined deeper than that.”

“Yep, I’ve heard that before too,” said the Agent, raising his eyebrows. “So, what is a Sandwalker?”

“They are very religious telepaths who seek out The Great Chasm of Nov-Cikel, Edossd. We think they are dangerous zealots who lead The Clans to their death in the great deserts. But I now know better.”

“Who is *we*?”

“We are Icers. We live in the mountains. We gather the ice and store the water. We water the fields of The Clans, and they share the harvest.”

“Share it! Right! I’m not feeling it. A whole clan doesn’t walk off into the desert, even seeking God, unless there’s injustice where they live.”

“They have their place, and we have ours. They are uneducated, and we are people of science and education.”

“You are people of a whole lot of something else, young lady. ‘*Of science and education*’ are not the words I would use to describe your people.”

“They are my people. I have to think *some* good of them.”

Deveroux could feel her shame, and her love for them.

“So, enough of that. I’m not here to judge you. We each have to answer to our own conscience and make our way forward as best we can. I need to find a portal, one that does not come and go suddenly like the one we crashed through. Do you know of any special places; places of strange occurrences?”

“No, I don’t. If Icers knew of any doorway they would have shut it forever, or at least wait guard on it always.”

“What if you haven’t been told about it?”

“My father is a Hunter Lord, and I am fully initiated. Other than that, I am his daughter. He is a proud man and gave me *all* his knowledge, as he wants me strong, and especially so for when he can no longer guard me.”

“Sounds like a good father, for a *psychopath* that is.”

“He is *not* this word. He does all for *honour*, and honourableness.”

“Yeah well, with people, honour is fairly *relative* from what I’ve experienced.”

“He *is* honourable. If he is given the chance to understand me and what I have experienced he will stand with me.”

“I can see you have great hope. I can see you believe in him. I can also feel your concern that he may not be able to turn from his way. Maybe it’s best you just turn away now, young lady.”

“I will *never* turn away from him.”

“Mmm, okay, so *can I* count on you to keep me out of harm’s way at least; *out of his way?*”

“Yes, I will make that covenant with you. I will help you find your portal, and you will help me find the Sandwalker.”

“And we will find the alien too.”

“Yes.”

“And until then, our allegiance is to *each other* first.”

“Yes, or you will simply find I am no longer in your company.”

“So, a *get out* clause, eh.”

“No, *the truth*, so we may work together, and you may be warned if I can no longer do so.”

“Okay. That’ll have to do,” agreed Deveroux.

“It is better than nothing,” commented Eedra.

Deveroux nodded. He had a lot of time for people who spoke what they meant, even if it wasn’t what he wanted to hear, or they were a little lost.

THE WINDS WERE BEGINNING TO DIE DOWN. Able and Dossd now talked of the spirit, and of other things. The Passing had been a time of deep reflection and meditation for these two cohorts. They knew instinctively that they would be tested in their continued journey beyond this place, and that finding The Great Chasm was just another step in the process of life ahead of them. They knew that they would be stretched again, tested again, and enlightened further by the continuing providence of life. Neither too, saw the attainment of The Great Chasm as an end, although most definitely a momentous milestone of their efforts. They both saw in their profound meditation that this goal had helped them to grow stronger by their efforts to simply reach it, a goal that had provided them with many gifts; many gifts that they would not have received had The Great Chasm not existed.

There was no fear or trepidation in them on what challenges would come, because of their confidence in The All, in the perfection of His designs, and in the beauty of the continual process of learning in this material plane. These were housed deep inside them like a foundation of stone. Like an Icer mountain they were immovable in their belief and the proof of it that had been gathered by their experience. The days of deep communion with The All in this cave had taken them to great inner heights and to deeper bliss; to such a point now that neither of them would really want to leave this rarefied air when the Passing ended. But right now, they sat easily in the world, and in their discussion.

They talked slowly now, as neither was in a rush, nor compelled by some need to fill the space with words. Their minds had been leashed by the spirit and just enough words for exploration were spoken. When we are in our spirit, the necessity of the world, compulsions that drive us, haste that attacks us, are not present, and the soul, even if walking and working, must need slow down and allow each step, each task, its reverence to God. Such was their state in this place, as they communed and reflected, and drew lessons from their great walking.

“Yes. The *Northern* Icers have fallen to great lows,” mentioned Dossd gently. “Though they are mostly against the Hunting and see a new future, they seek it through their minds alone. They believe in a higher future, but still indulge so much in the physical that they forget themselves. They forget their deeper selves; their nobility, and they wander each day further away from it. They even seek happiness and joy in their food, and their clothes; in their ornaments and possessions,” explained Dossd.

Able nodded in understanding, and said, “There is a saying from The Servant; the Son of our Messenger that I told you stories of. He said...

***“Today, all the peoples of the world are indulging in self-interest and exert the utmost effort and endeavour to promote their own material interests. They are worshipping themselves and not the divine reality, nor the world of mankind.”<sup>4</sup>***

“It is sad to see souls trapped in a lesser place,” commented Dossd. “We should not dwell too long on the negative aspects of any people, but it is a shame that many souls are kept away from their greater potential; from the power, and true and abiding joy, available within them. The peace and joy of the spirit surely surpasses indulgence in material delights and vain imaginings.”

“For sure, Dossd, but in my belief we’re told that we can enjoy the gifts of God that lie in the material, within the boundaries of His Will, and within the wisdom of moderation. There is a lot in life to enjoy that does not damage the soul, or stunt it, or make us forget it. I suppose we just need to enjoy these things in moderation, and not place them in our hearts.”

“Yes, what we place in our hearts *becomes* our life. We bow the knee before what we love, so we need take great care in what we worship. What we hold in our heart is a sure sign of how our life will be, and what future we will create,” shared Dossd, then adding this quote...

*“The inner joy that every individual seeks, unlike a passing emotion, is not contingent on outside influences; it is a condition, born of certitude and conscious knowledge, fostered by a pure heart, which is able to distinguish between that which has permanence and that which is superficial.”<sup>5</sup>*

Able allowed that saying to wander through his soul, and then in good time, shared something that came to him on the nature of the heart, and the attainment of life in the spirit.

*“The greatest gift of man is universal love - that magnet that renders existence eternal. It attracts realities and diffuses life with infinite joy. If this love penetrates the heart of man, all the forces of the universe will be realised in him, for it is a divine power which transports him to a divine station and he will make no progress until he is illumined thereby.”<sup>6</sup>*

“This is a rich topic, and one we should reflect on more. It is something we need see deeply, set strongly within us, and reflect on how it may guide our actions. But before we

take time to contemplate these nuances of spirit by ourselves, maybe some last words...” He now spoke in the words of Able’s language...

*“The bestowals of God which are manifest in all phenomenal life are sometimes hidden by the intervening veils of mental and mortal vision which render man spiritually blind and incapable, but when those scales are removed and the veils rent asunder, then the great signs of God will become visible, and he will witness the eternal light filling the world. The bestowals of God are always manifest. The promises of heaven are ever present ... but should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened, he will be led to deny the universal signs and remain deprived of the manifestations of divine bounty.”<sup>7</sup>*

“So, we need to keep our spiritual eyes open,” offered Able.

“To remain in the spirit and have the inner eyes and ears open. It is contingent on where we choose to focus, and in what sayings we look to. The Light of the Great One’s need to be read, contemplated daily, and lived. These Words keep our eyes open and our beings in abiding joy, no matter our outward circumstance. Lest we become blind, and deaf again, and get stuck in the sinking sands of the corporeal.”

With that both went to individual meditation on those words, and as Able did, he considered the mind and its place in the nature of spirit and a good life. He contemplated how the mind was a trap or veil for our sight, but he knew many sayings that talked of the importance of the mind, and the greatness of the sciences, and that with a spiritual focus it was full of promise. Also, that civilisation, intellectual and material, as well as spiritual,

needed be taken forward. In this rarefied place, he remembered a quote from his youth study that seemed to talk of science and of the soul's access to deeper knowledge...

*“There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of the consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.”<sup>8</sup>*

Able had learned of the spirit, and of physical survival, in the great deserts of Temelj. He understood how they were one, when initiated in spirit; that one may not deny the other, so we may enjoy the water and fruits of life and use the great gifts of the mind, but he was also sure that he was best to see life with his *soul's eyes* and walk *his spirit* on the ground.

THERE WAS GREAT ACTIVITY NOW. The Southern Wharf was teeming with life like the now exploding green of the desert below. What was once a wide vista of sand had become a great garden from the rains of The Passing. No one in this particular company of hunters seemed to notice the great change in the desert though, as they were singularly focused on their activity; digging out ships, piecing them together, and setting rigging; all to get them shipshape and airborne. The hunters had totally disregarded their hosts since they had been freed to fly again.

Enom stood upon the deck of his ship, as the great bladder, its balloon, was being refilled to one side of it. He stood on that deck, now firm, and complete. He was no longer haunted as he stood in all of himself, and beside Lessd, who had weathered The Passing in

the cocoon of the wrapped up ship. Lessd had been unearthed with the airship from the sand that had covered it. The crew had ignored him, with some even a little upset that he had not perished. He too had spent much time in meditation and was quite taken by the change of demeanour of this Hunter Lord.

He had worked on unwrapping the ship from the large protective sheets, and at getting it back together with the crew, while allowing himself some hope at what he had now seen in the eyes of Enom Clovek. When the ship finally began to lift from its rocky perch, Lessd was standing one step back, and to the side of the Hunter Lord, as was the tradition; well, their tradition, as no Walker had ever been known to stand a deck of an airship, *at all*, before these two had made it so.

Enom turned, just a little toward Lessd as the balloon took slack from the ropes of the gondola. He almost smiled, but didn't. At that moment Lessd stopped hoping, becoming sure of the hunter's transformation by thoughts he now gathered. The Walker's body showed no sign of change, but his heart cried out to The Glory of The All, and his eye's moistened. Such a spirit filled his chest that he thought he would explode as he stood proudly there.

Later on, as the ships sailed the night to reach the staging point, he would reflect on the many years of his association with Enom. There was an *honour place* between these warriors which had been their ground, but now they were *aligned*. Right now, as they stood the deck in silence, both realised the greater strength that came with this aligning. They had become unspoken allies today, suddenly, inexorably, while all about them now lay the enemy.

EEDRA HAD NOT SEEN, OR AT LEAST COULD NOT REMEMBER SEEING, what always came after the Passing. She had been very young then, but she now looked out from her airship at the miraculous sight; before her was a world of green to all horizons. So bright was this colour, and so many shades of it, that it was as if she had never known this colour before today. Her heart was full.

On emerging from the chrysalis of her airship she had seen, and even walked close to, animals feeding amongst the endless green verdure. They too, had seemingly sprung from nothing. The animals had not seemed afraid, as most were singularly intent to gather from this fleeting harvest. Many of them even bred and matured in this small window, each nineteen years. The bloom would last two short months, but many species of the plants and animals would regain their tenuous grip on life by its grace.

She and the Agent had re-floated the airship. She then set the sails, as there were still good winds, and it was best not to waste fuel. It was now that she heard the thoughts of Dossd, and her heart nearly exploded with joy.

“Boy, this place sure changes in a hurry.”

“Yes,” Eedra had answered, a little shaken by the strong feelings that took hold on her. They were gentle, but they were strong too.

“Are you okay?” asked Deveroux, just a little untrustingly, as she had definitely just held back her thoughts. He was becoming more attuned to her and had been cautious with his own thoughts too.

“It is something I have not seen,” she said, focusing on the green vista. “I would have been two years old when this explosion of life last happened. I have never seen our desert world green. It is like I do not know my own world,” she said, with real meaning, also

thinking of all the new knowledge of things that she had been given in the time since meeting Dossd, and a now deeper realisation of what her mother's poems held, as well as this stranger's science. Her vision was opened by all these things and were just as powerful as the great bloom of the desert.

Deveroux knew there was more to her feelings. They were stronger than that, and he gathered a few images that escaped her mind. She was hiding something, and he was a little disappointed in her as he thought they had a good trust. It seemed that he had been right to be wary; she would still bear watching.

The Agent tried to silence his mind more, and maybe get some '*intel*' out of her, but he was not naturally a *silent within* kind of guy. He was '*tell it, how it is*' kind of guy, and get on with it. To him, the human spirit was what we *did*. It was about character and how it served others. He didn't care too much for meditation and all that stuff. It was more about being real and true, and living a higher way in his daily life. It was in his service of others that he found meaning and purpose. Spirituality was definitely what flowed through you in *the day to day* to him. He often reflected, and would chat with the Old Man, but mostly, he got on with things. A little bit of humour, and *living* life was where spirit lay for him. It was on the ground that he gave it, grew it, and learnt it.

After a few days of sailing Eedra went aft to trim a sail. She smiled at Deveroux, signalling that they were gaining speed. Deveroux nodded, and was more at ease now, as he had not seen or felt any more strangeness in her since they took flight after The Passing. He had thought that maybe it was that the great green below them that had brought back memories of her mother and that Sandwalker. He definitely got a picture of the lady, when Eedra had become so guarded. There was something about that woman. The image of her was so strikingly clear in his mind, and there was also a deep feeling he could not gather.

In any case, he now turned to look to where they were headed. He didn't know why; he just always looked to where he was going. Maybe most do, as we fly our airships through life. He thought of his wife and kids, and of seeing them again. He thought of those girls of his, and he knew he was a rich man.

Suddenly, Eedra screamed, "*No!*"

It was too late, as before Deveroux could finish his thought he fell to the deck with a solid blow to the back of his neck.

When he woke, he saw two local purple boys looking down on him and smiling. He was immediately disarmed. He had what he called *dog sense* from his job over all the years, or more so, it had developed in his childhood out of necessity. He knew when he was among friends, and these two 'clowns', as Deveroux would put it, were sharing a joke, rather than being intent on harming him further.

"Well, Agent. It seems you are not as clever as a Sandwalker."

Deveroux was never one to seem vulnerable, so as he looked up at these two, giving them the once over, he answered. "I found your boys, *didn't I?*"

They all laughed at that, as much was shared in thought as well as in words. Feelings even passed amongst them, and as they helped Deveroux to his feet, he said, "I *knew* you were hiding something."

"*Sure*, you did," retorted Eedra.

"I am Dossd," said Dossd, looking into Deveroux's eyes as if seeking the man within them.

"I'm Deveroux," replied the Agent, as he put out his hand to the Walker.

Able was taken back home. That name was familiar, and that voice. It was from when he was small, and he felt at some other time. It was more of a feeling rather than a formed memory, and a deep fog denied him any real recollection.

Thoughts did not pass between Able and Deveroux, as it did between these visitors and the two of Temelj. It would have to be spoken language and dog sense between these two, as The Agent turned his head to Able and put out his hand to shake the boy's.

“So, you have feet *like me*? You look like one of *them*.”

“I'm from Earth.”

“From *where*!”

“Earth, sir.”

“Well, *I'll be*, son. Do you know just how *far away* you are from there?”

“No, sir,” said Able.

“You're in *another galaxy*, boy. *So far away from that sweet Milky Way*, that it *defies description*. Who *are* you, and how the *hell* did you get here?”

Just then, Dossd stood between Deveroux and Able.

“*Easy*, big fella' ,” said Deveroux, and Dossd certainly was a big fella' in comparison.

“I'm *not* happy...but *for* the boy's sake. Him bein' here breaks a whole lot o' rules.”

Dossd then moved back away to reveal Able holding the amulet high, now hanging from his hand by its chain.

“Where did you get that?”

“I took it from a trunk in my parents' attic.”

“What’s your name boy?”

“It’s Able Jones, sir.”

“Able Jones. *God damn! Your family are pain in the...! Well, you know.*”

“*Are we, sir?*” asked Able, allowing himself a smile.

“Don’t you *smile* at me, boy,” said Deveroux, threateningly.

The young man then laughed, and said, “Yes, sir.”

“*Why* did you come here, and *why* did you stay here?” Deveroux asked, knowing the power of the amulet.

“I don’t know how to work the amulet. I came by accident. It was four or five years ago, now. I’m a Sandwalker now,” he said, holding up his stick.

“Maybe you’ll be an *Earthman* again, if I can work that amulet. *Do you know* the odds of me coming to where you landed, and me knowing your parents? *Do you?*”

“He is *Graced* by The All, in a far greater way than any of us. It has nothing to do with numbers. As you get to know him, *you will see*,” explained Dossd.

“I know his family. They’re *all* a bit annoying like that. It’s like the rules don’t apply to them,” stated Deveroux, feigning anger a little bit, but still annoyed.

“I would really like to know more about my family. I knew nothing, but here, I learned that they were Travellers,” requested Able, expectant.

“It’s not a *term*, boy. At least, it *wasn’t*, until *Jack damned Johnston* decided it might be good to explore reality with *no damned regard* for the consequences.”

“What consequences?”

“*Work! For me.* That’s what *damned* consequences!”

Eedra and Able started to laugh, and Deveroux then joined them. When he did, Dossd let out a cry of humour, and the laughter grew again. At that point, they were one; as in shared humour, we are allied.

THEY ATE WELL THAT NIGHT, especially as so many fresh foods were now readily available. They took time to prepare the meal, and they relished it. To prepare meals, and to have time to do so, is a lovely, gentle, and fulfilling part of life; eating together more so. Fresh food, variety, and moderation sustain our bodies well, so these temples may serve us well. Natural simpler foods and exercise also add to a happy demeanour, to contentment and joy. To share our meals with those we love, and connect over them, is truly life; to pray together before, also a gentle thing that connects us and nurtures us.

It was after the meal, during the cleaning up, that Dossd *announced* that tonight was the night for the Seventh Great story, hoping that Able had another story as good as the last. Deveroux and Eedra then received the Dossd talk on the power of Story. He finished with, “Story is *paramount*.”

“I get the power of story, tall man, but even story has its downside. Many people are so locked inside their own story that they can’t breathe. All the thoughts of their story and their life just sit on them. Better to get outside your story, I reckon.”

“The Story I talk of uplifts the spirit, and renews us,” explained Dossd, plainly.

“The story I am talking about, is the ‘*woe is me*’ story, when the animal nature has taken our minds to all sorts of crazy places. You know, when fears, concerns, and ego come pouring out to be soothed or caressed.”

“So, the *animal* in us brings pain and concern?” asked Eedra, looking to her mog; now definitely an ally to all. It had taken a real liking to Deveroux, much to his disgust, but by his own hand. It had certainly created some moments of joy and mirth during the meal, watching them interact.

“Definitely; pain comes from the power of the mind in the hands of our lower self. It can be easily confused and fear a hell of a lot more than is real. The animal in us can consider itself far grander and be far greedier with the complexity of the mind too. Your Mog does not have our struggle, 'cos it's dumb. *Ain't ya' boy*,” said Deveroux, which only made the mog jump up on his lap and rub its back on him. “The animal ego can get so lost in its own story, and keep the mind so busy...well, it can bind you up and pull you down. Letting the dogs out doesn't work for self-aware beings.”

“The love of self draws you to your animal, and love for The All and for others draws you to the higher creature deeper within us,” added Able. “Only higher the human qualities, soul qualities of the human spirit, can bring real nurture to the *human* world; consciousness focused in the spiritual reality. The animal kingdom would destroy itself with this mind power, and when humans fall to the animal-mind, civilisations fall.”

“So, we get locked in our fearful and egotistical self, and *its story*?” mused Eedra.

“*Yep*, if it only believes in the material existence, instead of transcending it, in our spiritual reality. Our animal reality will never suffice us as human beings...Well...free willed, self-aware life forms like us. Actually, it'll destroy us if we forget the higher nature and try and live as only material-world creatures,” added Able.

“Boy, you *sure* are a relative of Jack Johnston,” said Deveroux, with a wry smile.

Able smiled happily at that, and Eedra said, “So, our whole planet is unconscious!”

“Don’t you mean the Icers?” offered Dossd, very humbly, and by way of kindly seeking to add to her perspective.

“Oh! *that’s* just *great*. *Judge* my people. I’m sure some of your people are unconscious.”

“Yes; many are. They come in and out of consciousness, and some get drawn in by unconscious souls. Some get lost there and forget their souls. But we bow down in humility before The All as a people, and it reminds us more often of our spirit. Your world seems void of The All, and no one worships Him.”

“People are people, darlin’. That doesn’t change on any planet, or not apply to any race,” offered Deveroux.

“So, we have fallen into unconsciousness because we don’t believe in your Creator, your All? How is that? I think that *not* believing has actually *freed* us.”

“In a way it may have. Ignorant hands on the tiller of religion in your society had no vision and held you back. But *Knowledge* has fallen away. You have forgotten The Eternal Covenant, and so forgotten The All and His Knowledge; forgotten your very own true nature. Your people are lost in your collective story; a story of your own making. You walk an even greater desert than that of Temelj,” said Dossd, with kindness, but without reservation.

“Waking up is really painful, darlin’, and staying *conscious* is even harder work,” added Deveroux.

“You are a man of science. You are a good man. You are strong. You don’t seem like a religious man,” argued Eedra, to help make her point.

“Yep, I am a bit that way, but I had some Guidance early on, and I’m only as strong as the next challenge. We all are. We are *small*, Eedra. I carry on a bit, but we have to be humble, and we have to be reverent to that which spawned us; no matter if you see the universe or God. Science and true spiritual understanding require each other, and safeguard each other, to me. Science shuts down superstition, and true religion guides science so that it’s not destructive.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Eedra, in defence of science, before just then seeing how her people had used science to keep The Clans down and kill any being coming through the portals.

“Personally, girl, the Big Man is my friend, and I don’t like gettin’ all preachy, but I haven’t seen any civilisation...not one...grow from any other foundation other than The Word, from The Man, through The Messengers. To me, that’s science too.”

“The Covenant is renewed in each age. It calls us back to the spirit, and we are renewed with it,” added Dossd. “But maybe we tax you too much. You need to reflect on our words, and the reality that you know and have known. Think for yourself, not just in favour of your people, *or us*. We can talk again on such subjects. For now, it is time for The Seventh Great Story.”

Able and Dossd took a place on the floor of the gondola as if they were sitting on the sand in the desert.

Eedra and Deveroux then joined them on the floor, and Able began by telling a little bit of what had come to pass before this story, and a little of what had happened around it. After this, he began to tell the story itself...

*“While in the foul stench ridden and vermin infested dungeon, called the Black Pit, where no light could gain entry, Bahá’u’lláh received the first intimation of God’s Revelation. All there were chained, but He also bore the weight of a great heavy chain locked around his neck; so heavy that it had its own name. Each day, a few of those there would be called, and taken out for execution. Each would have their turn it seemed.*

*While Bahá’u’lláh could not have been in a more hopeless place, it was here that He first heard of His mission. In His own Words He explained...*

*“One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side; ‘Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth - men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognised Him.’”*

At another time...

*“During the days I lay in the prison of Tihran, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of my head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bare to hear.”*

In yet another passage...

*“While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden - the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord - suspended in the air before me. So rejoiced was*

*she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced my soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants. Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: 'By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His Sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His Glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of revelation and creation, if ye be of them that perceive.'"*<sup>9</sup>

# *Volition*

Able came up on deck, and Eedra's heart skipped a beat; until she saw that it was Able. Dossd had shared almost nothing with her since coming aboard. When he had first contacted her telepathically, she had felt a deep elation. When he had told her that he and Able were just ahead of her, and they had worked out the bearing that she needed to take to pick them up, she was so excited.

She had held her heart quickly though, as the alien's ability to feel her feelings made contact difficult. She thought her feelings were so strong that they had emanated out from her outer being; but fortunately they had not shown strongly. This alien could even pick up tiny cues from her body language, so she must have held herself well enough outwardly. She had practised in focusing her thoughts only where she wished, and on not sharing her emotions outwardly, on the Agent, and on her Mog, to its painful confusion. She had been busy in her time with the alien and had honed her new inner skills.

Eedra was always preparing, and always seeking advantage. Her father had taught her this, as he knew that in the Icer Courts many games were played by seasoned players; it was always best, when hunting, or at '*noble*' tables, to be prepared, poised and ready, if need be. She did not see Deveroux as a threat at the time, she just had a score to settle with this

creature, so she set a plan in motion where she would drop a knotted ladder rope overboard; one long enough to drag along the ground.

This was how the two friends had gotten aboard, so as to take the Agent by surprise. Dossd had only felt her initial feelings of capture, still believing that she was in danger because she only shared details of the plan so there was less chance of her being heard by the mind of her opponent. He had come aboard ready and knocked the Agent out, but it was not her plan to *actually* beat him. It was her plan to show him that she *could*. She had tried to stop Dossd hitting him with the ball of his stick. But he had appeared over the rail and struck the Agent in a flash.

Dossd had not seemed happy at the time, and said something about honour, and that it may have turned into mortal battle. *“That’s probably why,”* she now thought, *“Dossd is not communicating with me.”*

“No, that’s just Dossd, being Dossd,” answered Able, as if he saw it as a question.

“Oh, that’s right. You hear thoughts too. I don’t like this, the everyone in my mind thing.”

“You get used to it, and it *can* be helpful. In my world there’s none of this. There is some clairvoyance in people, and I even felt one friend’s thoughts and emotional pain sometimes, but we couldn’t read each other’s thoughts like this. On my planet, people having this ability would be very cool; or very destructive.”

“I suppose it is special, but it takes some getting used to. So, what did you mean when you said, that it was just Dossd being Dossd?”

“He is a creature of his beliefs. His belief is not to show his feelings and take time to get to know you. This is honourable to him. He would be very happy to work with you. He

would be glad to come to know your character over time. And *he is* a Sandwalker after all...they have *all the time in the world.*”

Eedra let out a little of the build-up of emotional energy in her, and said, “Well, that’s okay for him. I would like to...”

Able put up his hand to stop Eedra going on with her words. It was strange to him, as he had never done this before, watching himself in slow motion as he did it. He was maturing, and it was nice to watch it unfold.

“I don’t want to stop you sharing with me, but your relationship, and what you feel, is with Dossd. Best you talk with him about it,” said Able, smiling, knowing this was somewhat wise.

“I think I will.”

“Yes, the connection between you is not *just* his, or just *yours*, to create, but between you and me, he *loved* saving you.”

Eedra smiled, and her heart melted, and Able then realised that he *had* just interfered in their relationship. “*So much for being more mature,*” he thought, while also knowing that no one is ever fully ‘there’, or fully created, at any stage, in any life.

The Pilot did not hear him, as Able was quite adept at controlling his thoughts, and in any case, she was now busy thinking how she would approach this creature she really knew nothing about. It would take time to come to know him, and she decided she would relax and enjoy the process. She then looked at Able and asked if he knew anything about Piloting.

“No, I don’t. Will you teach me?”

“Yes, and I will share with you a little of the Icer ways. You have spent too long wandering around lost with that Walker,” she said, in a very Icer tone.

Able let out an expression of humour, just like Dossd would have, and thought that she was probably right. As their thoughts were shared, they both laughed a little.

“From up here you may see life from a different perspective.”

“Maybe,” answered Able, now much more able to speak his truth.

“Good. It’s good he didn’t teach you *too* much humility.”

“We can never have *enough* humility. You can’t enter the spirit without it, and to be forthright about what you see is more about having courage and using *true* kindness. One can be gentle and also speak clearly their truth.”

“I should not have wasted my time with the inner world,” she said, smiling. “Maybe in the outer world, and in the art of flying, I can share the beauty of the Icer culture with you.”

“That would be good,” said Able, then looking a little puzzled.

“Are you *sure* you want to learn to fly a craft?” asked Eedra, confused at the expression on Able’s face.

“Yes, I do. I just had a fleeting, but very sure feeling, that I know you. It was a memory. But it wasn’t you,” added Able, now feeling something else.

“Well, that makes a lot of sense,” said The Pilot, sarcastically.

“When it comes to such things, Eedra, it means they are both true in a way; that the mixture of them is true. Well, it will come to me in its time.”

“That makes even less sense,” said Eedra, goading him a little.

Able smiled, and said, “It’ll become apparent in time, if it’s meant to.” He was still puzzled at the feeling of a memory of her, or someone so like her. But he was sure in his heart on the truth of his experience.

“Oh, you religious types. *Seriously*. You talk in riddles and contradictions which hold no measure of science.”

“I would agree that the imagination can be a danger to the spiritual wanderer, but also to a blind fool whose greed has gained him much material treasure, but no real worth; or indeed the arrogance of a philosopher or a scientist, who through vanity of the power of his or her intellect, or previous learning, misses a great discovery or even fails to see reality at all. I have experienced quite a lot in life, especially since being here. I seek guidance from the Knowledge of my Faith, but I also see for myself, think for myself, feel my soul’s voice, and seek the wisdom and answers of my experience. I get a greater awareness of things from these. I also gather volition from these, and I act.”

“You still need *science*.”

“I learnt a good deal of science on my world; even though I left there so early in my life,” began Able, in reflection and the state of humility that impressed this young lady. “I have learnt much about the biology of your world, and mine in comparison. I know the stars, and you would be surprised what a Walker knows. So, when I say that I see and think for myself, I mean I use observation, and my knowledge of science as well. I *even* use scientific method, in a way, to reflect and grow spiritually.”

“Well, that’s good. My experience with Dossd has challenged much of what I saw as true, but science must still guide me.”

“I couldn’t let science *alone* guide me. But yes, it is a vital and worthy friend,” said Able, now realising just how much he was sounding like Dossd.

It was good to talk with Able. Eedra had still been confused and would be so for some time on all this spiritual stuff. This young man seemed to stand in all worlds, whereas many stood only in religion or science; the spiritual or the physical. She could relate to him more easily and may yet learn from him, but right now she had something to teach him.

“Let me show you the nature of bearings up here. I will show you the machines we use to steer ourselves, and how to make best use of the winds.”

“Great!” said Able, very excited to learn.

“To an Icer, *good* people *go out* into the world. They *go out* and explore, bringing back what they have found. We learn more about the art of piloting by this too; we live by its wisdom and seek to share our experiences and any new learning with others.”

“Ahh,” said Able, in understanding.

“We are always choosing our direction and resetting as we fly, as drift is part of any journey, so you have to be wary. It is about always being here, now, and at the wheel,” shared Eedra, as she brought her airship almost ninety degrees about without changing sail. “You must work with the conditions; *with* the prevailing winds. You may plot your course, but it, by necessity, and due to the chance nature of air currents, will never be exactly as you planned; sometimes the wind will even take you where *it* wills.”

“Thanks, Eedra,” said Able, also feeling the flow of deeper wisdom in her words.

“My pleasure. Now let me show you some skills, so you can one day take the wheel alone.”

With that, the instruction began, and over the next hour or so Able learned to use the instruments and took the wheel a little. He also learnt, just to a degree, how to feel the wind in the sail, and to know the movement of the deck under the elongated balloon. It was also about the ropes, taut or slack, and the way the gondola hung. After this first instruction, Able could see that there was much to learn about Piloting and found that Eedra was a fine teacher. She had given him the wisdom, the wonder, and the joy, just as much as she had given him knowledge, skills, and the wheel. She gave him the spirit of things, as well as simply using the instruments.

“*Boy, you sure have got me.*”

“*Flying gets you. No doubt.* We Icers are not the thugs you imagine us to be. Even *we* left Nov-Cikel, Edosd, to His own business.”

“The *Icers* knew Him?”

“Yes. It was The Clans who executed Vrata-na, Oragi, and who forced the exile of Dossd’s Messenger. Many of them even sought *His* death *too*, for heresy. The Icers did not care much, and though one Northern Lord did offer protection and a safe home, Vrata-na, Oragi did not take him up on it. He made it clear that it was His fate to be as it was to be, and not to be aligned with, or needing, any earthly power. He was to die; just as Nov-Cikel, Edosd was to be the ‘*Patience of our world*’.”

“Well, that’s *one hell* of a story.”

“One, Dossd would *never* tell you.”

“No. He’s no zealot. He didn’t tell me this particular story, but he did tell me that his kind killed Vrata-Na, and exiled Nov-Cikel. He shares openly *all* the *truth* of His faith. He does not embellish or omit, as his heart is true and unafraid. He would say all this himself.”

Eedra now felt more respect, and so, more love for The Sandwalker.

“Where did you hear that Nov-Cikel, Edossd was the *Patience* of your world? That doesn’t sound Icer to me,” enquired Able.

“My father taught me this history, but more as a warning, as his father had warned him of the great danger of this new religion to the Icer way of life and the Majority Order.”

THE SHIPS HAD BEEN IN A WIDE FORMATION FOR SOME WEEKS NOW. There were over forty in all. It was a mighty sight to see such an Armada, and those who were part of it could feel the full power of their great culture. One so large had never been seen in the skies of Temelj, even in the last Icer wars. They were spread out from horizon to horizon, and a little beyond, as they scanned the wide swathe of ground they flew over.

Evening was now falling, and ships nearby each other began to form camp together. These larger ships were anchored to the ground by wide deep ornate rock dishes, that were only filled with sand once on the ground. It had been a bit harder for the crews to dig the sand now that it was moist, and also now that the greenery mostly covered the ground, but nonetheless, it was done. The airships had hook anchors too, which were used for many purposes, but mainly for the airships to hold purchase on rocky ground.

They ate well each night, and tonight was no exception. They had laid up good stores, and supply ships had been arranged for, in the event of a longer search. Enom had done his job very well, and while happy to have every chance to find his daughter, he also knew that Plenilec too would have his prey. That was if the creature had survived. Enom was not too sure how he felt about the aliens, but he had most definitely crossed a bridge where the Sandwalkers were concerned. He now shook his head internally as he thought of it. He *was*

still an Icer, but of a new kind; and only time would show him the full implications and challenges that this evolution in him would bring.

The talk at Plenilec's table went late into the night, as did the drinking. Enom had refrained from the grog, much to the displeasure of all attending. He had said that he wanted to remain focused to find his daughter, but also that he no longer felt the desire for the liquid. He doubted he would ever waste his energies or his health on it again. He had then realised that it was not to be part of his future; or the thinking that shook heads around him when he would not partake. He did not care. He was no sheep, and he had never been one.

It had been a long evening, and there had been endless talk, so much so, that Enom had commented how his father had despised idle talk. He told them. "It draws the life out of our spirit and stops us acting, at best. It divides us, and at worst, destroys us." He knew many people whose character was destroyed by it, and the grog for that matter. Excess of speech, to him, was like eating too many raw sod-fruit. Sod-fruit was a great Icer delicacy. It could be eaten sparingly for the sheer joy of it, but raw, and too many, would poison you. "Too much talk robs us of volition, the will to act, and therefore, blunts the sword of action," he finished, leaving the talking and drinking to those who remained.

Many agreed, and then kept on talking, as people do; just like they had never heard him. Plenilec had heard, but he was more so *curious* about Enom's demeanour. He was a man of action and a gatherer of any older hunter's wisdom, so he appreciated the notion, but Enom's demeanour told him something else; or at least put questions in his mind. Self-aware predators always looked out for trouble. While they were vicious, they were *most certainly* also always fearful. Talk helped him see his enemies, and his rivals, and gave him chance to manipulate them; but even so, he could almost immediately *smell* someone's nature, or see

them clearly in their eyes, when he first met him. His fame, or *infamy*, preceding him, made these reactions more pronounced and clearer. He *liked* that.

Hedden Spron lowered himself down straight after Enom. He put his arm around him and instructed Enom to laugh; right now, and just enough to show that his mood had lifted. Enom had not just been tired of the endless chatter; it was the *violence*, and the *love* of violence, within it. He had been a man of violence, but *not* for its sake. It was for honour and service that he did what he did, and why he did not question it until now.

“You need to settle some, Enom. All eyes watch you, and I am sure Plenilec stands at the rail watching you now. You are not as stable as you have always been. He was searching you tonight.”

Enom laughed again, and so did Hedden, to keep up the ruse.

“I am not afraid of him,” said Enom, yet knowing that he was cowering, with every false laugh he breathed.

“I don’t know if you are restless, or the Change is in you?”

Enom looked to him with thoughtful eyes, and Hedden laughed and slapped him on the back, both honestly, and for the sake of the ruse. Enom allowed himself a small smile, quite surprised that this old Icer Lord had such vision.

“My goodness me, Enom. *Not you,*” said Hedden, very much enjoying this outcome. He had not imagined that the great Hunter Lord Enom Clovek would be one of those who would rise in the *early* dawning of this new time, and Enom allowed himself a smile at the seeming impossibility of it too.

Plenilec *was* on deck and had been watching the two old friends. He now turned and retired for the night. He was happy with the body language he had seen, thinking that Enom's impatience, and his love for his daughter, was weakening him. He had never seen Enom this weak. But he knew just the same, that a weak Enom was still a formidable force, and that he would have Enom beside him in battle, or to any purpose, before any other; no matter what.

"I do not know this thing, but it *has* me. I will have to see what it means to my life, and how it will shape my intent and my actions."

"There is a *great Change* upon us Enom, and it will take men like you to guide it forward. Take care not to shatter that which came before it, even though it must change. You must bring people *with* you. You must learn to fight with your hands tied behind your back, and with kindness in your heart."

"I see darkness in our way though, Hedden, and..."

Hedden stopped him. "Enough. Your pathway is yours to find and know, and though we have now talked, I wish none of it. Each of us must find his own way. My talking with you at this time does not mean that we will talk on, or again, about the intent in our hearts. Just know, that I seem by *the fates*, to have the job of establishing our kind in this Change, and helping, step by small step, guide them through it as it rises. I must be *with* them, and need work more slowly than you. This is my role, and yours is yours. Once you show your hand, if your heart has *actually* changed, then we may even be at odds. I *will not* stand for you, because I must have the trust of those who cannot see yet. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Enom, now after this surprise interaction, even surer that he travelled the right path. Even if it was unknown, it also somehow felt known. This

confirmation coming through a great Icer Lord like Hedden filled his heart, yet now knew that he would have to feel his *own* way as he entered this new terrain.

EEDRA STOOD AT THE WHEEL. It was early morning. Deveroux and Able were below deck trying to work out the amulet, and Dossd stood at the rail, looking out to all the green. It was so strange to see his back bent a little as he leant on the rail. He always stood tall when he stood; even mostly so when he sat. Eedra loved that, and she loved the honour in him; she had always loved these in her father's bearing too.

“The New Spring will change our world to this extent, Eedra,” he said, gently and aloud, waving his arm to indicate the great green that lay below.

She had appreciated the telepathic privacy in his speaking aloud, but now opened her mind and heart to him, and they conversed telepathically. There were some boundaries though, as while two may become one; there is also a line that no one may cross.

Dossd knew they would need time to really know each other, and that they needed to venture on in life to see each other truly, but he also felt her heart and the flow of fate. These things allowed a deeper communion than he had thought wise. The coming together of two souls takes time, no matter the pathway. In any case, Dossd and Eedra talked long of their families, their beliefs, and their aspirations, and in these things more respect was found in each for the other. It is a strange thing about true love; that it requires respect. Without it there can be no true union.

In time then, she came to ask, “*What of our differing beliefs? I may change in time, but I may not.*”

*“Who we are, no matter what school of thought or religion we claim, bears out in what we do. What is destructive, lost, or reprehensible, is always so, no matter the high name that we claim leads us. What is unhealthy is unhealthy. What shines, shines, and truly only actions of love are sublime. You are not a label, or a thought system, you are the potential of love. Bow to no thought that bars it from what you do, because all life lies in what we are; in our intent. It shows in what we do, and in the clothes of the expressions we utter.”*

*“The clothes of the expressions?”* she asked, understanding the rest.

*“Kindness, respect, moderation, honesty...these clothe what we say. Is it not the essence of how we say things that makes them heard; trustworthy, useful, and effective?”* he communicated, clothing his words in genuineness and humility.

*“It is,”* she answered, her words, clothed in love.

They sat there a while in the peace of that beautiful place; the place two souls gather in as they seek the deeper union. They were both silent, knowing that while this bliss would not always be so, it could be so more often with hard work. There is always struggle after the initial joy of love’s early morn, but as couples, it is that we work our way through life together in both happiness and hardship; that we work through the old pain that lies hid in each of us together, which puts the foundation under a union. Hardship, expectations, and old wounds, though, can bind or destroy, depending on whether we serve ourselves, or our partner before ourselves.

Consultation, continued effort, and authentic communication are the tools for the building of such a foundation, just as they are for when children come, and family grows. The power of seeking the truth of a matter together by the power of consultation, and the

momentum of love and continued effort, would create many victories; the many victories that create truer deeper love.

*IT WAS VERY HUMID AND THE AIR HUNG HEAVIER, as the day rolled on. The Armada, and the small airship of the friends, cut their way through it, all feeling the impending storms. Each had their struggle; Deveroux and Able, the faint hope of return home; Enom's new path, which he could not, or would not, intimate to anyone beyond who he had already; Eedra's concern of her father's reaction, and what that might mean for her and Dossd, and her and her father; Hedden's concern that his society may crash violently, rather than wind down, if he did not manage things well.*

*Something deeper in all of them hung as heavy as the physical swelter now did on their outer beings; well, all but Dossd. Dossd was straight and true, he knew who he was and his intent, and while he had love for Eedra, he accepted the fragility and changeability of life and would honour whatever The All would bring. He believed in the life beyond this one, and that these, and all other souls, were eternal. So, indeed, nothing could truly separate him and Eedra for long; only The All.*

*Dossd had come to understand through his inner vision, that 'going out' would be part of his life beyond today. He had 'gone out' from his clan, but the meaning he felt from the Old Man in his inner experience was different. Since the Old Man of the clan had used these particular words, he had wondered at them and sought understanding of them. He came to believe that he would not stay in The Great Chasm; he knew that it would be his future to take the Message of Nov-Cikel, Edossd, out. He did not know to where, or what that would mean or even look like, but he would be doing it. There was a Writing that Able had once shared with him that came now to his soul on this subject of going out...*

***“...conquer the citadels of the hearts of men.”<sup>10</sup>***

*It gave him much to contemplate, because it talked of the hearts of men.*

*So, the sultry day rolled on, and the storms wandered the skies of the afternoon and into the early evening, as did all these souls in their airships, dodging here and there seeking the quietest winds; most not succeeding, while keeping to course.*

*There was another soul not burdened by the day or seeking reassurance. It was Plenilec. Lost in his surety, his arrogance, and with his appetites currently fulfilled, he embraced the humidity and heat of the day, as his imagination wandered to what he would do with that alien once he caught up with him. The joy he would take in visiting long and excruciating pain on that creature buoyed his being. He now stood at the rail outside his quarters, and he took a deep breath in as his mind wandered free in the imagination of his lower self; his intention singular.*

IT WAS A TIME OF CLEANUP IN THE GREAT CHASM. The Passing had been far stronger this time, but the people here had learned a great deal in the almost two hundred years since the first efforts were made to garden the desert here. The followers of Nov-Cikel, Edosd had seen two Greater Passings over this time. These were not The Passing of Stremeti, they were the *passing down* of the mantle of the Faith of The Messenger; the first of these, the passing down, upon the death of Nov-Cikel, to the one they called The Interpreter. She had been deemed the only interpreter of His Message, and some years after *her* leaving

this corporeal life, the mantle had been passed down again to a Great Council which was now the steward of what they called the Beautiful Way.

At each Greater Passing, there had been posturing talk and those who *'knew better'*, and once the attempts of a usurper who fell to his own whisperings. The talk of people, and these intrigues, found some even leaving the Chasm and the Beautiful Way, but the instructions of the Messenger had made it very clear how the mantle would be passed on. The Passing of Stemeti was a small challenge to their foundations in comparison. There are always usurpers, and whispering, at times of change, but there are also pure souls who stand up to stave off the destructive winds at such times. We always meet the devil at the crossroads, it is said; as an individual, as groups, and as a kind.

It was now many years since that last challenge; since the Great Council was formed. The nature of this Council had been clearly delineated by the Messenger, and those who stood firm as it came into being were selfless. The crisis at each change was followed by victory, as the Faith had been safeguarded and led forward by the Covenant; the instructions of Nov-Cikel, Edosd and by the will of The Interpreter who had held the mantle of this inviolable Faith.

There was another Covenant though, which those here called The Power. Its other name was the Eternal Covenant. It was a clear covenant between The All and the people of Temelj. It was between The All and each heart. The agreement was that The All would never leave the people alone. He would send a Messenger each thousand years or so, to reorient them back to the spirit and take them forward to the next step of their evolution. For the people who accepted this Faith, and any before it, their part of that great contract was to obey the laws set down by the Messenger of their times. These laws were created by each of these Great Physicians for the wellbeing and security of those who followed Them; the Laws

themselves a healing for the maladies of each particular age, and for regenerating societal wellbeing.

This wider covenant was an *Eternal* Covenant because it had always been this way, was still this way, and would always be this way. The ways of The All did not change for anyone's opinion or vain imaginings, and the differences between the Messengers and their Revelations were only His to command. This Great Covenant always sent forth a new Messenger, the Word of the Messenger, His spiritual exhortations and explanations, and new social laws to suit each age. These all brought forth to remedy society's breakdown, and to build a foundation for the future society.

The Power now lay within the chamber of The Great Council. It was a Circle of Light that stood upright there. No member of the Council sought to own its power, as each was just a man; and in any case, *only* the various institutions of the Beautiful Way held power. Those on these bodies only *served*. Power here, was not anyone's. Those on these Institutions sought all knowledge of any particular thing or situation; searching into the truth of each matter, while using the Guidance from The Word to create wise and considered action upon it.

There were also no clergy in this place, only the connection of each heart to The All; and all were united by this one bond and their bond with Nov-Cikel. *Unity in diversity* had been attained here, and although each soul and the Institutions struggled to reach the spiritual level required of them, they had matured quite well in such a short time since the inception of this Cause. Transition from the old ways and ideas took time, and all that mattered was that the future, and higher being, was strived for. A baby cannot become an adult overnight.

Each month there was a meeting to pray and socialise. Also, for the Institutions to report on their work to the community, and for individuals of the community here to share

their ideas and learning with these Institutions. These meetings were held in various areas of The Great Chasm and were indeed Institutions within themselves. Thankfully, they too were slowly but surely maturing. There had been hiccups, egos, and misunderstandings over the years, but the Spirit of Nov-Cikel, Edosd had ensured continued effort and evolution. In *all things*, in the The Great Chasm, there was evolution.

While the Beautiful Way was being laid down by the efforts of each soul and generation, all realised they would not see its full beauty and nature until it had fully unfolded. Like the first developing roots of a plant, or the sprout, cannot see ahead the full nature of the bloom of a rose, or the fruit of a flower. One cannot see the bloom only in the bud, so they worked and built the Beautiful Way to the Guidance. It was in this state of humility that its best evolution would be created, and only Nov-Cikel knew the full picture of the Plant that would grow from the Seed that He had planted. To watch the Beautiful Way grow, and aid its evolution, was the joy of life here in The Great Chasm.

A deep volition behind all the activity in this place, even in the clean-up after The Passing, was to serve this new culture's growth for the sake of all Temelj; for the peace and security of *all* people. This, will to act, was born out of the Knowledge enshrined in the spiritual Writings. It was, for all, the vision of a greater future, the definition and scope of spirituality itself, and true understanding by which volition could be informed and unleashed.

These Writings defined spirituality as...*the process of holistic development of spiritual capacities latent in each individual's nature*. This too was the aim of every soul, for as the individual spirit of each evolved and transformed, so too would The Chasm; just as The Chasm's evolution would support the high aim of every soul.

The people here did not just talk and talk, or just pray and pray. They also deepened in The Word and gathered the will to act, the volition, and they lived very normal and

purposeful lives. No act or work was considered lesser; no soul greater, even though individual ability, talent, and creativity were indeed appreciated and praised. The people here, like any other, simply went about their daily life, and as stronger bonds of love evolved so did the beauty of this place for every soul. It was, to best explain it, a human place, a living place, a place of all peoples.

THEY HAD SUCCEEDED IN DODGING THE STORMS. The winds had been quite strong when they skirted them, but Eedra had saved them from the worst of it. There was no lightning in the storms of Temelj, and they only lasted a month after The Passing. The discharge and balancing of ions were strangely settled by the great bolts that passed between the two planets. But the great lightning bolts of The Passing could also bring great tragedy beyond the winds and storms; before the coming of the green, and the endless fruits it bore. One had to be careful, circumscribed, and prepared, and while most were, and parents attentive, many souls were still taken by chaos of these times.

Eedra and Deveroux had lowered the anchors on sundown and gone down to fill them with sand. Eedra's mog loved this time of day, and their *important work* of course. Though with his new *best friend* Deveroux on the job, he couldn't help but play. It took them into the mid evening to finally stop it playing '*run away*', and finally coax the mog aboard. The Agent had a bit to say while they worked to catch it; none that could be shared in polite company.

The two of them, make that the three of them, came down to the lower deck after they had winched up. The friends then shared a meal and some talk on the open forward deck of this lower deck. They talked of this and that, and of where they were headed the next day. Dossd would only give instruction on the heading as they went and made clear the

requirement of zigzagging here and there. It was because he was a Walker, and always cautious. Even though he trusted his companions, he needed to make sure, that should they be intercepted, he would be the only one who knew the actual position of The Great Chasm. He would take any pain, or give up his own life, to keep it safe if need be. He had explained this, and though there were very good arguments to the contrary, he had his oath to fulfil.

The friends ate well, and the banter reached a far higher level this evening as they had now come to know each other's hearts a little, and each other's idiosyncrasies *even better*. Eedra had her cabin; with her mog of course. The men had the open upper deck to sleep on. Able had loved this, while the older men did not seem to see the excitement in it. Dossd missed the sand and the stars as he reflected at night. All he could see looking up was the elongated balloon and a little of the sky between it and the solid railing. It was a hard deck too, with only some thick sheeting folded up for padding, not the soft moulding sand that he was used to. Deveroux missed his wife and his comfortable bed. He missed waking up and playing havoc with his two girls, as they were now in their teenage years, and fair game; well, as far as he was concerned. God help the poor young men that may court them later on, as *they* would be *far* more than fair game to *this* loving father.

They had shared stories over the nights they had spent with each other so far. It had been a treasure trove to all of them, but mostly to Eedra and Able. They drank the stories in, even though they were glad to share theirs too. Tonight, Dossd requested The Eighth Great Story from Able. He had been so taken by the stories so far and had deemed tonight to be a fitting occasion. The banter they now shared made it clear to him that they had gelled and were one in purpose, so he praised their unity and announced that a Great Story was in order to celebrate their effort.

All of them sat on the floor, as was the tradition, and Able began...

*“Bahá’u’lláh was exiled further and further away from his home, in the hopes that he would have no influence on the people of His country. He was born a Noble, and people saw the Greatness in Him even though He had not yet declared Himself openly as the Promised One of All Ages. One of these exiles was to Baghdad. After many years there, and once punctuated by two years alone in the mountains to the north, He was again to be moved on; as, to the dismay of His enemies He had gained great love and admiration from the people of this city; high and low.*

*While it was a great loss to those of that city and His followers who would be left behind, and his further exile another seeming crisis in the fortunes of the Faith, it was indeed to be a great time of victory. Bahá’u’lláh had been in a “set time of concealment”, serving the community of The Bab; “The Gate” through which “He Whom God would make Manifest” would come. It was Bahá’u’lláh’s advent that The Bab had prophesied, and now, it was time to Declare openly His Person and His mission.*

*Tents were pitched in what would become known as the Garden of Ridvan, just outside the city. He, his family, and his companions, spent twelve days there before being moved on to another place of exile. The authorities sending them there to get them away from the people. Bahá’u’lláh only told a few of His Mission at this time, but the outpouring of thousands of visitors upon his leaving made clear the realisation of the general populace of the intimation of the Nature of His Being. He was the new Messenger of God for today, prophesied in all the great scriptures. The Cycle of Fulfilment had more than begun.*

***“Of the exact circumstances attending that epoch-making Declaration we, alas, are but scantily informed. The words Bahá’u’lláh actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mirza Yahya, the***

*identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate. The fragmentary description left to posterity by His chronicler Nabil is one of the very few authentic records we possess of the memorable days He spent in that garden.*

*"Every day," Nabil has related, "ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the centre of the floor of His blessed tent. So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it. All these roses Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom He dismissed from His presence every morning to be delivered, on His behalf, to His Arab and Persian friends in the city."*

*"One night," he continues, "the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could hear distinctly His voice. He continued to walk until, pausing in the midst of one of these avenues, He observed: 'Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?'"<sup>11</sup>*

Dosd sat long in silence after that story as its beauty filled his soul with illimitable joy. He walked amongst that story; those tents, and the rows of rose bushes. He even took the

role of Nabil, watching and writing, and feeling the story even more deeply. He would never take the role of The Messenger though, as that was not to be done. It was that which could not be imagined, and dangers lurked within such imagining. There was so much energy and spirit in that Ridvan Garden that Dossd stayed there a very long time.

WHEN DOSSD CAME OUT OF THAT PLACE ALL HAD LEFT THE FOREDECK. He wandered into the galley and saw that his duties had been performed by his cohorts. He smiled and was pleased as he climbed the ladder to the upper deck. Both Deveroux and ‘the kid’, as Deveroux had deemed him, were well asleep.

Dossd then settled in and reflected, as he always did on his day. Today was a fine day and these souls now dearer to him. He had even taken instruction on flying from Eedra, feeling the cultural spirit of the Icers in her words just as Able had told him he would. He had enjoyed steering the airship and learning new skills. These two had worked well together in this short time, with of course, some misunderstandings and awkwardness at times. But this awkwardness had begun to turn more towards humour as they relaxed more with each other.

Eedra now broke into Dossd’s thoughts, which caught him by surprise, as he was not used to any intrusion on his reflection. He had walked alone for many years, and then the years with Able where the boundaries had been clear and respected. He knew it would be different with Eedra to some extent, as it was a different relationship, so he did not mind. She had started asking him about The Great Stories, with no knock at the door, so to speak. It had not been intentional, as she was only thinking that she had wanted to ask Dossd about a feeling she had about the story and her intent had sent out her thoughts. When she realised what had happened, she simply went on anyway.

This last Great Story had affected her in a way she had not experienced before. She asked many questions, and finished with, “How can you know?”

“I suppose belief in The Great Ones begins with search and some faith; the search usually rising from an inkling, a shared idea that moves us, a strong life experience, or a feeling like you have just had. These, in time, with a search for proofs and some effort, becomes knowing, or certitude. Young Able has told me that his grandfather came from unbelief to belief. He told Able the story of how his heart knew it immediately, and how it took time for his mind to catch up. Maybe you need to relax with these questions and simply feel what is right. Do not rush it. Maybe, like true love, it needs time to become real.”

Eedra was warmed by his metaphor, but said, “I would need more of an anchor than that. For me, physical proof is my anchor, and needs be as tangible as the stone.”

“There is much tangible evidence of the Great Ones. I cannot say that you will see it that way, but I will attempt to share a little of what I have found.”

“Thanks, Dossd.”

“It is my pleasure, Eedra,” answered Dossd, both of them feeling a depth of love. “The greatest evidence of God, and the Messengers, is the Message itself; and the Messengers *Themselves*. What They Revealed is the *greatest* proof, but Their Presence, how They lived, and what They sacrificed, are also a great proofs. They all suffered greatly because their claim is the *highest* claim, and the darkness is always deep in the time and place they come to us. Those in power are usually ignorant of spirit at such a time, as the Messengers come when the Spirit needs be re-energised. These leaders are usually fearful to lose what they have, or to somehow not please their people and lose their position. The

priests of every age, it seems also, mostly stand against These Lights of God due to ignorance and fear; and maybe some arrogance.”

“I am sorry Dossd, but it *is* a big claim, as you say. From my experience, only madmen make such claims, or dark people who seek to manipulate. It is a lot to ask any leader, in any time, to take such a claim seriously.”

“I understand your sentiment, as you are not used to a culture of belief. I believe that you need to read Their Words, the stories of Their life, and see if They gained materially from Their mission, or whether They drained the cup of woe to bring back life to their kind. How do you know unless you look diligently into their claim? How can you see clearly with a biased mind? If your mind is already made up, then you will see what you want to see.”

“I don’t know if I would see anything other than what I see now, and just because they suffer it does not mean they are Messengers from a Creator God.”

Dossd put his head to the side, even though not in her physical company, and said, “If you feel in your being the Holy Spirit in Their story, like you said you felt from The Eighth great story, if you look into their writings and exhortations, and see the benefit that may be attained for our kind by the fulfilment of what they call for in Their Message; are not these then proofs for you? What *would* you *stand* behind in this world? What *cause* would *fire* your blood? Have you *ever* felt this feeling from your politics, or even poetry? When one feels The Holy Spirit, it is different to other feelings. As you have said, you have experienced something different tonight.”

“Maybe, I need to look into these Writings you speak of?”

“Yes. But know that they are copious. Nov-Cikel wrote many tomes, with no need of edit, the sheer weight of which is in itself another deep proof. When we reach The Chasm, you may access these texts, and maybe take proof of the value of those Words from what you see before your own eyes in that place. There will, I believe, be strong evidence of the greatness of Nov-Cikel, Edossd in what has developed there.”

“Sure. I can’t just *believe* like you.”

“I made my choice to believe when I passed into adulthood. It was mine to choose. It is not wrong for you to seek proof; yet I believe it *is* blameworthy not to seek at all.”

“Then, I will search; but with *no* expectations, Dossd.”

“Your soul is yours. The responsibility to seek the truth of this or any other matter, only yours.”

“Then tell me a little more before we sleep.”

“Well, young Able shared this quote on the subject of God, man, and his Messengers, it is said...

***“Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation ... Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth [the prophet of God] every***

*man will advance and develop until he attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed. It is for this very purpose that in every age and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared amongst men, and have evinced such power as is born of God and such might as only the Eternal can reveal.”<sup>12</sup>*

“I again, certainly feel something in those words Dossd, but spirituality is such an ethereal thing. I don’t think it will ever be quite real for me,” admitted Eedra, honestly.

“Then, I will, over time, reacquaint you with our history. What I just shared with you, was not just about something ethereal. Much of our past, and the understanding of religions that renewed again and again our civilisations, have been cast away, lost, or been changed by the dogma of closed minds, both secular and religious. There is proof of these words in our history.”

Able then joined in the discussion. He simply joined in, as he would have any night by the fire; now that it was a shared search.

“Spirituality is not just ethereal, to me. I mean, it is in a way, and I love that, but spirituality is essentially very tangible, in real life, and alive in our day-to-day actions; actions which are high, moral, and socially responsible. It is also very real, in that it creates a deep volition, a strong will and inspiration, within me to help build a cohesive, peaceful, and nurturing civilisation.

Bahá’u’lláh says...

*“In one of the Tablets these words have been revealed: O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behaviour. Valiant acts will ensure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power.”<sup>13</sup>*

He also wrote...

*“It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action. ... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth.”<sup>14</sup>*

“Maybe, that is enough for now,” offered Dossd. “Reflect on these things, and sleep for now. We can continue this process over time. It is good to take the time. All in life here is a process.”

“My goodness, that’s what my father taught me; again, and again,” added Eedra.

“We call that a confirmation. Some may call it a coincidence. It’s up to you how you see it.”

“I must say, I *do* feel it is what you say. But it’s also a coincidence for me right now,” said Eedra, yet a little unsure what she was seeing and feeling. “It seems I require more proof to see reality as you do.”

“Right now, you lay in your cabin, with two aliens and a Sandwalker on the deck above you. They are even your friends, when only recently, you were hunting them. You are telepathic, the only known Icer, or woman, to be so, and there are even some deep feelings between you and the Walker,” stated Able. “Not only that, but you fly these creatures to The Great Chasm. What measure of coincidence or random happening can change your being and your life so fully, so quickly? What power existent on this world could have made all that possible? To say it is by design and driven by deeper power is just as plausible, if not more so. Open your heart to the spiritual eddies, just like you do with the wind as you fly your airship.”

They all felt the spirit in those words, and with that, returned to themselves; the noises of the night animals, and the insects below, taking over their ears. Eedra’s soul was growing, just as the green verdure below her had sprouted suddenly from The Passing.

# *Action*

Enom loved the wind in his face out on deck. The moist air reminded him of his home in the high Western Mountains, but it was far warmer here. Yet even though the moist air was nice for a change he would have much preferred the dry hot desert wind. He had seen two Passings as an adult, and while he most definitely enjoyed the great green below, he equated the dry desert breeze, or its often still air, with action. Whenever he and his men went out from the mountains it was like they were more alive. The purpose of their work had filled them; their work and the danger, both raised their juices.

He knew that this time was different; that the foe he now faced was among his cohorts; maybe all his cohorts, but he still revelled in the challenge of what may come, and what it may take to seize victory in such an uncertain situation. He knew that he had to find his daughter and take a whole new tack; a new direction, which was at best a mystery to him; all this while appeasing Hedden Spron's sensibilities and keeping ahead of Plenilec. This was going to be no easy task, but he had found his peace and his purpose, most especially after his talk with Hedden.

He shook his head at that old warrior. He did not see Hedden as one that would allow for change. He should not have been surprised, as there were many times over the years that

he would talk of Eedra's mother, and cryptically, of old ways becoming new ways. He often talked about the evolution of things and the current breakdown in the Icer culture; especially in the north. His introduction to Etera, adding to Enom's education. It was a wonder that the old Icer had not gone in search of the Great Cham himself, but now on reflection, Enom could see that Hedden more so revered the Old Religion of the Icers, even though he kept aloof from it in the open. He was certainly part of the change, but there was also no doubt in Enom *at all* that Hedden would *see him dead* if he threatened the old man's hunt; to deliver his people more gently to the new ways over time and with much of their culture intact.

It was so clear to Enom right now, that the nature of their culture now made it unable to actively change, let alone evolve. He did know it had much to give, and loved it as Hedden did, but how much of its nature would remain with *the change* he could not be sure. Lord Spron's work would help many an Icer through what was coming, but the culture would have to change immensely. Enom had also seen clearly, after his release from his own inner battle, that the foundation of his culture *had* come from The Power; that this Old Religion had formed the basis of The Majority Order, creating an honourable culture before it slowly fell away as unimportant, and as honour slipped to a lesser form in the likes of Plenilec and the childish mores of the Northerners.

Plenilec waved to Hedden, and to Enom, in a wide wave that could be seen far away. It informed them of a new heading. Hedden had suggested that Plenilec take charge of the search, and Enom had grudgingly accepted the suggestion. Enom was a leader, and while he realised that the older warrior was playing Plenilec, and that he had to push Enom aside a little, he still did not like it. The old man was moving his pieces, in a way to help Enom, and to cover himself. Plenilec was happy to take the lead and the nature of Enom's grudging acceptance helped raise no alarm. He saw it as an honour that these two older men were affording him.

Enom did not know how things would pan out. He could probably not even depend upon his crew when things started to heat up; especially if the Walker was found in, or even seen near, his daughter's ship. He was now alone. His intent had come full circle, his goals completely changed, as he had radically changed since he had set up the search, and he could not turn or dissolve such an armada now. With Plenilec on watch and Hedden on task it would not be possible. He was also only now realising just how much of his own strength had been in the Order that backed him, and in the men that surrounded him. He was only alone two other times in his life; once standing before the onslaught of Eedra's mother challenging his beliefs, and his own recent struggle within himself.

He realised that he was not strong at all, but yet, would have to be, to enter this fight alone and unsure. He then thought of Hedden being of *some* help, but certainly no guarantee. It was then, that an idea of Lessd being a more active and willing ally presented itself. He then wondered at the magical nature of providence, as hope began to rise. He had never thought to actively engage the Walker before now. He had just been glad that he might have a willing hand when, and if, things came to a head.

"IT'S *NOT HERE?* WHAT DO YOU MEAN, IT'S *NOT HERE?*" sprouted Deveroux, incredulously. "Aren't you some kind'a *super tracker*, or sumthin'?"

"Are you *not an Agent?* Have you *not known* the nature of life?" challenged Dossd. "It is not where it should be."

"It's obviously not where you *thought* it was," stated Deveroux.

"How do we find it then?" asked Eedra.

"*Process*," ventured Able, confidently.

“Yes, process. There is *always* a test of faith,” added Dossd.

“Yeah, my faith *in you, tall man,*” challenged Deveroux, like he meant it, but then smiling. “Where do we go from here?”

“Maybe it needs to be found in the humility of walking,” said Dossd.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“There is a way that Sandwalkers find their way around,” explained Able, “They...*we*, have to *walk* by what we learn as we go, as well as what we feel and see with inner sight, because *none* are given the easy way to The Chasm. We start from scratch and earn our way.”

“We are trained, and we have The Word of Nov-Cikel, Edossd; we have the stories too,” added Dossd, and Able nodded.

Deveroux sat back and breathed in and out deeply from his nose, not real sure about all this at all.

“We anchor here, and in the morning the boy and I will walk.”

Able patted the mog, and said, “Did you hear that boy? *We get to walk.*” The mog knew the word and was very excited; even more by the animation in Able’s voice.

“I can’t see the attraction myself, and I’m *not feelin’* this plan,” put in Deveroux, honestly.

“That’s because you have never walked as we do, Mr Deveroux,” said Able, with a smile.

“I’ve *walked*, boy,” stated Deveroux, just like Deveroux said most things. Which had Eedra laughing gently, and Able joining in.

“In *which* pathway did you *walk*?” asked Dossd.

“Whatever path I was given, and I walked it with all I had,” said Deveroux, plainly.

“I walk the scientific path,” put in Eedra, definitely not to be put aside by the challenge between these men.

“I have walked the path of religion,” added Able, very sure he would have fun with *this* conversation, and maybe learn something by playing his part within it.

“Let me tell you about *pathways*, boy...”

“There are the two pathways of the dual being, of the self-aware physical creatures that we are,” interrupted Dossd, with a slight smile; one that Deveroux enjoyed, so he stayed silent. “The two pathways of *science* and *spirit* are one, if they be true, and are most surely not the pathways of the imagination or of a lack of process. Many see one of these pathways, alone, as the way. They see theirs as the greater path, and so will not walk the lesser. Some walk what they see as the greater path, and after finding the lesser path, later in life, find it to be no doubt superior. In the end, both pathways, when one, are far superior, as the actions of those that walk only *one* of these generally come to little; and sometimes far worse than that.”

“Well, I suppose that’s how you see it *tall man*. I walk a path of doing the hard stuff. The only *way* to get any real self-respect is from taking on responsibility. Spirit and meaning, to me, come from serving others with what we’ve been given. There’s no spirit without it being an action. Not as I see it anyway. Responsibility, not some *hoodoo* quest for freedom, brings happiness; and delayed gratification brings strength and contentment. Respect is earned by service to others; from standing tall and doing the good thing. That’s my pathway, a *real* pathway.”

“Living well, and spirit, does not have to mean religion. I feel that I can work it out myself and rely on my mind,” added Eedra.

Dossd called out his call of great humour, and said, “What of your *spirit* before knowing The Clans, *hunter*? Honour with such spirit is not enough. It needs to stand on the foundation of *True Knowledge*, then the volition and actions that rise from it are *high* and *moral* and *good*.”

“Without humility before a higher power, there can’t actually be spirit, young lady,” added Deveroux, smiling at Dossd, in a way that said, ‘you didn’t see *that* comin’, *did ya*, *boy*’, as he backed up the tall Sandwalkers view. “There’s been a lot of history, on a lot of planets, in which peoples have had to walk their self-made story again and again, until they finally got that. We’re puny forms, *babies* of the universe. Arrogance gets us less, *far less*,” argued Deveroux.

“But there have also been religionists who forgot the essence and knowledge of The Creator and made their religions just as ugly and arrogant. Earth’s history is full of those stories,” added Able, thoughtfully.

“Yep, spirit is spirit. It is either there, or it isn’t. You can feel it,” said Deveroux.

“All emanates from The All. All comes to be what The All has spoken it to be. Free will is part of the process of life and so it can take His wisdom from us. He is beyond and Lord over His creation. He sustains creation, all things, and if he removed this sustaining power of the spirit, all then would cease to exist,” stated Dossd.

“This is quite a lot to take in,” said Eedra, her mind hurting.

“You took in all the science that I shared with you in *The Passing*, without having to know it all. You felt the wonder of it though, eh,” offered Deveroux. “You’re fighting this, and not allowing it, just because it’s religion.”

“It offends my scientific mind, my reason, my intelligence. *I can’t help it.*”

“If I can give you a tip, honey, I’ve found that intelligence is not a good indicator of spiritual development...So, don’t try and get there singly by the intellectual way...that’s too long a road. You have to use your mind, but the answers lie in your heart. All the answers to life are in our heart and in feelings of deeper knowing, not in our emotions, *or* in our head. Life is complex and it’s what things do on the ground that gives out their proof. Walk with your heart.”

“And this is why we must walk to find *The Great Chasm*,” said Dossd, putting a full stop on the conversation.

THE ARMADA SAILED ON, AND LESSD FOUND ENOM ON THE DECK. He again, stood behind him, and to the right. Enom turned to him and nodded in clear meaning that they should confide. The Walker heard his meaning and now talked telepathically with him. He shared with him all the information about his daughter; information that he had not shared from the markets, and from the clan folk he had tracked. He also shared that there were two who had escaped from him some time back; two who had fled into the night. They too, had been at the market in the time his daughter was there; one a Walker, and the other an alien.

*“Your daughter asked many questions of the clan folk who traded there, about *The Great Chasm*, *The Walkers*, and their beliefs. She confided in one old woman who saw her feelings, that she was connected to a Walker in heart somehow. Your daughter seemed unsure*

*of its full nature at the time, but when she left the market, the old woman believed she was set to find him. It also seems that she is telepathic,”* finished Lessd, knowing that sharing all this information was a great risk to his life, but he had a knowing in his being that Enom had been changed.

Enom explained that he had eventually been told of Eedra’s possible affection for this Walker, and that his love for his daughter was a strong aspect in driving the transformation in his thinking. He added, *“Her mother was telepathic too. As are you it seems, old friend. I had heard your kind were, and even knowing that she was, I still thought it was just another aspect of the trickery you are taught. On reflection, I suppose it was my wish to push memory of her away and remain ignorant of these things, so my Icer ground would not shake. Have you ever read my thoughts?”*

Lessd then let out his breath, as Enom’s answer was even more than he had hoped for. He knew there had been change, but this much comfort with talk of his daughter and a Walker now showed him the depth of Enom’s surrender.

*“I have never sought your thoughts since the day you decided not to end my life. It was a thing of honour.”*

*“I didn’t think so, and that is why I may yet trust the Walker my daughter cares for. It is much to take in, and part of me struggles with their bond, but you have acted with great honour and by you I see Walkers more clearly now. I wonder how many others of your kind you have saved from me?”*

*“I saved a few.”*

*“I had thought so. Only a Walker could do what you have done, with honour intact, and I am glad you have sought this meeting, Lessd. I am very thankful that you have opened*

*my eyes more surely to what may be ahead. You are my only confidant now. There is no other. It will be a miracle if we can extricate ourselves, save my daughter, and this Walker and his companion. For her sake and theirs, I hope she has not found him yet."*

DOSSD, ABLE, AND A *VERY* EXCITED MOG HEADED OFF, as Deveroux and Eedra poured the sand out of the anchors. It was strange and wonderful for Able to walk the ground of Temelj like this. He was used to sand and dirt in all their many varied forms and wondered how he would *see* in all this complexity of green.

"It is harder to see in the verdure. To have such abundance can blind you. We must be watchful, mindful, and circumspect. We cannot wander as freely here, but we have the mog. It will no doubt be of use," explained Dossd, as he looked to the mog giving it instructions, not by words or telepathy, but by just a look. A mog can know much by a look, and so can we; should we choose to be aware of it.

"It's good to be Walking again," said Able.

"Yes. It is, *indeed, good, Able Jones.*"

There was a feeling that laced those words and Able picked up on it. "What's on your mind, old friend?"

"Can you *not* tell from the clothes of my words?"

Able, let go of his mind and felt the words and how they were said, and nodded, as he realised. "Yes, we may be parting soon my old friend," and with those words, tears filled their eyes.

The young man had not been focused on that until now, as there had been so much to be done, in the here and now, as they had flown above the ground. With the Agent's work on the amulet going well, Dossd knew that Able's exit from this world *may* come too quickly for them to reflect on their time together, and to give each other the farewell that their great journey deserved. He had decided that this would be the time; while they had some time and still walked in search of the Holy Place. It seemed that there could not be a more fitting time.

"We have walked far, and you have grown, young man."

"We have walked far," said Able, plainly; as plainly as Dossd would have.

Dossd appreciated that, knowing that he had brought this child well through to manhood. Then, he let go a little, and said, "My heart will tear when you depart my company, but your mother's heart will mend, so I can at least be held by that thought."

"My heart will tear too, Dossd. I could not have asked for as good a father as you."

"An uncle, *maybe*," offered Dossd.

"A *father*," stated Able, as plainly as the driest of Sandwalker's could.

Dossd laughed his cry of humour, "You have learned very well our ways," and then, with great depth, "and *yes*, you too are *my son*."

The two did not embrace. It would not have been right. There would be the right time to embrace. That would be when all was truly done, and not before that time. They simply walked on and talked; reflecting on all the struggles and learning, all the graces and joys, of their path through the desert together.

Eedra now looked down from above as she deftly sailed her airship, following the two below. She watched Dossd and Able. They were having a bit of a hard time with all the plants; zigzagging through clumps of them, and jumping over others.

“It’s just like dealing with more people down there, and being in too good a paddock,” mused Deveroux.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, these two have been out in the desert, walkin’ on flat ground; and maybe *a few* sand hills.”

Eedra laughed as the desert was mostly dunes.

Deveroux got the humour but continued, “Well, it’s a *lot* less complicated, and easier to be detached there. When we have fruit all about us, and more people to deal with, well, then it gets complicated to walk free. You’ve been sailing above the complication too, since we all joined up.”

“Oh, I think we will wander in my airship a lot. I am sure he will want to wander the deserts still. I could not imagine us living in a chasm.”

“Well, little darlin’,” started Deveroux, with an *‘I am goin’ ta’ have to share something with you’* tone, “things are going to change when you find that place. That stretched out purple man down there is no friend of meaninglessness.”

“What?” asked Eedra, as she made a slight course change, moving along with only a small sail out below.

“It’s the meaninglessness versus responsibility, thing. He *is* a wanderer, but with a *purpose*; with a *deep* responsibility to his people. He would have to take on something of

value after he gets his Clan people there. A stretched out telepathic purple man like that would die in meaninglessness, and truth be known, so would you. We all would. Responsibility is hard, but meaninglessness is a lingering slow death. There's only joy in wandering if it's to rest your being from strain, to reflect before acting again, or if there's some other purpose in it."

"I like to fly on my ship. I have found people quite closed and quite hard, and I see it even more so now. It is good up here, and really, all I need in a way."

"*Let 'em be hard. None of us are perfect. The strain's always worth the meanin', darlin'. Like I said before, life is complex, and people are flawed, but we just gotta' live life and be grateful. Life is in striving, not ease.*"

"I don't know."

"Meaning was in your life when you believed in the honour of hunting, then exploring, and there's meaning in what you've done since meeting *Stretch*, down there."

"It's Dossd," said Eedra, making clear her respect, and calling for Deveroux's.

"Just havin' some fun, young lady."

"It's *his name*," said Eedra, strongly.

"It's great you've got his back, Eedra. It's a great thing to have someone you care that much about, but your *words* on his behalf will never cut it. It will come down to what you will do *for* him, especially what you do for his needs over your own."

"You keep talking in riddles, like I know what you are talking about," complained Eedra, a little frustrated.

“Well, just to make it clear, you are the daughter of a Hunter Lord, and he’s the prey. The fact that he even travels with you says a lot about him, but it doesn’t say much about you.”

“How dare you! I am sacrificing *everything*; everything I have ever known, and maybe the love of the *only* person who has *always* had my back. My father may *never* know me again, by either the fact that I may not see him again, or that he never accepts Dossd; *if* I ever find a way to get a message to him, that is. I am leaving part of my heart behind with him.”

“Still, you’re doin’ it for yourself,” said Deveroux, plainly.

Eedra was stopped inside with the last statement. She was no shrinking violet. Her father had challenged her strongly, and often. The thing about her too, was that she was never afraid to see herself no matter how much it hurt. Over time, these critical challenges had come to hurt less, and she was mostly quite happy to see herself more clearly. They granted her more strength and freedom.

“Yes. I suppose you’re right. But there’s meaning in where I choose to be right now. I’ve learnt quite a lot and gained a new perspective of the lack of justice in my culture; most especially towards other cultures. I can’t return to my old culture now. Surely, that’s an action; a sacrifice.”

“Yep, I suppose you did act, and you have helped me and the boy too. You have put yourself in a dangerous situation, but you have to ask yourself, is it more dangerous for the one you love? It’s in what we *do* that we find our *real* self, and in what others do an indication of what’s in them.”

“I just act from what I learn, as I always did. I am doing my best, Protector,” said Eedra, with mixed humility and pride.

“I suppose you have. But just to help you a little, those two down there, and especially your Dossd fella’, act from a deep volition that’s guided by their Messengers; mixed with necessity, the terrain, and the conditions. They think for themselves, but knowledge for them is the Words of their Great Ones. If you want to get to know your man, and have his back, you have to know from what, and where, his convictions rise; just as he needs to do that for you.”

“Thanks, Agent from Deeper,” said Eedra, with real appreciation, and again just a smidge of attitude.

“No thanks needed honey. I *love* putting people straight,” he answered, with a wry smile on his face, and still loving this young lady’s spunk.

Both, then, had a bit of a chuckle, and Deveroux got a good punch in the arm, just so he knew for sure where he *actually* stood.

*“WE MUST HAVE A PLAN OF ACTION, LORD CLOVEK.”*

*“I am Enom. We are equal and have always been. In any case, I am no longer truly a Lord.”*

*“We need a plan of action, Enom.”*

*“There are too many variables, and this is not a hunt like other hunts.”*

*“There are always variables, we simply need to put it all down, look to it all, and find what already lies within it that we cannot yet see. There will be pathways of action that we may yet conceive in this process.”*

“Yes, process,” agreed Enom, as if he was finally waking up fully out of a dream. He became unstuck for now, free of the mind fog that had ensued from all the sudden changes now that a call to action had been made.

“Yes,” stated Lessd, *“and maybe one path of action will fit what we may face, or we may need to use two pathways, or just a variation. But if we go in unprepared, there will only be failure.”*

Enom agreed, but now being a little changed, he asked, *“I thought you would more just trust what was to come. Don’t you believe in The Power? Surely, you trust in an Omnipotent Power that looks after you?”*

*“I trust Him implicitly, but I also trust that I am responsible for my actions. I am not a screaming child seeking the teat, and neither are you.”*

Enom enjoyed talking with Lessd, now seeing clearly which of them was the strongest. This Sandwalker had been strong with no ally, in all this time; always unsure of his fate, while standing and delivering for his people. He was stronger than all of them, and Enom was beginning to understand what the power of faith, and courage, combined so strongly in one soul, could do. Like two great metals forged together in the furnaces of God, this Walker had withstood life’s heat, and so had become the strongest and purest form.

# *The Power*

“Clovec, Sed,” said Lessd, out loud; words not unusual to their normal interactions.

*Sed* was a term of honour, which also meant *stand*. Enom immediately stopped dreaming and straightened his back. He looked into the eyes of his crew as he realised that he had again fallen into the fog. His mind had wandered again as it sought more answers and ways to bring together old knowledge and new. Such things take time.

He and Lessd had talked of the many options available to them and had now been waiting for some days as the hunt rolled on. They only communicated when needed, and only together as much as they would usually be, so Enom had again found himself wandering in his mind quite a lot.

He nodded to the crew, who had watched him leaning on the rail and off in his thoughts with a strange stare in his eyes. He now looked at them in a way that said, ‘even in

weakness, we can be strong'. He then turned and nodded to the Walker as he walked past him into the wardroom. Lessd followed him.

*"Why do you save my honour? Why do you save me from myself? I have enslaved you all these years, and still, you do this."*

*"It matters not, why I do this thing. It matters, what you now do. You will see much before our journey is over, but you will have time to reflect and regather your sensibilities later. Now, is a time for focus."*

*"Yes, of course,"* said Enom, still in his thoughts a little. *"You took a big risk on my change of heart, Walker. I honour that. I thank The Power you are here. The design that brought all of us to this new place is intricate, and eloquent. My mind has much work ahead of it."*

Lessd agreed, and then explained to Enom that he had seen the possibility of this change coming in the Hunter Lord who had enslaved him, and that he had seen more clearly the terrain that was ahead of him and more of his journey to who he was today. He then went on to explain, that when he had initially shared the information that he safely could at the time from the clan folk they tracked from The Market, he saw the great love he had for his daughter; while others only saw an enraged man, who wanted to keep order. Lessd also explained that he also knew that his daughter was changed and may have moved towards the Word of Nov-Cikel, Edossd. *Most* amazingly, that she was clearly smitten by a Sandwalker.

*"This information I withheld, to any soul other than I, would have only imagined more rage coming from you. Although it surely would have, there was no understanding of other things about you. Other things only I know of you."*

Lessd had seen a great providence, and design, in all that was happening; a design Enom was now very aware of, but he did not know how Lessd could have been so sure of such a possibility, and he asked him how.

He explained that over the years, in times of drunkenness, Enom had shared stories with him. Stories of his old love, and The Power; the old religion she followed. Enom then recalled a number of times over the years that he had talked to Lessd. He could not talk to another Icer about such things, even when drunk. Thankfully too, a Walker's word or opinion did not matter *at all* to those around him, even if Lessd had talked about these things. Enom knew that even then, he could always depend on the honour, and so a closed mouth, of Lessd.

In this and other things Lessd explained that he had come to know Enom far better than any of his cohorts could ever have, in all their years of flight above the sands. He had a clearer picture of Enom and the forces that shaped him than even Enom was aware of himself. Observation was a great strength of the Walkers, and he had known clearly why Enom had begun to struggle.

From his recent experience, Enom had seen more clearly the power of his love for his daughter Eedra, and her mother. This, and his love for what was right and good, had changed him. The rest was now right in front of his eyes. He thanked Lessd for his nobility, as he gotten to know the spirit of this creature over the time since his capture, and the Walker's nobility had made his inner journey less difficult when his heart had risen up against him. He had always felt a deep power coursing through this creature and his actions. In this, and in all that was now happening, he was suddenly and strangely brought to a real awareness of The Power; how the Eternal Covenant, as Eedra's mother had called it, still *was*, and would *ever be*.

It was like a switch had been turned on. But this too, was not truly strange in hindsight, as he had learned about many of the other varied beliefs of the many smaller Icer kingdoms as he had wandered the deserts doing his vicious work. They too, spoke clearly to him of Messengers coming over time, and place, to share the knowledge of God. He could now see how they had progressively awoken the potentials of all peoples. He saw a continual evolution of the spirit, one even in The Clans. He had seen the development of this great garden of the peoples of Temelj: all this, even though quite unaware of what he was learning.

Lessd too, had seen it firsthand. Nov-Cikel, Edosd had made the nature and sight of the progressive nature of religion very clear in His Message. The older Sandwalker had seen *The Power* within many beliefs, as there were a number of varied and older beliefs than the Law of The Clan's and The Old Religion of the Icers. This Eternal Covenant, this endless agreement between The Creator and the created, was a guarantee that all would be continually nurtured by The Unknowable. But the other side of this covenant was that souls must follow the guidance that came at each new stage, stay steadfast in their love of The New Lover, The Spirit of the Age, and be true to the laws brought down as Revelation unfolded.

Each Messenger would bring The Light; the essence of which never changed. Each One of these Messengers had a particular mission though, and had tended to the ailments of each age, and in earlier times, of specific peoples. There would be Messengers in the future too, as this planet and these people evolved. These people were only now reaching initial maturity; the oneness of all who lived here. But Temelj, by its particular calling, would become a foundation of unity for this whole galaxy. It was to be a Foundation planet. Such was the depth of the nature of this time, on this wide desert world.

# *Crisis*

It had been two days of Walking, and both Deveroux and Eedra had been impressed with the pace of the two friends below them. It was late in the evening when Dossd suddenly looked up, with his head to the side, as if trying to hear something faint that rode along the wind.

He looked at Able, and said, “Call them over, while I speak to another.”

Able quickly signalled Eedra to bring the airship to them. All three then waited, as Dossd had a long telepathic conversation with the person on the other end; his face *very dire*, for him.

*Suddenly, then, Suwna Smith woke with a fright from an afternoon nap. She had not been sleeping well over the last week and had fallen asleep on the lounge. It was like her son was now closer, but still far away. The feeling of imminent danger assailed her being even now that she was awake. She hoped it would wane, but it did not, and she cried and prayed for the safety of her boy. Once again, she thought that maybe she was being silly, but deep in her being she knew that something very evil stalked her child.*

“We go up,” said Dossd, to Able, after he had conversed telepathically, and they both took hold of the rope that now hung near them.

When they were winched up, he shared that he had found the way, the right bearings to The Great Chasm, but also, that now, some of them would never see it. He told them that he had been in contact with Lessd, another Sandwalker, and that an Armada was near. He explained that Eedra's airship had to move with all haste to The Great Chasm. One of their small company though, had to lead the hunters away by leaving tracks on the ground for the ships to follow. He said that it would take a miracle even for him to escape after doing so, but also that it *could* be done. He explained to the others that he would give them the bearings, and that they must now fly on. He would lead the chasers away from them, and The Chasm.

Eedra asserted that she would not leave him again; that the two off-worlders could take the craft. Deveroux just looked at Able, and Able nodded. With that, both grabbed the winch rope and lowered themselves to the ground below. They looked up, and Able called out, "Go on to your future old friend. Eedra will get the most speed out of the craft, and you two should be together, no matter the outcome."

"And I'm a *Protector, buddy boy*," added Deveroux, to Dossd, with a smile.

With that, they immediately headed off, giving Eedra and Dossd no real choice. The two on the ship knew they had very little time, so Edra set more sail, turned on the motor, and they were off too. Just as quickly as that, choices had been made, and fates sealed.

*"I will most likely not see you again, Dossd. We will lead them as far away as we can. We will attempt a jump with the amulet, but only when we have to. This will hopefully give you more time."*

*"You have come to know the amulet well?" asked Dossd.*

*"No, we will make a jump and then another, and another, until we learn, or until we make it home, or Deeper."*

*“I will tell Lessd to find your tracks and guide the hunters after you. You must ‘not be there’. Like the wind that dies away, you must not be there,” communicated Dossd.*

*“I will not. They will not see me,” said Able, knowing this time that they had to be seen, and would be seen; and so did Dossd.*

*“I will miss you little friend.”*

*“I will miss you, Dossd. Good luck and God speed, old friend.”*

*“God speed, Able Jones.”*

There was nothing left to say, only what to feel, as Able and Deveroux ran and dodged at a brisk run, around, and through plants of all kinds, in a new direction.

“THERE,” CALLED LESSD, SOME HOURS LATER.

“There!” called the watch, as he also began to signal the other ships by mirror.

The Armada began to turn, and what a sight it was. That many ships turning as one, was magnificent, and foreboding, all at once.

Plenelic looked to the tracks as Lessd had called out. His lookouts had missed them in all the new verdure on the sands below. A twisted smile came over his face, as he knew it was aliens. Two of them *at least*, had survived; even though he was told only one set of tracks were found leaving his downed and burned airship. Maybe this was not them, but in any case, he would enjoy visiting great pain on them; *if* they survived the hunt. He was always happy to dispatch vermin in any case.

Hedden, Enom, and all captains craned their necks to see the tracks as their ships reached them. They could see they were not the tracks of a Walker; *they* never moved in pairs anyway. They each satisfied themselves that they chased two aliens, and all knew that this was the first duty; before that of seeking Enom's daughter for now.

"These two are fools," said Hedden. "They don't hide their tracks at all."

Plenilec was of the same mind, but fortunately, he put it down to the stupidity of the quarry. These creatures that rode between worlds would not know the ground. They would never have had to know the skills of quarry on the ground. Plenilec almost laughed out loud at their apparent weakness and shook his head in pity. But this was the only pity that would be shown to them by this hunter in particular, as even if they were not the ones who took down one of his best ships, their deaths would be good enough for him to save face, and at the least, feel like *some* justice to him. It was personal for him, as his ship's failure was his failure, and he almost drooled at the continued thoughts of hunting them down and ending their existence.

Hedden was not at all excited about the hunt these days, and he had let his captains do this work for a good time now. He no longer had the stomach for it, and his heart had many years ago left the love of such things. He knew that the hunt would one day fall to the coming future, as all such things must, and prayed often for forgiveness for his immortal soul. He could see the winds of change and went to his cabin to contemplate further on how he would guard and guide his people through what would surely come. It was clear to him that this was, alone, his duty now; just clear as the great orange sky of Temelj was today.

Enom and his crew went to work, as did Lessd, as they always did. Seemingly working together, they went about the hunt. Lessd had lost contact with Dossd, as Eedra's ship and the hunter ships had suddenly diverged. He was impressed with the honour of these

two aliens when Dossd had made it clear who he would be tracking, but he did not know their plan. *His* concern was to keep the ships on the hunt for these two, and hopefully when it ended, he would help lead the Armada away from Dossd and The Great Chasm. Dossd had shared where it lay, so Lessd could keep the Hunters from it. Blind people were easy to lead and this Sandwalker was now very practised at it.

THE QUARRY HAD MADE IT INTO THE NIGHT, and the ships now settled for the evening, as they had no hope to follow their tracks at night. Even with their best lights all the new growth on the desert floor would confuse them. They were better resting up and would catch such easy quarry soon enough.

Like a cat enjoying the game, Plenilec enjoyed the hunt, so the longer it went the better it was for the likes of him. He would savour this hunt in fine company, even if Enom was off his game. He did think it a little strange that a man concerned about his daughter would stay with the pack, but he knew Enom's politics, and his priorities. He would die for the Icer way and would certainly want to hunt these vermin down before fulfilling his own needs.

Plenilec then thought of Eedra, and what was going on with her. He could not know if she was in danger, or if she sought to move out of the old man's shadow. His best guess was that she had fallen somehow, and that Enom's honour required him to bring her back. She had a lot of fire, and he loved that. It was good to see such progeny, as it augured well for the future of their kind. It was always good to see her too, as he most definitely had designs on her. He had hoped in time, that with successful hunts his Name would be reinstated, and his Lordship returned. Then, he would seek her hand.

It was then that something occurred to him, something that he could do *now* to aid his cause; to lay his claim to Lordship, and to Eedra, in one bold move. He would save her, and Enom would be beholden to him. Then he may be able to socially force his goals to fruition. He thought that at least one of these goals would *definitely* be possible if he rescued her, as even if Enom was not in favour of the match, and stood his ground, the Icer Lords would definitely have to give him back his name. Saving a Great Family's child would make any resistance to the return of his name almost impossible in their culture. These thoughts were enough to take his interest from the hunt, and as fate would have it, it was then that he received a message from one of his ships.

Plenilec was a predator and he never hunted alone. He had two hidden ships, out-riding, unbeknownst to the rest of the Hunters. He had many ships, and always stacked the deck in his favour. One ship had reported, through communicators taken from a downed alien spaceship, that they had spotted Eedra's ship. They had reported that it was a little far away, but they were sure that it was hers. Plenilec immediately made plans to break off, and chase Eedra in the morning. He would work his way back in the hunt, feigning equipment failure, and peel off. His crew, and crew on all his ships, were always in fear of their lives so they would fall in line, even if he was deceiving the Hunter Lords.

Fear kept most of them loyal, and in others, it was in their own best interests that Plenilec be successful. Because as he was elevated, so were they in their society. Such is the foolishness of such souls who believe that social status and material things are the greatest treasures. They damned themselves to darkness for the sake of social acceptance, ornaments, and clothes; and the fearful ones, they were slaves seeking a safety that would never exist in the material world.

“WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE CLOSE TO A HIGH DUNE,” suggested Deveroux.

“That’s going to be hard, and we need to give the others as much time as we can,” offered Able, as the two walked through the night.

“We’ll *have to be* close to a dune, *boy*. They’re in ships and they’ll come quick, so we won’t have the luxury of time. We’ll give those two all the time we can, but we’re *out o’ here*, pretty much as soon as we see ‘em on the horizon.”

“How high do we have to jump from?”

“*Hell, I don’t know, boy*. I just know that your mother liked jumping from *ridiculous* places. Her faith in this golden amulet was *solid*.”

“So, what if we jump into a place with the wrong atmosphere or something?” asked Able.

“We don’t know what we’re going to find on each jump, so if it’s a dangerous situation, just flick those winders any which way, and we’ll jump again. When we find a safe place to stop, we can take some time to work out what our next setting on the instrument might best be. Hopefully, we can periangulate a position with enough jumps. It’s going to be a, let go, and do it as we go, kind of thing. There’s no guarantee we’ll even make it past the next jump, young Jones, but we made *our choice* back there.”

“I don’t care. I am just glad Dossd got away.”

“That’s the stuff, young man. There might be work for you in The Agency; given your *heart*, and the circumstances. Your old man would be proud of you.”

“I suppose, and Grandpa would be too, I think,” added Able, with no sign of ego; just honest and real.

“He ain’t your grandfather boy.”

“What?!”

“He’s your *great, great*, grandfather, or *somethin’* like that. He’s a complicated man, or at least he’s had a very complicated existence. I’m sure Jack’ll have plenty of stories to tell you now that all this *travelling* stuff is out of the bag. If we get back, he’ll have more stories for you than any Sandwalker, that’s for sure.”

Deveroux had known Grandpa Jack, in the past, and into the future, but even this experienced Agent could not tell which was which when it came to Jack Johnston. Time didn’t seem to matter when it came to *that* Traveller. Deveroux never knew where that man, or his lady for that matter, might turn up. The Agent knew a lot about Jack that he was not allowed to share; even with Able. It was a ‘*need to know*’, ‘*order of the universe*’, kind of thing. But Able’s questions drew much out of him anyway as they walked on.

Able was thinking that his grandpa *would* have a lot of stories to tell, even from the little that Deveroux had grudgingly shared with him, and about his parents, by morning. But then, thinking back to the long years of stories told each night, before he and the Sandwalker had slept, he said to himself, smiling, “*I don’t know if Grandpa could have more stories to tell than Dossd.*”

PLENILEC’S AIRSHIP WAS GOING AT FULL PACE. He stood on the foredeck, excited and alive. It was a different chase, a different hunt, and he revelled in it. He pictured himself accepting back his family name, again and again. All he had to do was hunt down a little girl. He laughed out loud as he thought about it, and then looked ahead again. He did not like the green. He liked the desert, and the dry air. He liked the wreckage of spaceships, and the

dominance of his hunters. He loved returning home to the adulation of the usual hangers on, as well as the grudging acceptance of his efforts from those who he knew reviled him. He would have their respect, no matter what it took, and in time he would lead them, for such was Plenilec's charge. Such was the charge passed down to him through the generations by his forbears. They had all worked to this one single purpose; that their name would shine greater than any other name once more. That it would be a name respected and feared; and he *knew* that he would be the one to do it. He had *always* known that it would be him; as all such creatures imagine.

He had now deftly limped aside in the formation of ships, and when the Armada was beyond the horizon he had struck out on his new heading. It took all of his patience to hold back from going earlier; only chained by his need for the success of his ruse. The crew were now in full hunt mode as they drew every bit of speed they could out of the craft; certainly, as none were *game* to fail. It was rumoured that those who had failed him in the past had died soon after. They knew this hunter stalked prey wherever he was. In the Icer kingdoms or on the sands of the desert, in his daily life or in the high halls of Hunter Captains, he was ever the predator.

“Coming about!” called one of the crew.

“Pilot!” called out Plenilec.

“Pilot!” called out the crew.

This was an old tradition, which most Icers had let go to the past. It hearkened back to a very long time ago, when the planet was very different, and ships sailed wide waters with sails above deck; at least that was the legend told of times past. The call was so that all were

aware of, and would be safe at, the turn; the change of tack. Even though right now they were only running with motors and propellers roaring hard.

Plenilec could hardly contain himself, and the crew were also feeling the excitement of the headlong effort. They did not know the purpose, but they knew it was no *small* purpose. They had *never* seen him turn from the hunt of aliens; *ever*.

*“HE IS GONE,” SAID LESSD, LOOKING BACK THROUGH THE GLASS.*

*“Damn! He’s an experienced captain, and his men are ever motivated. There is intention in this. He is going after Eedra,” communicated Enom.*

*“I feel it is so, too.”*

*“How can I pull out of this hunt?! Damn! I can bring him down if we can catch him. But he will be going fast, and I need my ship to go alone.”*

It took all Enom had not to give the order to turn. He screamed inside, as he knew now that the Walker was definitely with Eedra. If they had not split up by now, they were both as good as dead, and he could not warn them as they were now out of telepathic earshot. Plenilec would have claim to all he needed in the Hunters Halls, and it was then that Enom realised why he would go after her. If the Walker was with her or not, Plenilec would at least have his Name again for gathering Eedra, or there could be *no honour* in the halls of The Icer Kingdom.

Enom was then taken from his thoughts by a mirror signal from another ship. They had spotted fresh alien tracks, and all ships went headlong in the direction it had indicated.

*“All stand to,”* called Enom loudly, as the crew stood ready to charge out with the others. *“Come about 90 degrees, pilot!”*

The crew were stunned and had to reset themselves, as they were ready to go almost the other way, but they regathered and responded.

*“All speed! All sail too, as the wind will be strong behind us,”* he called, and the men again, responded quickly.

As they turned, and dropped their sail, Hedden Spron’s ship sailed by at a good distance in front of them. He saluted Enom, as a maybe, but reasonably sure, last goodbye. He knew the game was on; he had seen Plenilec fall back with no anger in him. He knew it was a planned move, and he knew that Enom may not be able to return to the Icer kingdom due to what may transpire. He did not know what the result would be, and while he would have given anything to see Enom and Plenilec going head-to-head, he gave all airships clarified instructions to follow the aliens.

Enom saluted the older man, both outwardly and inwardly as his ship finished its turn. He knew he was in new air now, and his spirit lifted as he struck out after his daughter. As a man, there is no surer place than when all of you is focused in one direction, and that direction is to protect your greatest love.

PLENILEC’S TWO OTHER HUNTER SHIPS NOW RAN ALONG, following Eedra’s airship. They tracked her from beyond the horizon with what they called ‘rising eyes’, what we may consider a staged periscope with mirrors set at distances around the girth of the balloon, or they sat low behind dunes at the times she suddenly changed tack, popping up again to follow out of sight.

Eedra was zigzagging enough to make it hard for any airship to stay out of sight; but unfortunately, not impossible. Her priority was speed and had only taken Dossd's advice to change tack sporadically because she knew how hard he had been to track. Her new love knew the art of evasion well, and even though he knew that her somewhat erratic movement may not be enough, it was a compromise they could both live with.

They were now sailing into the night, more than one day after Plenilec had set his course away from the armada. They had not seen the ship on the horizon to their left, when it had spotted them just over two full days ago, as they had continually cast their view behind them. Plenilec's two ships constantly worked their way along out of sight with each other's help. They waited for Plenilec, and he was gaining quickly as he did not need to constantly hide or do extra changes of course.

"I hope those two will be okay," commented Eedra.

"Able is capable, and Agent Deveroux is very experienced. They will be well, and hopefully, Able will return home."

"That lady was his mother," said Eedra.

"Yes," said Dossd, both referring to the time that they had all shared a Great Story together.

"It was a strange experience, and a wonderful one. What is our future, Dossd?"

"The All will show us. Our path will emerge as we walk, but we will do it together. That is clear to me."

"My goodness, Dossd. A little more emotion in those words might help a little," challenged Eedra.

Dossd let his feelings known telepathically, and Eedra was filled up. He was glad that she had challenged him. That a couple challenge each other in a helpful and kind way, is always a good thing, and Dossd, who had been trained to the desert alone, was certainly going to be challenged by Eedra in the future they would walk together. He let out a shriek of humour as he thought of it, and they were so in sync, especially now they were alone, that she knew why he had laughed. She laughed a little too, glad of his humour and their growing connection.

*“HERE THEY COME, SON,”* called Deveroux, as he watched ship after ship appear over the dune horizon.

“We can wait a little,” said Able, trying to give the others more time, but not knowing that it was now in vain.

*“We’re goin’ up that dune boy, and we’re trying it immediately. We need to test it for height, and our velocity of movement. We gotta succeed, or we gotta run. The night is comin’ in, so maybe, we can start hiding if we don’t get out.”*

“They are close, and many,” said Able, like a proud Walker, “but one way or another...we will not be where they expect.”

Deveroux smiled at this Walker-Human, and Able gulped, as he knew the jump was really the only sure escape.

PLENILEC CAUGHT UP, just as Enom caught a good wind beyond the horizon, and his motors too still running hard. Lessd had thankfully now reached Dossd and Eedra

telepathically, but it was just as the three hunter ships were setting themselves to converge, and as yet, Lessd did not know of Plenilec's two other airships. The communication devices Plenilec used with his hunters had been kept from the Hunter Lords. Any word of them was stifled by the fear in his crewmen, as all good technology was to be shared, or at least given to The Hunter Lord Council to decide whether or not it was good for their society.

Each of his crews, and each individual member of them, had over time become the eyes and ears of Plenilec, so no one could be sure or trust any other within these ranks; and as most suspected, he even had paid spies beyond their ranks. Plenilec made good money in bounty, and he used it for power; not for trinkets and trappings. His family had known the fall to namelessness and to poverty, so had remained quite Spartan to remain strong. Plenilec had eyes and ears everywhere, so when any man who came into his employ finally realised the web they were ensnared in, they were powerless to act. Not one of them thought that their lives were worth an open mouth.

Eedra changed direction away from The Chasm immediately she got Lessd's warning, and rose up higher, to see where Plenilec's ship was. It was then that she saw the other predators too, lying in wait behind high dunes. Dossd felt somewhat powerless, as he was now totally reliant on this lady to see them out of the clutches of these ravenous wolves. When she rose up high, Enom saw her, and then, the wolves rise up around her. His heart sank heavily in his chest as he called his crew to move the ship faster. He had heard Plenilec used outriders in his hunting work, but had been so confused with inner changes, and the complexity of his situation within the Armada, that he had not thought of it.

The scene was a joy to Plenilec, but when he saw a Sandwalker on the deck of Eedra's ship he was stunned momentarily. Then, he bared his teeth. *That she should consort with a Walker*, but *not* be open to his advances, was all the fire he needed; as if he needed any

more. He would butcher The Walker himself, and then, he would bind the girl and take her before the Tribunal. His future was assured this day, and he called out a howl that brought all three airships to full action.

THEY HAD MADE THEIR WAY TO THE TOP OF A TALLER DUNE. This was the third one, and the airships were almost upon them.

“Geeze, it better work this time. Let’s get a run up kid. Get all the momentum we can.”

Able, suddenly stopped.

“What is it kid?” asked Deveroux, expecting another dire circumstance.

“Just a prayer for Dossd, and Eedra. A little respect before we go.”

Deveroux couldn’t believe it but set his head down; and up, and down, a few times, with one eye open looking to the converging Armada, as Able recited a prayer for protection.

When Able finally looked up, he said that he would miss Dossd and this place. Deveroux just gave him a crazy look, and said, “*Now kid. Now!*”

They ran as fast as they could along the spine of the high dune. The ships were almost at weapons range, and were firing as they came in. The sand exploded behind them, closer and closer, in small and large charges; the two then suddenly finding themselves running on flat red rock. It was an outcrop that jutted off one end of the high dune, so gathering more speed, they jumped off its high edge. As they cast themselves off the great rock, they joined hands, and gave themselves to fate, while strangely, Deveroux said, “That girl sure did look familiar.”

Able turned his head to look at him in complete surprise as the ribbons of light formed around them in all the colours of the rainbow, again forming a white sheath that took them from that place.

Hedden Spron smiled to see the ribbon of light like a huge tree root forming in the sky, then trailing off beyond sight again; seeing it as a great sign of the Change. Now, he was sure that the pivotal time had arrived for Icer kind, and their reintroduction to The Power. Aliens escaping in ribbons of light would only aid his cause in bringing on the change to his kind. He would put impetus behind it being a great and special time, not a time to fold back in fear. It was surely the time for Icers to be introduced to their future.

Was it that the boy had been cast here? Was it that the Agent had? Was it that the search had been called for? Was it the change in Eedra and Enom? Was it that Lessd was taken aboard a Hunter ship so many years ago? Was it that Hedden Spron knew that it was time? Or was it, that it *was* time, and the Will of The All.

BLOOD LUST WAS RUNNING THROUGH PLENILEC'S VIENS, and it manifested evidently in his eyes as his ships dove down, after Eedra had put her ship into a dive. Enom's ship was coming though, as Eedra suddenly again drove upwards, and turned back toward his ship.

"That's my girl," said Enom, to himself, and then, to his crew, "I seek to battle Plenilec, for my daughter's honour, and for her safety. You know of him. Where do you stand?"

“We stand with you, Lord,” called out one of the crew, and then all called out the same, as one; many just now realising that it was not only fear, but honour, that bound them to him and to each other.

“*Har Sed,*” called Lessd, as a battle cry.

“*Har Sed,*” called the crew.

All went to work; all as one, as Plenilec turned below Eedra, and saw Enom on the charge towards them. He smiled, as he would either win before Enom could get there, or he would bring down a Lord with his airships. In that thought he felt a great joy within him, and at that moment, he saw clearly his greatest hatred; his hatred of the Hunter Lords. *As if* they were better than *him* and *his* family. Today was only growing deeper in satisfaction for him.

Each of the four craft sought ascendancy of position, tacking high and low, to left and right, as small weapons fire peppered Eedra’s airship; her sails hauled well before the attack, and her propeller going strong. They were attacking the ropes and the balloon mostly, so as to bring her down, or make her fearful and fly lower so they could rein her in. Plenilec wanted her alive. He fired off very exact shots from his long weapon, while glancing often to see where Enom was. Just then Eedra’s ship sailed up and to the side a little, positioning the belly of her gondola away but alongside his balloon, trying to put the gondola in the way of the small weapons fire.

Plenilec smiled, knowing that she might try this, and knowing he had victory as he nodded the order for a larger weapon to smash the gondola’s air rudders. As it found its mark, Eedra looked to Dossd, communicating, “*We are lost.*”

But her eyes went wide, as she saw that Dossd was gone. He had suddenly and silently, fired himself down at an angle from the rail of Eedra ship, swiftly sailed through the

ropes that held the balloon of Plenilec's airship below them, knocking his confused quarry to a sand dune far below.

As she gathered sight of them falling, Eedra screamed, "No!"

But it was too late. The move had stunned them all, as they watched the two figures fire towards the ground. Eedra knew they could not survive the fall, and her love for Dossd, the horror of his demise, and the love that it took for him to cast his life away for her, hit her being all at once. All Enom could think, as he came close now, was that his daughter was safe, and that this Walker must have indeed loved her.

Plenilec's life ended suddenly as he hit the top of the dune awkwardly, but Dossd had flipped and landed, and his feet dug into the soft sand on the front of the dune; his knees bending and his torso simply sitting down in the soft sand. He now looked up, knowing that the enemy would be at least somewhat confused, and that Enom was close enough. He waved to Eedra, as she sobbed deeply in the relief of seeing him do so. He then nodded his head to Enom, as he rose and ran over the dune, out of sight.

All were still a little confused by his bold move, but the crews of Plenilec's ships felt a strange release. Evil usually dies quickly, and it had stunned them all as the spell lifted from their beings; *the spell of one life, controlling and burdening so many others.*

As Eedra reached safety with her father, the crews of Plenilec's three ships now found themselves a little lost as to their current loyalties, and Enom now confused about his fight *with them.*

While all were questioning, he called out, "You are Plenilec's mogs, but my fight is not with you. *Do you fight?*"

“We are no longer his,” called the first officer of Plenilec’s ship, clearly knowing his lack of honour, and so, not calling any fight against Enom.

All then stood down, like a storm that had suddenly passed. A strange atmosphere came over the battlefield. The crews of Plenelic’s ships had been set free, Enom swung on a rope over to his child, and when they all came to their senses, Dossd, of course, was not *‘where they thought he would be’*.

As the full night came in, Dossd walked towards the Great Chasm. The Icer crews anchored for the night and to talk over what was to be done. Dossd knew that it was best for him not to be there, adding to the complication of what needed to follow. It was not his even his intention to cast Plenilec to the sand, but a moment that saw him simply act, and as he saw it, the perfection of the designs of The All. He knew the lots would fall on the lives of all those now present among these Icers; it would fall, as was the will of The All.

# *Victory*

The bargain had been struck, or more so, the most honourable way had been decided between the captains of Plenilec's ships and Enom. The three captains would each seek the Armada and turn it home, explaining that Plenilec had fallen to the dunes and Enom had found his daughter. That Enom wished, for now, that it be only family, and the other ships were not required; all, with his *great thanks*.

When they found the Armada, and fulfilled their duty, Hedden Spron wondered to himself what the truth of things really was. He would never truly know what had actually transpired, as he would not ask; at least not yet. He was not surprised that Enom had prevailed over Plenilec, as there was always a little more honour in him. That made him stronger and provided for more grace.

Hedden, had later that night, talked of a high and deep future at the tables on the ground, as the armada had halted and gathered to that place. He talked of the portent they had seen in the sky; he talked of the old religion, and the time of change now among them. He talked to them of their culture, its beauty, and its need to evolve. Then he simply returned home, as did the other ships; heading off in various directions. They would take the sighting of the ribbon light and its implications to their way of life with them to all the Icer Kingdoms

and towns, as well as the words of Lord Spron, beginning to talk of what it all meant. Times had indeed changed quickly, but much more lay ahead.

AS THE AIRSHIPS CAME UPON THE CHASM, they came upon Dossd. He was elated. He had *Walked to this place*, and *she* was here. Eedra was elated, and her father saw more clearly what was in her for this Walker. Just then, Lessd put his feet down on the Sand, and Dossd turned, putting up his arm as indication to join him. The two Walkers walked slowly and reverently toward a wooden arch, small and alone, that demarcated the existence of The Great Chasm on the ground. They savoured each step; then stood at the threshold and waited there to be ushered in.

From the two airships above, and from the two Sandwalkers' new vantage point, The Chasm was a glorious sight; great water wheels, homes, fields, canals and running water spread across the wide rift-valley. There were even high trees, wind rows, and orchards. It teemed with life of all kinds, and it stretched off into the distance in both directions. There were Icers, and aliens, and Clanfolk, all working together; well, until they saw the two airships. Some Icers and Clanfolk knew the colours and airship of Enom Clovek, and they stood there wondering at what the response of such a Hunter Lord would be at a sight like this. But even the staunchest Icer, and the most unbelieving Clansman, had melted at the sight of this place, these peoples, and what they had achieved together; what the Message of Nov-Cikel, Edossd had brought to Temelj.

One member of The Great Council and two others came to the wooden arch, up the steps hewn into the rock face from far below; as was the practise. They asked the Sandwalkers' names, and the names of their clans. They welcomed the two of them in, which was then regarded as permission for their clans to enter when these two would finally lead

them here. Dossd and Lessd had to do this duty first; but only after a short time of coming to know the Chasm, and after meeting with the full Great Council. They had to be familiar with things here, so as to educate their clan of this new place as they walked with them to this new place. The social laws were new, so there would be a time of learning and integration for those who came here, even if the Writings of Nov-Cikel, Edossd were well known.

As the Walkers now made their way down the stairs the airships lowered themselves into the chasm; its great high rock walls only now being appreciated fully. Enom and Eedra then came down ropes onto the chasm floor and the crews anchored them. It was not as respectful as entering through the archway, but leeway was given to the ways of all peoples who came to The Great Chasm. As Enom smiled at his daughter he recalled a dream Eedra's mother had told him of; one she received when very young, about a sign of the coming time of Fulfillment. It was of a man and his daughter who had fallen to the greatest depths of darkness; two who would rise from that dark place to help lead the Icer Mountains to the New Humility.

He knew then that he would be *going out*; that Eedra's work *also* was to be not just here, and for both of them maybe only in the Icer world. Hedden believed he may have more change than he could handle, but not knowing of the ribbon light and the stewardship of Hedden Spron in his address at the tables, change would be quicker and a little less challenging than he imagined. Enom now thought it was more likely to be a lifetime's work, of his, and Eedra's. He was not sure, and who could be sure, but he knew time and process were always a factor; even though change came swiftly sometimes, there was always a process before it and during it.

It was clear to him as he looked around, and as the children followed them around, that his society had *already* fallen. He saw that no problems within his culture could be

solved from the general level of consciousness now existent within the Icer world. It had to evolve, from Greater Knowledge, or continue to devolve. Now he realised the weight of effort that he and others had made to keep it together over many generations now. Even the joy of having so many children around with the working adults, and their chirpy energy, showed him just how separate they had become from the little ones, and the lack of energy that this had created in the Mountains. The children were everywhere here, and a sign of the abundance of this place.

The Councillor who had welcomed Dossd and Lessd, now welcomed Enom and Eedra, and the people who knew of Enom Clovek relaxed as they saw him smile and shake hands with the Councillor. A few old ones looked strangely at Eedra, and looked to each other, as if surprised, and a little confused. Much was in the eyes of all those who saw this day, for many reasons.

What surprised Eedra was the technology that she saw about her now. The mill houses and power generation houses beside the great wheels took her attention, as well as farming machines and some small devices. The Chasm it seemed was not all about Nov-Cikel, and a religion. It was life, peace, and abundance. People building, growing food, and looking after each other; not overtly religious to her view. There *was* quite obviously a place of prayer, but *also* one of learning and education, which were built into the walls of the Chasm here. Had she been mistaken about what the true nature of religion was? Maybe she had never known religion before. Enom now somehow felt that the beauty of his honour was in line with The All. It *always* was, deeper within him, but that he had not seen that clearly until now.

They gathered Lessd and Dossd as they walked to two small open flying machines. They would travel by these to meet with The Great Council. It was then that the Councillor

began to talk, “Our lives, and ourselves, though far from perfect, are but...togetherness and love. We carry the words of Nov-Cikel, Edosd in our hearts, and we simply live; and endeavour, and create, and care. All is underpinned by humility before The All, and as you can see, we are from many places. The All is The All, no matter from where we hail.”

When they were up and flying in the small open craft, they all looked around at the construction and strange new sights, and the Councillor shared a just a little more, “Nov-Cikel, Edosd is long gone from this world, and this place, but that which He has brought is still growing, and becoming, centuries later. None of us yet know the heights that our civilisation will reach, as we cannot see as He did, but we labour to fulfil His Blueprint, and bring The Gift to the people of Temelj.”

Able and Deveroux now rode the vortex; and in honour of Dossd, and the years of their Walking, Able now told the Ninth Great Story. Able’s intent linked Dossd to him, and Dossd heard within him the Last Great Story that they would share...

*“Bahá’u’lláh, some of His family, and a number of His followers, were exiled again to the Prison City of Akka. It was a foul place, and in a far-flung region of the Ottoman Empire. This last exile was the latest one in an effort designed to keep his influence from spreading. He was to be held there in strict confinement. Again, it seemed that the flame of The New Faith was to be hidden away, but even during His previous exiles to Adrianople, and in this Most Great Prison, Bahá’u’lláh penned letters to the rulers of the world; to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, the Czar of Russia, certain Kings, The Queen of England, The Emperor Napoleon III, The Pope, Leaders of The American Republics, and to the entire body of the monks of Christendom.*

*“With time, however, the people of Akka came to recognize the innocence of this small band of exiles from Persia, and the conditions of their confinement were eased.*

*Much of the change was due to Abdu'l-Baha, who was very much in contact with the inhabitants of the city and was able to demonstrate to them the true motives of the Baha'i's and the spirit of His Father's Teachings. Eventually Bahá'u'lláh could leave the city of Akka and visit nearby places. Having been confined so long in the walls of a desolate city, Bahá'u'lláh could now pass some time in the countryside and enjoy the beauty and greenery of nature He so loved.*"<sup>15</sup>

*In time...*

*"...the attitude of the people of not only Akka but also nearby regions of Syria and Lebanon towards Bahá'u'lláh and His followers had completely changed. Though the orders of the Sultan were still in effect, and formally he was a prisoner under strict confinement, He was, in reality, as revered and respected as a king. Even the officials of the region would come to seek His advice and counsel. Thus is the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to transform the hearts of men."*<sup>16</sup>

*"The 'hearts of men', " thought Dossd, to himself, as Able continued on.*

*"In May 1892, after over forty years of exile, and after revealing one hundred volumes of Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh passed from this earthly life. He had succumbed to a fever, and some days before His passing, he spoke to those gathered around his bed. Among His words was a quote from The Most Holy Book...*

*"Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the day-star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me will arise*

*and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.”<sup>17</sup>*

“Victory!” called Dossd out loud, much to the surprise, but yet, heartfelt agreement of those who were physically in his company as they surveyed the green fields and small villages.

Able then thought that he had heard Dossd’s shrill laugh; the cry that he had loved so much, as their link faded away.

“JACK JOHNSTON,” came a voice from behind him.

Jack stood up, not yet turning, and said calmly, like a sure old soul would, “Agent Deveroux.”

“Hey, girly man,” said Deveroux, with the usual bravado, but with the tone of the depth of seeing an old friend.

As Jack straightened his old frame, he began to turn around.

“Woah! *Jack. God! You have not aged well,*” blurted Deveroux, suddenly, and his face screwed up a little.

Jack smiled, and said, “I am a bit rough these days.”

“*A bit rough! Geeze, you look like a bleached prune with fuzz growin’ on it.*”

Jack broke down in laughter, and then said to the young Agent beside Deveroux. “You should take far greater care of the company you choose to keep, Agent.”

“Oh, I didn’t choose him, and I’m not an Agent.”

“Well, not yet,” stated Deveroux, still working on the young man.

Jack, then saw what he had not seen, and began to cry so much as to physically shake, “It’s you! By God, it’s *you*.”

“Yep, Grandpa, it’s me,” said Able, now almost twenty-one, as he went to hug his grandpa.

Jack sobbed deep, and said, “I have missed you,” and after a little while, Jack held him back and got a look at him. “Purple skin, eh.”

“Yes, it did not seem to want to fade. I love it though. It reminds me of the greatest time of my life, and the best friend I have ever had.”

“I’ll ring your mother,” said Jack, touching the communicator on his wrist, and calmly asking Suwna to come over and give him a hand, as he was feeling a little shaky; which was partially the truth.

It had taken three years, quite a few jumps, side roads, many hardships, and a good deal of Protecting work, before The All allowed Able’s return home. He and Deveroux had been through quite a lot together, and he had eventually shared more of the stories of Able’s grandpa. The two men, Able and Grandpa Jack, stood there regarding each other, now seeing much more in each other, and they both smiled. There was nothing more to say, for now, as they waited for Able’s mother.

It was not long before a car pulled up and Suwna Smith came around the corner. She was a Jones, but she had kept her maiden name. She *knew* straight away, and she fell to the

ground as Able dove to catch her. He lifted her off the ground; she seemed so small to him now. He seemed so big to her, and she said so, with her eyes, through her tears.

“Yep. I’ve grown a little, and *changed* a little more.”

“Oh, *sweet* Able, you have not changed *at all*,” and with that she bawled deeply into his chest, for quite a good while.

IT WAS MONTHS LATER WHEN ABLE WAS AT A FEAST, a regular celebration and get together of his Faith, that a young girl, about eleven or twelve, came up to him and asked the question that the adults wanted to ask, and that the smaller children were not quite game to.

“You’ve got purple skin. How come?”

“Let me tell you a story, about a boy around about your age, who was taken by accident to a desert planet and walked its sand for five years with a Sandwalker. He grew to adulthood there; and there, so far away, he *still* found the traces of God,” shared the Storyteller.

# AUTHOR'S OTHER BOOKS

As human beings we learn, discover, evolve, and grow, and what I can give as an author at the time of writing is subjective and relative; and so, does not seek to be absolute. There is much in these books that is symbolic, so readers can hopefully find their own perceptions of the concepts, which they may or may not be in agreement with. My main hope for these books is to awaken investigation and discussion; even self-reflection, while also entertaining those who read them.

James D

## THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH TRILOGY

The first book of this series, "*The Department of Truth*", is the original adventure of Jack Johnston, who is taken away on a journey of discovery, that he wanted to take, but did not realise it. Its main theme is the search for truth. It is an existential journey, and seeks to explore the nature of truth, and intimate that the continuing journey of humanity is full of promise. It is a wild and wonderful journey that wanders to many different worlds, and places deeper, as it explores universal themes. It hopefully mimics the feelings of awe, questioning, confusion and realisation, of a spiritual journey.

The second book, "*Expectations of Happiness*" seeks to explore the nature of a human being, the nature of this life, and therefore, the nature of happiness here on planet Earth. The main character, Jack, is struggling to get the great things he learned from his first journey, on the

ground in life, and is again drawn to places deeper to find answers. “*Expectations of Happiness*” is about meaningful purpose, and connection in life; it is about striving and acceptance; it is about seeing ourselves as noble, and working at that. It makes it clear that happiness is not something that can be sought within itself, and is not, only an inner, or only an outer experience. The book is mostly about the *personal transformation*, which is required for any *collective human transformation* to occur.

The final book, “*The Halls of Certitude*” attempts to meaningfully explore aspects of finding a sure way forward for humanity, collectively. The human race and its future evolution is a wondrous story to me, not one of darkness that most seem to believe lies ahead. There may be some big tremors, some chaos, and outmoded ideas we have to deal with and cast aside, but the way forward is ripe with new fruit. There is much to share on this subject, and we may find that the answers to building a *new civilisation* are more about local communities, very much simpler than we might have imagined.

The *Search* for knowledge, *Growth* of that knowledge within us, which transforms us, and action in *Service* to others, therefore transforming our world, are key building blocks of life; *the* building blocks to a new future for humanity. “*The Department of Truth*” turned out to be seminal in that way, as its three secondary themes have become the main underlying themes of the three books, respectively.

## THE STORYTELLER TRILOGY

This is the author’s second trilogy and continues on with what will be a series of nine books. It introduces many new characters and renews our connection to some old ones. These books lift the storytelling to new heights.

The first book of “*The Storyteller Trilogy*” is, “*The Storyteller*”. It is a story of the passing into adulthood of two young souls, Able and Eedra, while Eedra’s world and all its peoples are in the same process on a planetary level. It talks to some of the nature of this time in the life of a person, and this time in the evolution of a planet; the challenge, upheaval, but great beauty and potential of these ‘*passings*’. This story holds other stories within it, and all between its covers attends to the theme of crisis and victory.

The second book is, “*Letter to the World*”. It is a prequel to “*The Storyteller*” and talks to the story of good versus evil. It is a look at humanity through an angel’s eyes, and a street kid and two visitors who get caught up in His mission, the story shows the disjointed psyche of the world, and the distractions that take us from ourselves; mostly our own minds. Also, how we need to battle the forces of decay, by seeing them clearly.

The last novel of the trilogy is “*The Traveller*”. It is a prequel to “*Letter to the World*”, and explores civilisation; its great power, and how we mere mortals may wield that power in our own neighbourhoods; no matter what our own ignorance, or the social norm seeks to put in our way. It also seeks to portray how the great dark force of self is our enemy, and that we are all friends; a human family now finally being united in one river, and one future.

## THE KNOWLEDGE TRILOGY

James D Connolly’s third trilogy completes a series of nine books, whose characters and storylines intertwine. These stories are again, like all the author’s books, wild, untamed, and joyous adventures. They attend to big themes in enjoyable and symbolic stories, leaving readers spellbound and reflective.

The first novel of this trilogy is “*Knowledge*”. It asks us to talk honestly, yet with respect, about what ails us as a society, as we are responsible. It asks us to open our minds to more exploration, to more open communication, in a more and more ideologically tribal world. It challenges the clichés of apathy and shows how a small group of people can take part in community building; no matter their age or outlook; no matter how seemingly ordinary. It has a good hard look at the world, through common, day to day eyes, as well as spiritual ones. It seeks to show how we have the power of initiative, and how we can utilise growth engines to transform lives and communities.

The second novel is “*Volition*”. It attends to human will and its nature, and looks at different stages in life, finding our vocation, relationships, family life, and child rearing. It looks at three core times in life, and how the knowledge we use underpins how we will act. It also seeks to create more understanding of the power of consultation in all parts of our lives, and free ourselves from the rising noise around us.

The final book of the trilogy, “*Justice*”, looks at the boundaries of human life, and how the ego can seek to subsume the greatest within us and threaten take people away from their high destiny. It talks to the inevitability of a mature, just, and unified humanity: and explores the power, and nature, of our link to the Creator as humankind.

## CRASH and THE HUMAN CONTINUUM

I wanted to write a book to explore some of the implications of our burgeoning AI and robotic future. What I found as I wrote though was *how amazing* it is to be human. I *was* able find *some* clear implications in the rise of AI, but indeed, it turned out to be more a look at the seemingly small, yet powerfully amazing, aspects of our human creature.

The story is about Crash; an AI crash-test dummy that wanders out into the world by chance. He is a lovely fellow, experiencing a good deal of struggle as he explores further safety solutions for humans. Strangely the damage enhances him, allowing him access to deeper fields of the human continuum. Mmm, *maybe*.

See what *you* think of Crash and his journey in the human continuum.

## UNITY

*“I don’t know what turn of fate brought these two together. A woman of beauty and dreams, and a killer born in the belly of hatred itself. I don’t even know where they were headin’. But the day I saw their path’s cross was somthin’ I wouldn’t soon forget.*

*I’ve prospected all over this planet in my one hundred and twenty years, and life was hard out here back then. Much harder than it is now, and most folks were just lost in the grip of desperation. Well...it was that way beyond all the walled cities, and away from the high planets.*

*Those places weren’t caught in the grip of desperation and loss, or bein’ chewed up in the violent chaos on some other rocks, but they were livin’ in their own kind’a hell, and growing a chaos of their own makin’.”*

## CLOWN TOWN

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Duncan Connolly is an Australian writer and artist/ painter of Irish descent. He grew up in a Christian family, but as a young man his quest for knowledge and understanding of the meaning of life and the spirit, led him towards the Bahá'í Faith and has been a member of the Bahá'í community since then.

His driving interest is the nature of the human creature, and this life. It has led him to many sources from psychology to history to religious texts. He also believes in the spiritual wisdom written into nature, and in human inner vision, as great sources of joy and understanding; but believes that only by living life can anyone really hold knowledge. His writing and art are greatly influenced by his Faith and life experiences, and those of humanity.

He has been writing philosophical realisations and poetry, under the acronym JDC for a number of years, and has now written upwards of nine novels; which will be published, when edited and developed.

# QUOTE

“Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. If any man were to meditate on that which the Scriptures, sent down from the heaven of God's holy Will, have revealed, he would readily recognize that their purpose is that all men shall be regarded as one soul, so that the seal bearing the words "The Kingdom shall be God's" may be stamped on every heart, and the light of Divine bounty, of grace, and mercy may envelop all mankind.

The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath wished nothing for Himself. The allegiance of mankind profiteth Him not, neither doth its perversity harm Him. The Bird of the Realm of Utterance voiceth continually this call: "All things have I willed for thee, and thee, too, for thine own sake." If the learned and worldly-wise men of this age were to allow mankind to inhale the fragrance of fellowship and love, every understanding heart would apprehend the meaning of true liberty, and discover the secret of undisturbed peace and absolute composure. Were the earth to attain this station and be illumined with its light it could then be truly said of it: "Thou shall see in it no hollows or rising hills."<sup>18</sup>

Baha'u'llah

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## RECOMMENDED LINKS

For further information on the Baha'i Faith the following links are recommended

[www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)

[www.bahai.org.au](http://www.bahai.org.au)

[www.bahaiebooks.com](http://www.bahaiebooks.com)