THE PIONEERS

Vol. 31

Past and Present

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525.

Revealing the Past

Mid Brénménu /early Oct., 25/643

Sajéku looked nervously at the crowd that had gathered to hear him defend his Masters thesis. He glanced at his parents, rural people uncomfortably sitting in a classroom, then at Thornton, his advisor, who looked worried, too, but that was because he was watching the clock. Two more geologists from the Royal Geological Survey came in; the last ones they were waiting for. Thornton rose.

"Today we have two candidates presenting their Master's degree thesis research. They both look very nervous, so perhaps I should start by assuring them that the work they have done is absolutely ground-breaking in importance and completed at a high level of precision and sophistication. We don't find research work of this quality every day. We will begin with a presentation by Sajéku Agramanu." Thornton sat and Sajéku walked to the front of the classroom.

"We have long needed a way to date recent events when we lacked written documents, coins, and other archaeological materials," he began. "It turns out that when trees grow, their annual growth rings provide a distinct pattern of wider or narrower rings, depending on temperature and rainfall that year. The rings in a tree will tell us when the climate was better or worse, thus telling us about long-term changes. And when those patterns are found in a piece of cut wood, they can tell us when the tree was cut down, thereby dating the structure built with it."

He flipped a large piece of paper out of the way, revealing a drawing of a cut tree, revealing the rings. “The rings are fairly distinctive, with a wider, light colored area of growth in the spring, when growth is rapid, gradually shifting to a slightly darker, usually narrow section that represents denser and darker wood growth in the summer and fall. Finally, the annual growth ring is capped by a thin, dark layer that represents the winter, and it is followed by another similar sequence the next year.

“How far back can we go with this technique? You will be surprised. We started extracting cores of wood from trees over a year ago using a special wood drill that leaves an intact core.” He paused to hold up a wooden core that was 60 centimeters long. “They can be quite long. This is a piece broken off from a much longer core. Most trees are only a few hundred years old, at most; I know, I’ve sampled several dozen of them. But some species can live for a very long time. On the south side of Mɛlwika there are several groves of ancient olive trees that have survived drought and cold for 1,500 years, and in the hills north of the city there are ancient bristlecone pine trees that are 2,300 years old. And they are still alive!

“First, the olives. These are trees with huge trunks; one is 3 meters in diameter. Olives produce rather indistinct tree rings, but if you are patient, you can find them. Their ages were a huge surprise to us; we knew they had to date back to the time before the great drought because no one would have planted them since then, but we could not have imagined they would be that old. The Great Drought is said to have begun 1021 years ago. What we found was that, according to the tree rings, rainfall began to decrease fifty years earlier, with cycles of several years where the rain would drop somewhat, then recover for a year or two, then drop even further. The Great Drought, then, was the point

where settled life in the Eastern Shore could no longer compensate for the decrease in the water supply. The so called “Year Without Summer” that marks the beginning of the Great Drought is clearly visible as a tree ring so thin as to be almost undetectable. It was probably caused by a large volcanic eruption on Sumilara and coincided with the gradual drying. Imagine, if the trees could barely grow that year, how would the crops planted by the people have managed? This situation is something the historians, reading ancient texts, should search for.

“Last month, I visited the ‘School of Mitrodato’ on the Swadakwés and saw that extensive timber has survived under the rock overhang. The archaeologist graciously allowed me to take the dry end of one of the beams that had supported the second floor, which was their main meeting area. The oak beam was 15 centimeters in diameter and its growth rings were clearly visible. What is interesting is that the beam clearly had grown during the century and a half right before the ‘Year Without Summer’ when the rainfall came and went with increasing unpredictability. Tentatively, we can date the cutting of the tree to 1119 before present, based on tree rings. That matches coins we have found on the site from Lilalara and Gordha, ranging from 1122 to 1020 years ago. Mitrodato appears to have been the second or third director of the school, which dates him about 1100 to 1070. Interestingly, Naralon the Great founded the Naralon Library in Anartu in 1087, and Mitrodato’s name in Sumi translation is found in that library. It appears, therefore, that right before the beginning of the Great Drought, there may have been some redevelopment of cultural life, after the mass movements caused by the flooding of the Great Valley.

"One more thing: the ancient bristlecone pines. There are several dozen of them living on Gordhamonta south of Gordha in the high desert there. We found one with 3,537 tree rings! They are known to be extremely ancient creatures and we hope to find one that has 4,500 rings, because that will match the time we have lived on Éra. The tree's rings clearly indicate climatic fluctuations. The Great Drought and the thousand years since were the most difficult years for the trees, until the rainfall returned 15 years ago. The rings grown over the last 15 years are much larger, similar to the ones before the Great Drought. But the rings also record 29 short periods of 1 to 3 years when growth was miniscule. They probably reflect times when there were major volcanic eruptions on Sumilara. The Evudingiru eruption twenty years ago is represented very distinctly by a thin ring. Thus the rings are a clear warning to us that times of bad climate and agricultural crises occur roughly once every 121 years, but not on any predictable schedule; the closest pair of slow growth periods were just 9 years apart. Further research is necessary to correlate the slow growth periods with written records, to core more trees to develop a clearer reconstruction of the climate, and push the record farther back in time. Thank you."

The crowd applauded loudly and at length, very impressed by Sajéku's work. He smiled nervously and bowed slightly in thanks. "This is really doctoral level research," Thornton said. "And you can see how very important it will be in our understanding of our history on Éra, not to mention our future, which will be punctuated by climatic crises that we must prepare for. I am now pleased to introduce our second master's thesis speaker today: Avɛsé Doma-Luktrudɛmai, who will introduce her work on ancient pollen."

Thornton returned to his seat and Avɛsé stepped forward. She glanced at her father, General Pɛrku, who smiled encouragingly at her. She spread her notes on the podium, set up her flip chart with a series of illustrations and terms, and began. “I have also had the privilege of embarking on a brand new field of endeavor known on Gɛdhéma as *palynology.* It literally means the study of dust, but in my case I am studying the pollen that plants produce every year in their reproductive cycles, because pollen can survive thousands of years. The layers of sediment that slowly accumulate in ponds also accumulate pollen and thus can tell us about the changing climate, vegetation patterns, and human use of an area.

“I began research on pollen 14 months ago, when I was teaching geology and environmental science at Néfa Génadɛma, and I was blessed by a grant that allowed me to hire four geology majors from all around the world to come to Néfa for a year and assist. All four of them, this coming spring, will earn Masters degrees with theses on palynology.

“We faced three significant challenges in our work: first, extracting cores of mud from a suitable location; second, separating pollen from the mud, layer by layer; and third, identifying the species that produced the pollen, because each species produces pollen of a unique size and shape, but we had to learn how to recognize it.

“On this table to my left you can see a mud core. This is one of three cores we have studied so far. This one, which is 3 meters long, was extracted from a former bend in the Arjakwés River that was cut off and became an oxbow lake. It is located six kilometers east of Lilalara, next to the shell mound that was excavated several years ago. We also cored an oxbow lake on the Rudhisér fifteen kilometers west of Néfa, not far

from where the river leaves the mountains and enters the Basin. That core is 2 meters long. Two months ago we extracted a mud core from the Moritua when that water body was drained down its lowest level. That was our most ambitious effort to date; the core is almost 4 meters long! It took three of us four days to remove the core intact, and I don't think we ever want to go through that exhausting and frustrating experience again.

"Once you extract the core from the tube and let it dry, you catalog its various layers. Alas, they are not annual, like tree rings. Floods can make a distinct layer of mud; dust storms, thin layers of fine dust grains; and volcanic eruptions add layers of volcanic ash. Wetter times may produce deposits of courser-grained sand particles, but can also contribute more organic material. Droughts might leave a thin layer of clean clay. Under the microscope, these changes can be observed easily and described scientifically. But we cannot date any of these layers. One thing we can recognize, however, is the effect of the Great Drought. The last thousand years, until the return of the rains, left a distinctively different sediment in the lower Arjakwés and to some extent in Moritua. That effect was much less pronounced in Rudhisér, where rainfall diminished, but never dropped to desert levels.

"The second challenge was extracting the pollen from the mud. It took several months of experimenting to develop an effective technique, which involves liquefying the mud, passing it through sieves, and using various powerful but expensive acids to dissolve away the silica and clays, leaving just the organic materials.

"The third challenge was identifying the sources of the pollen. Fortunately, via the internet we had access to many images of pollen from journal articles and textbooks on Gɛdhéma. We are grateful to the Royal Translation Service in Mɛddoakwés for their

careful work to translate, as well as they could, over 100 pages of written materials for us. We had to help the Translation Service because no one had yet invented technical palynological terms in Eryan. That effort was worth half a Masters thesis in itself.

"With these challenges overcome, we could count the pollen grains, create statistical profiles of the different pollen types, layer by layer, and identify the species. What did we find? Working our way down from the top, the top most layer had pollen that reflected the wetter conditions of the last 20 years, but also the expansion of agriculture. Corn pollen appears for the first time, for example. Pollen from wheat and other crops becomes more abundant, as does pollen from grass and some tree species, especially those planted for fruits and nuts. Below that layer, the thousand year drought in Arjakwés, especially in the lower valley, is demonstrated by pollen from arid-climate species and winter grasses. Small areas of irrigation contributed a small amount of pollen from wheat, figs, dates, and vegetable crops. We are not done with our analysis of the Moritua core, but we think the beginning of the drought is marked by the beginning of fluctuating levels of water in Moritua, indicating that the natural low area—it was a marsh and shallow lake, naturally—was pressed into service as a water storage basin.

"Below the base of the sediment deposited during the Great Drought, we come to an era of abundant agriculture, indicated by the same crops we have been growing in the Arjakwés: rice, wheat, vegetables, fruit and nut trees, grapes, and pastureland for animals. The pattern in Rudhisér is different; rather than a great drought, we see pollen from the current crops continuing downward but diminishing in quantity and nearly disappearing, replaced by a lot of pollen from grasses; then, below that, abruptly there is extensive pollen from agricultural crops. We interpret that as the invasion of Eryan peoples from

the flooding of the Great Valley, which appears to have destroyed agriculture for a time. Presumably the result was terrible starvation. Agricultural pollen returns to the Basin gradually.

"Below the abundant agricultural pollen of the pre-drought and pre-invasion eras, both Rudhisér and Arjakwés show a period of very extensive agricultural land use where grass and tree pollen are comparatively rare, rarer than they are today. It is generally hypothesized that the population of Éra was higher in that period than today, and the pollen evidence bears this out.

"Continuing on down into earlier and earlier periods, we can chart statistically how much agriculture spread, from no contribution to the pollen record near the bottoms of the cores to abundant agriculture just below the Great Drought. Time shows that the human population on Éra started small, had a minimal impact on the ecology, but over time came to dominate it more and more. What were these three areas like, before the arrival of human beings? Very much like they are today, with trees and grasses suited for 75 centimeters of rainfall in the Néfa Basin, 60 centimeters in the lower Arjakwés, and 50 centimeters near Moritua. There were five notable ashfalls in the Rudhisér core and four in the two Arjkwés cores, but they may represent different events, depending on the direction of the wind. We are still not certain that we can detect pollen changes associated with them.

"There is one other thing to note about the lower Arjakwés core, which, as noted, was extracted from the mud of an oxbow lake next to a Shell Mound. Our core did include a few fish bones at the 2.3 meter level and a snail shell. No fish bones were encountered elsewhere in the core, and the bones appear to come from larger fish that live

in the river, but perhaps did not live in the oxbow lake. We hypothesize the possibility that the fish bones and the snail were leftovers from a meal of the Shell Mound people that found its way into the oxbow lake. We could test this hypothesis by taking several additional cores and seeing what we find. If that is true, the Shell Mound people lived at a time when the countryside was a mix of winter grassland and groves of trees, without any agriculture. Further research will be necessary, however, to corroborate this conclusion. Thank you."

General Pɛrku jumped to his feet to give his daughter a standing ovation. The audience followed, but not just because it was a talk by the daughter of a prominent general; it was a fascinating presentation. Thornton turned to the other four Geological Sciences faculty and quickly conferred with them while the audience applauded. He walked forward as it waned. "I am happy to say that the Department is unanimous that both Sagéku and Avɛsé have completed their requirements for Masters degrees in Geological Sciences." He paused for another round of sustained applause. "You can see why we are so proud of these graduates, both of whom will enter our doctoral program next week. They will also be teaching courses in their fields in the second fall term, so that we can continue the development of both fields. We are seeking contributions to establish permanent chairs in dendrochronology and in palynology so that these two fields will continue to be developed and contribute their understanding to the social and environmental history of Éra. Both have enormous potential to teach us about our past, but also to illuminate the challenges we might face in the future. Consequently, both are high priority areas for the Geological Sciences department. I want to thank all of you for coming today and invite you to attend the reception that we will be holding across the

hall. You will have many opportunities to ask both speakers questions. We'll see you over there."

Thornton stepped down from the podium one last time. He walked over to Sagéku and Avɛsé and shook their hands to congratulate them for excellent performances. The General was right there to hug his daughter as well.

"So, you want to establish endowed chairs in both fields?" asked Pɛrku.

"Indeed."

"Do they have to be here in Mɛlwika?"

"No, not necessarily. We do want to expand our geology program, obviously, which is by far the best one. We have five faculty; Néfa has two more, Bɛllɛdha one. But those génadɛmas need to develop their programs, too."

"How much?"

"We want to support a salary of 6,000 dhanay per year and, ideally, provide another thousand for supporting research. At five percent return, that requires an endowment of 140,000."

Pɛrku thought about it and nodded. "Good to know. I have some time; she won't finish her doctorate for at least three more years, right?"

"Probably. The Masters was heavily focused on creating palynology courses and research techniques, but now she needs more general background. That may not take very long because she has been teaching geology courses in Néfa and Pértatranisér several years. She could finish a dissertation in only a year and a half, after the course work is done. So, minimum of two years."

“Alright. I can probably do that, but for Néfa. I want my grandchildren near me and Sharé.”

“My good General, we will be glad to support an endowed chair there as well. She could teach here in summers and other times. All the geology departments collaborate with each other.”

“Of course! Thank you, honored Dhoru.”

Thornton nodded and moved toward the reception. He saw Jordan sitting in the back and they approached each other.

“Very impressive,” said Jordan. “And very valuable research. What did Pɛrku want? To arrange an endowed chair for his daughter?”

“Yes, and in Néfa. I’d prefer the chair to be here, but I can understand his preference, and Néfa needs endowed chairs as well.”

“Especially since Néfa Génadɛma teaches more courses in Pértatranisér than in Néfa. Even Ora depends on that department. Have you thought of developing an endowed chair in geological sciences in Ora? You’d think they’d want one, and the faculty could easily commute back and forth.”

“Mitrui Génadɛma has tried, but they have a long list of things they want endowed already.”

“I suppose you invited me here to see what we could contribute to an endowment?’

Thornton smiled. “Of course.”

“I figured, and I can see why. We have time; two or three years. We’re already contributing twenty thousand a year each to three new endowed chairs, as you know, and Geological Sciences already has three.”

“But two are really pledges from the palace for perpetual support for positions in the Royal Geological Survey. We have only one real endowed chair in geological sciences.”

“This is important, though. If we make a pledge to get the endowment started, the génadɛma can publicize the effort. We have more and more alums every year with spare wealth to donate. I suspect we can raise the amount over five to ten years.”

“That may have to do,” agreed Thornton, disappointed.

He went into the reception and chatted with people for ten minutes, but he had to watch the time; he and Lébé were departing for Pértatranisér that evening after the eclipse. He hurried home as the sky was beginning to darken. As the eclipse spread darkness across the world, they ate supper, listened to the *World Table,* and said good bye to everyone. Bags were packed, so once the sunlight returned, they grabbed their luggage and headed for their cars. Thornton and Lébé were taking their big *kwapbertro* or “steam carrier,” a sort of pickup truck converted into a van, while Jalalu and Saré were taking their own car.

“I wish they wouldn’t drive so fast,” complained Lébé as she started down Route 4.

“I’ve warned Jalalu not to drive so fast. Maybe we’ll have to consider something stronger.”

“No, we’ll keep working on him. He’s 22, after all.”

Thornton nodded and pulled out his cell phone. “I’ll text him right now.” He sent a quick message and thirty seconds later, their son did slow down.

“It won’t last,” predicted Lébé.

“I think I’ll text Philos.” Thornton selected Philos’s number and began to type: *Dear Philos: We are on our way to Pértatranisér for the next three months, so keep that in mind when you text or call, because we will be awake or asleep 9 hours later than we were in Mɛlwika. By the way, today we had two superb presentations. One was about dendrochronology. We are beginning to reconstruct the climatic changes back at least 3,500 years, and hope to push it back even farther. The researcher was also able to date an archaeological site based on the tree ring patterns in the wooden beams. The other presentation was about palynology. With the pollen deposited in mud layers, the speaker was able to reconstruct ancient climate and settlement patterns. It was very sophisticated work, especially considering both efforts have been underway only a little over a year. Both were broadcast over the web to colleagues of the second speaker gathered in Néfa, so you can probably find it, if you want.*

He hit send and settled in for a nap. When he woke up a bit over an hour later, the sun was high in the sky and they were approaching Bɛllɛdha. They stopped at a garage a bit past the city to get methanol fuel for the cars and switch drivers. At that point they were 160 kilometers from Pértatranisér on a straight and wide road.

As they entered the Néfa Basin from the north, Thornton’s phone rang. “Thornton, this is Philos! Thank you for telling me about the recording! I was very, very impressed by the research!”

“Thank you, Philos, I am so glad you called. These are two very talented scientists, and we were able to get them financial support so they had students to help them. Both are continuing on in our doctoral program to develop dendrochronology and palynology as mature fields of study.”

“I’m very happy to hear that. They will help you greatly to reconstruct the last 4,500 years of history. I’ve followed the various publications in the journal *History* as well. You are very fortunate to have clay tablets, inscriptions, and books made from leaves or from bark paper. No doubt there will be gaps in your history, but the arrival of the Eryan and Sumis actually fall in the period of recorded history.”

“Yes. In the last ten years, also, the archaeologists have started to catalog pottery styles, glass manufacturing styles, and coins. The latter are the easiest to date because they usually have the name of a king on them. Soon every king will be dated through his coins and diplomatic correspondence. There are 30,000 leaf pages in Mɛdha that we are photographing and deciphering, and a similar number of clay tablets in Lilalara, plus the Naralon Library in Anartu. The palace is now supporting the work of a dozen archaeologists, two dozen support personnel, and a dozen historians.”

“Very impressive. You will make rapid progress. What about radiogenic dating?”

“I’ve spoken to our chemists and chemical engineers. We can measure many substances to the parts per million range, but we can’t measure isotopes very well, yet. We have been getting about 10,000 dhanay per year to work on the problem and that’ll support one researcher and two assistants.”

“I see. Because you need radiogenic dating to reconstruct the history of the Shell Mound people. They go back to 72,350 Éra years before present.”

"We won't be able to do much to study them for a very long time. So we have been concentrating on more recent history, like Mɛdha, Lilalara, and Gordha."

"Speaking of Gordha, a month or two ago you texted me about the tomb they had found, and the speculation was that it was the tomb of Mégékwɛs, founder of Gordha. That speculation is correct. He and his people were transported to Gordha because they had a fight with a local tribe and they lost the battle. There was the possibility they'd be massacred. Mégékwɛs was wounded by an arrow in the battle. During transit to Éra, while he was unconscious, his wound was treated, but the infection spread and killed him a week after he arrived on Éra. His son Andamu succeeded him."

"That's what the legend says!"

"Well, it is correct. Many of the stories about them are not; they did not encounter dragons, for example. But the basic facts are correct."

"Now I don't know whether to tell people or not!"

"That's the dilemma caused by these conversations. But more research on his sword will reveal its Sumerian manufacture. It took them many years to find tin on Éra, in order to make bronze."

"We have been meaning to do a chemical analysis on the bronze, but we don't have many bronze items and we can't date them, so we can't do a useful comparison."

"Oh, that's true. We have been discussing your history lately and feel it is best that you reconstruct the history of the Sumis and Eryan yourselves, without our help. We are willing to help, of course, and we will provide you with everything we have eventually—which is not as extensive as you might want—but meanwhile, your archaeologists and historians should do their work. But what we are willing to do is share

detailed information about the Shell Mound people with you. There are no written records for you to find and the oldest camps are buried or obscure. We think it is important to start learning how to cooperate with the people of Éra, and that is a simple choice."

Thornton looked at Lébé, stunned; she could hear the conversation and looked equally surprised. "What sort of information would you share?"

"The places where your archaeologists should dig, for one thing. Beyond that, we'd share a lot of information you can never recover archaeologically; the names of the people and the bands, the way they spread out over Éra, their languages, songs, religion, sacred stories, rituals, the technology they developed, etc. This is information the Earth will get, eventually, on the ancestors of humanity. We have records that go back there nearly 2 million years, with lots of gaps of course. When that precious archive is donated to humanity, it will be a true enlightenment about the nature and capacities of the human species. For Éra, 72,000 years of prehistory is a pretty good example of what humanity will experience later. This is not something we can give right away, either; it will take years to convert it into a form you can access, and it will take years for your scholars to make sense of it all."

"Philos, this is a huge responsibility you are placing on my shoulders. I'll need to consult with others about it. The palace will need to consider whether to give resources to support the effort. It may be a substantial amount of money and people."

"Yes, it will require a lot of people and time. You should consult with your family and your colleagues, and with the palace eventually. But today I'll give you a little taste, an example, alright?"

"Ah . . . alright."

"I can see from the satellites picking up your cell phone signal that you are in the Néfa Basin. Can you continue south and turn onto Route 51?"

"You mean, the route that has just been extended into the Néfa Basin from Véspa? I believe it just opened a few weeks ago."

"Yes, the Duchess of Rudhisér and the Duke of Véspa attended the opening; it was broadcast over the *World Table.* My son gave me a translation because he was studying it for a course project."

"It meets Route 2 just half a kilometer in front of us," said Lébé.

Philos heard her. "Turn onto Route 51."

"Alright." Thornton saw the sign ahead and slowed. The intersection was brand new, at the southern edge of the Néfa Basin where the village of Bruagras stood. The road had been terminated there so that trucks carrying wood to the Bruagras cement and gas plant would have a direct route from the western forests of Véspa.

Thornton slowed and went a quarter of the way around the roundabout. The new route was wide and fresh and gradually descended the outer edge of the Basin's crater rim. Jalalu and Saré, who were following them, turned as well. "Where are we going?" Thornton asked Philos.

"Not much out of your way. You are now in the beautiful valley of the Atranisér and the city of Pértatranisér has gradually filled it with houses and farms. It has a pleasing climate and fertile soil. This is the place where the first band of Shell Mound people were placed, 72,000 years ago."

"In Pértatranisér!"

“Not in the city; in the western end of the valley, which is part of the city’s territory. I have turned on a mapping program and I can see exactly where you are. The route crosses the Atranisér in another two kilometers, right?”

“Correct. I can see the bridge up ahead.”

“Once you cross the bridge, park your car.”

“Alright.” Thornton looked at Lébé, a mix of excitement and worry on his face. She looked the same.

Route 51 rode over the river on a beautiful new bridge of concrete and steel; one of the nicest bridges on Éra, in fact, because it was so new. Thornton slowed and pulled off the pavement. “Shall we get out?”

“Yes, and walk upstream about 150 meters.”

“One hundred and fifty meters.”

He got out. Jalalu parked right behind them and got out of his car as well. “What is it dad? Car trouble?”

“No, archaeology.” He pointed to his phone. “Alright, one hundred fifty meters upstream.” Thornton started to walk west along the top of the river bank, the other three following and Lébé explaining to the astonished young people.

They were not far beyond the westernmost edge of the city; Route 51 had been brought across the provincial border to serve as a back way into Pértatranisér as well, and the city’s industrial park had been sited nearby at its western end. The river valley here, however, was quiet and uninhabited, except for cows grazing on the slope. Across the river, the valley floor was a flat floodplain, planted in corn. They followed a cow path that was about 2 meters above the sparkling waters.

“A little farther,” said Philos. Then a moment later, as they reached a spot that widened out and flattened where a small creek entered the Atranisér, he said ‘“Stop!”

“Here?”

“Yes, here. As you can see, the river is now moving back toward the middle of the valley and there’s floodplain on this side of the river as well. Seventy thousand years ago, the river was much farther north and the floodplain was bifurcated. Now the river is flowing against the south side of its valley and slowly eroding the hillside. This area, then, was all forested, with scattered meadows of grass. This flat area was open and had the river to the north and the little creek you see to the west. It was a perfect place to camp. It became the home base of Papadam’s band. We put them down here because we could see what an ideal spot it was, and they came back here for hundreds of years.”

“And if we dig here, we’ll hit something?”

“We’ll give you a detailed map if you want, but yes, about a meter down you should find fireplaces, a midden, and scattered, broken stone tools. They didn’t have much, back then.”

“How many people?”

“Papadam’s own clan had 27 and it was a part of a band that had 7 clans. We brought all seven bands to the Néfa Basin, which was a beautiful area of grass and trees. Then a few years later another band was placed near the mouth of the Swadakwés on the eastern shore, then a third band in Kɛrda. Altogether, about 700 people. Over five thousand years they spread out over all of Éra and eventually became seven bands of about 500 people each, speaking seven languages in two language groups because one of the three original bands died out. When the Sumis and Eryan arrived, the Shell Mound

people numbered only about 3,700. They were gradually conquered, enslaved, and assimilated, but it took 3,000 years for them to disappear. But all Érans today carry their DNA as well; probably about 10%, though it is all from the female side. There are probably no Y chromosomes from the Shell Mound people."

"My sister would be fascinated by their languages."

"The three languages were variants of the original terrestrial mother tongue, as will be obvious when one studies them. We will provide oral records and culture once you have a consensus among your scholars that they want them and will study them."

"A consensus." Thornton thought about that. "That will be a tricky thing to bring about."

"Indeed. It'll be more difficult than excavating this site, I am sure."

526.

The Prince Visits

Mid/Late Brénménu /early/mid Oct., 25/643

Thornton, Lébé, Jalalu, and Saré couldn't say anything about the call from Philos; as soon as they reached the family house in Pértatranisér there was all the chaos of unloading and greeting, followed by a big lunch that included Budhéstu and Kalémé, Saré's parents, plus Andranu, Skandé, and Marié. It was late afternoon when they could finally tell Amos and May. They sat outside in the garden's sun to help stay awake, as it was after midnight in Mɛlwika.

"This feels like a whole new chapter in our relationship with the aliens," said May, pondering.

"Last year they indicated interest in deepening their relationship, right?" asked Amos.

"Yes, Philos said that," confirmed Thornton. "They want to introduce our history to us as a sort of practice for doing the same with Earth, possibly with humans serving as intermediaries."

"But not now; Earth is still too immature," said Lébé.

"But this might be a step in that direction," exclaimed May. "With their records of the Shell Mound People and our archaeology as the collaboration."

"Yes. Right now, all the archaeologists are busy. There are excavations and related work at Lilalara, Mɛdha, two shell mounds, Morituora, the philosophical school, and

outside Mɛlwika. The palace has been pretty generous in developing an archaeology program. But everyone is busy."

"I think this takes priority," exclaimed Amos. "And we can spare some money to assist a new excavation."

"That will help, but I'm really not sure what to say!"

"I'd go meet with someone and explain the situation. Start with one person, like Marku," suggested May.

"Yes, that occurred to me, but neither Marku nor Skandu have expressed much interest in the Shell Mound people. But if I approach someone who might be, Marku and Skandu might be upset, because everything is done through them."

"Politics," summarized Amos.

Thornton nodded. "But this is big," said May.

"I agree, but neither of them is very sympathetic to the idea of *aliénɛs.* I'm not sure they'd be willing to start an excavation because we were led via a cell phone call to the right place."

"Well, there is an alternative," said May. "Prince Mégékwɛs will be here in a few days. He and I need to talk about his doctoral program in History. He'd be receptive."

Thornton smiled. "Yes, that'd be perfect. He will understand, be interested, and can talk to his mother, as well as the archaeologists."

"It is so kind for you to visit with me, Your Highness," said Duchess Albɛsé to Prince Mégékwɛs and Princess Ninlilé, as she welcomed them into her salon. "Will you have tea

with me? We have it ready; thank you for letting me know ahead of time that you wished to visit. I'm surprised to see you at this hour, it must be late in Mɛddoakwés right now!"

"Thank you, cousin Duchess," replied the prince. "It is the late evening in Mɛddoakwés, but we arrived on the western shore last night and are partially adjusted. My mother actually urged us to come by and visit. She conveys her greetings and asked me to express her pleasure and admiration for the work you have been doing of late."

Albɛsé smiled, flattered. She pointed to some comfortable chairs and they all sat while a servant entered with tea and cakes. "Please thank the queen for me; that is very kind of her. I have tried to take her advice in baby steps. As you know, two months ago the road connecting the western towns in Véspa was completed all the way up to the southern Basin, thereby opening a new north-south route. I approached Governor Brébalu and he agreed—reluctantly, I should add—to include me in the dedication program that opened the last stretch of road. I obtained advice from several individuals about what to say, and people seem to feel my speech was good. The palace had actually made a study of the economic impact of the road; I understand that's a new thing! I was able to get the statistics and include them in my speech."

"Indeed; Her Majesty read your speech and was quite happy with it."

"Excellent, I am very pleased. The Governor is now sending me copies of all the reports he receives from the various provincial agencies. One day a week I sit down with two assistants and go over them all, and I am now reading the newspapers more carefully so that I am aware of the situation in the province. I am sorry, Your Majesty, that you are no longer writing pieces for the papers."

“That is temporary; for the next few years, I need to concentrate on my education. I am, however, occasionally converting some of the research and writing I am doing for school into newspaper articles. There will be one in a few weeks about what we are learning about the development of Eryan culture and politics from the ancient Sumi records.”

“Really? I had no idea they had anything of significance.”

“Indeed, they do. You’ll see. So, the Governor is being cooperative with you?”

“I would say indeed, that is the case.”

“Has he rejected or ignored any advice you have offered? He is in charge, of course, but we would hope that he listens and values your comments.”

“We have a reasonably good relationship.”

“So, he hasn’t been . . . resistant?”

Albɛsé hesitated. “Well, I have never approached him with suggestions. I am still getting used to an expanded role.”

“Excellent; that is important,” injected Ninlilé. “We have relatively few women in positions such as yours, and it is not an easy position to be in. Countess Ninti is a relative of mine and she struggles with men ignoring her; she has told me about it.”

“And Duchess Sugé has to deal with three very powerful and opinionated brothers,” added Mégékwɛs. “Yet she is an active figure in the governance of Swadnoma.”

“I spoke with her when the House of Lords met in the summer, and she was very encouraging, as was the Queen. I’m afraid I don’t have the preparation to make the decisions that she has.”

“My mother didn’t have the preparation, either,” noted the Prince. “She was raised to be the wife of a lord, and that’s what she was until my uncle, the heir to the throne, was killed. She learned fast.”

“Your mother is a truly remarkable woman,” agreed Albɛsé. “And she was always more active than I. She was active with the poor in Mɛddoakwés, while I was the wife of a relatively unimportant rural lord.”

“True, but I came from a similar background as a member of an aristocratic family with no influence, and have had to learn a lot,” said Ninlilé. “I’ll tell you what I have found: I love to visit the elementary schools, meet with the children, and read to them. And they love it! The reason we weren’t able to come earlier today is because I was at two elementary schools in Ora, meeting children in third and fourth grade and reading children’s stories to them.”

“Really? I do enjoy being with children, though only for so long.”

“That’s what’s fun about this; you’re with them for an hour or so,” said Ninlilé. “And you get to encourage them, ask them about what they want to be when they grow up, encourage them to study hard . . . so you are able to do some good.”

“How interesting. I might be able to do that.”

“If you’d like, I plan to go to some schools here in Néfa in a few days, and you would be welcome to come along. We have plenty of books with us. You can see what I do and then go do the same in a different classroom. The elementary schools love it and the kids feel encouraged.”

“Thank you, I’ll think about it.”

“It’s very good for your public image,” added Mégékwɛs. “There are some families that visit hospitals periodically to see how the doctors are doing, and they greet the patients or even pray with them. My mother tries to do that every month or two. There are others who visit with gabrulis. Some Dukes will visit granges and talk to the members. I think you can imagine the advantages. Really, this is something all the governors should be doing, because it keeps them in touch with the people and their problems.”

“I can see how it would do that. I have visited Néfa Hospital a few times, but never just to see what they are doing. I am not sure I’d know what to ask them!”

“That’s alright; they’ll be very appreciative of the visit, you’ll learn something, and next time you can ask better questions,” said Ninlilé.

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. I have never heard of any lords doing that sort of thing.”

“I think you are right; all too often, it falls on the women,” said Mégékwes. “But when I can, I go with the Princess to the schools. Today I joined her and went to talk to a classroom myself. The kids were thrilled and asked all sorts of questions.”

“I bet you are good at answering them, too.”

“Thank you,” replied Mégékwɛs. “But I have gotten good only through practice. I think back to some of my answers a few years ago and feel embarrassed. This is what we do to grow. We try something, because it is our duty to serve the people. Widumaj gave us authority, but also responsibility. If we don’t take responsibility, we are not worthy of having the authority.”

“That’s been your mother’s message for years, and her mother’s before that.”

"And Wɛrétrakɛstɛr's," added the prince. "He has been our conscience. What would we do without him? He has been the great manager of this twenty-five year revolution, you might say."

"That's true. He's a great man and Rudhisér is now privileged to have him living among us."

"It is a privilege," agreed Mégékwɛs. "But have you thought about why he is here? Because this province has suffered so much, and it is in great need. Right now he has set a goal to visit every grange in Rudhisér and Véspa by the end of this year. He'd visit every gabruli as well, but I think he feels awkward about it. He'd prefer a woman to do it."

"Really? Maybe he can give me advice about that."

"Invite him," suggested Ninlilé.

Albɛsé nodded. "Perhaps I will."

The next morning, feeling more adjusted to the time zone change, the Prince and Princess managed to get up in the late morning—after the eclipse—and head to Pértatranisér, where Ninlilé visited an elementary school. Mégékwɛs, however, had business with May and met her at her house.

"We can have tea in my office here, and we'll have a quieter place to talk," suggested May, greeting Mégékwɛs by the front door. She led him across the house's public courtyard to the stairs leading up to her office. "Is Ninlilé with you?"

"Yes, she's at the elementary school down the street, reading to third graders. I stopped by for half an hour, then came here."

“Are you staying at the palace in Ora?”

“No, the Palace Hotel there. Much more comfortable and private. Tomorrow night we’ll go over and have dinner with Duke Aryu, and the day after we’re having lunch with Lord Mitrudatu. It’ll be a good chance to catch up.”

“I’m glad.” May opened the office door and allowed the Prince to enter first. She followed and they sat in chairs opposite each other.

“Ninlilé and I visited Duchess Albɛsé yesterday. The Queen asked us to have tea with her and encourage her to continue expanding her involvement in the province.”

“Good; I think. She is not very well informed, as you know. If someone feels empowered to get involved and is not well informed, they can also do a lot of harm.”

“I know. Mother was hoping you and Amos could befriend her and advise her.”

“We’ve tried. The fundamental problem, of course, is that we are gɛdhémɛ. All the lords in the province stay aloof from us, except for a few, and they are the lords of the new townships east of the Basin. The Duke actually interacted with us more than the Duchess does now.”

“That’s too bad. The province has two large cities; they need to be coordinated better.”

“I agree, and some of that is being done by the mayors. Governor Brébalu has been concerned about that, too.”

“Still, it would be good if the families worked together.”

May thought. “Well, there is one possibility: Skandé. She and Duchess Albɛsé hit it off at the meeting of the House of Lords. Perhaps she would be ‘safer.’”

"And maybe Andranu, too. I'll think about that. Anyway, I didn't come here to talk to you about that."

"No: the doctoral program. You've run out of courses to take and need more courses for the degree, based on the requirements."

"Exactly. Between history, archaeology, and some relevant courses in Sumi, literature, and linguistics, there are 14 courses. I've taken them all, some as an undergraduate. I need 24. I've managed to create 4 special seminars over the last year studying ancient Sumi texts. I need 6 more. Skandu created quite a few for his doctorate, but they aren't being run currently. I could create more special seminars and tutorials, of course, but that is becoming rather frustrating. The fact is that the history profession does not yet have enough content for someone to get a doctorate in it!"

"Then we need to keep creating content."

"But that is hard, when the pupil is also the prince. People defer to me. It is difficult for me to get advice that is frank and rigorous. That's what I mean by frustrating. I really don't get a sense of how I am doing, because everyone says I'm doing great!"

"I see. Of course, from what I can see, you *are* doing great. You have thrown yourself into the task. Have you thought of a dissertation topic? We could build some courses around that."

"I'd like to write a history of Éra."

May shook her head. "No; too broad. Save that topic for when you are 40. Seriously, that requires a maturity of judgment that only comes with age. Physicists and mathematicians may do their best work when they're young, but historians do their best work when they're old!"

"I see. Something narrower."

"I think so. What about a critical biography of Gésɛlékwés Maj? Your great-great-grandfather. Roktɛkɛstɛr, Gurwɛkɛstɛr, and others of their generation were alive as children during the end of his reign, so there's oral history to gather. There are Eryan records that are still around, and there would be Sumi records. He conquered Sumilara, subdued the Tutanɛ, and repaired the Royal Road all the way around the world, from the eastern escarpment of the Long Valley to Kɛrda, Sumilara, Mɛddoakwés, Gordha, Kostakhéma—which he rebuilt and fortified—then on to Moruagras on the western escarpment of the Long Valley. He's great, but he's also controversial; he's close enough in time so that there is plenty of information, but far enough back in time so that he can be studied dispassionately."

Mégékwɛs smiled. "That's a very interesting idea. I have heard stories; the palace is full of them. There are records in both languages, so the story has several sides to it. It reminds me of my journalism!"

"Of course! History is journalism with careful wording and lots of footnotes!"

He laughed. "That's true. But what courses are we talking about? There's already a course on 'Recent Eryan History.' I took it as an undergraduate and it's now out of date."

"Well, you know what we recommend to graduate students who are fairly well advanced and want a course that doesn't exist: we recommend that they create and teach the course themselves as a seminar for fellow students under the supervision of a faculty member. Because of your royal position, I suggest that the course be officially listed in the catalogs as being taught by someone else, so the students signing up won't know that

you are the primary instructor. Start with ‘Recent Eryan History’; since you are revising the course and teaching it, it counts as a new course. You might want to create a ‘Recent Sumi History’ course as well as a parallel offering, and that would be new. Together, they’d give you context. Then a course on Gésɛlékwɛs Maj himself, with your dissertation chapters as the principal text; that’d be a third course. There would be a dissertation writing course or two; that’d be a few more. You’d need to add one more seminar on something, and I suspect something will come along. I’d like to see a seminar about Kɛrda and the Philosophical School there; maybe someone can pull that together, there are texts in the archives there that could be studied. Eryan scholars want to know that the Naralon Library and its school was not the only center of learning before the rise of the génadɛma system 25 years ago. There are some other topics that we can persuade other students to work on.”

“You are right, I don’t need to plan all 24 courses right now. But your suggestion that I reorganize and teach the Recent Eryan History course; that’s very appealing. So is a dissertation about my great great grandfather. In many ways, those three monarchs—Gésɛlékwɛs Maj, Gésɛlékwɛs Dwo, and Duktɛrésto—set the stage for the Modern Period. I think a course on the Modern Period could be organized as well.”

“I agree, we’re far enough into it now for some retrospective interpretation.”

“Alright! I’m glad I came to see you about this! Like I said, I can’t get frank feedback from anyone except my mother, and she can’t advise me about history!”

“I’ve been thinking about your dilemma ever since you wrote to me. You aren’t the only one with this problem. As you may know, my sister in law Lébé has decided to pursue a Ph.D. in literature. There is a shortage of relevant courses for her as well, and

the course on Kɛrda was an idea I had for her, though she doesn't want to pursue it as a faculty member."

"She has written two novels and edited two books of folk tales. I think she has already earned a doctorate!"

"I agree, but we want to be sure to put together a process that others can follow as well. I think that's true of history as well." May rose. "Thornton wants to talk to you about something; an archaeological matter. Do you have time for it?"

"Yes, I have at least an hour. I wasn't sure how long we'd be speaking."

"Good, he has an office nearby. He and Lébé are here for the fall term."

She led the Prince out of her office and down the balcony to another office nearby. They knocked and Thornton immediately answered.

"Oh, good, I was hoping you'd have time," he said. "Come in and please sit and make yourself comfortable. May can join us, she knows about this and may have ideas."

"Good. How mysterious." The prince sat in a chair and looked expectantly at Thornton.

"As you probably know, we get various things from the aliens; concentrated medicines, electronics, and sometimes mechanical equipment that allows our industrial facilities to develop new abilities. The way that works is that I drive to a remote spot, two or three times a year, and pick up boxes of materials they have left for us. We can also talk to the aliens over our phones, and email and text them, just as we can each other. I have personally been in contact with one of them since the time we were captured on Earth, because he is about my age. He was a student when we were captured; he is now in charge of their base on Skanda and has a son who is completing their equivalent of

génadɛma. So we have been friendly. In fact, about a year ago, he, his wife, and his son invited me, Lébé, and Jalalu to meet with them socially when they brought a shipment to us. We can't eat the same foods, but both groups brought their own foods and we sat together and talked for a few minutes."

"Really? That's amazing! What do they look like?"

"They are about our height with a head, two arms, and two legs, but they also have two tentacles growing from the sides of their chests below their arms. Their eyes and ears are more or less in the same place as ours, but they have no noses and breathe through a slit in their throat. They wear clothing like we do, but males have a mane of hair on their backs. They don't have vocal chords like we do and communicate through a series of whistles, clicks, and other sounds. They have to wear a translation box that translates their sounds into our words. It is difficult to recognize their body language, so meeting them is rather. . . strange. But in spite of that, they are friendly, inquisitive, and concerned about justice, just like we are."

"And their interest in us is what, exactly?"

"They're mostly interested in Gɛdhéma, the home world of human beings. They are a species that studies intelligent species and their social evolution. They know that sometimes when a species develops complex technology, they wipe themselves out entirely. They created Éra as a place with a 'backup' population of humans in case humanity destroyed itself on Gɛdhéma. This is still very much a danger, too. Eventually they will deem humanity to have passed its adolescence and reached a stage of adulthood when it is stable, and at that point they will introduce themselves to humanity. The galaxy

has other intelligent life forms and they are in touch with each other; it will be humanity's destiny to be another member of that community of intelligent species."

"Huh." The Prince sat back in his chair, amazed.

"They have been watching humanity for a very long time; maybe a million years. And as they have watched they have recorded what they have seen. They have a huge archive of history that they can give humanity when Gɛdhéma is ready, which it is not, yet. But they would like to 'practice' that transfer by giving us information about our history. And they want to start with the Shell Mound People."

"Them? Why not start with the Eryan?"

"Because if they tell us everything, there would be nothing left for us to discover. Learning how to find information—through text study, archaeology, and all the other techniques we are learning—is an important lesson, too. They can tell us things that we can't learn using those techniques, too. For example, Philos told me the grave that was just discovered in Gordha over the summer really was the grave of Mégékwɛs and that the core of the legend is true, though many details of the story, like slaying the dragon, are not. In the case of the Shell Mound people, the leader of the first band was a man named Papadam. That's something we could never find out on our own because they had no writing. They were people without agriculture, without domesticated animals, who used stone tools. And the aliens told us exactly where they first lived on Éra. It was on the Atranisér, five kilometers upstream."

"Really?"

“Yes. They will eventually give us recordings of the people speaking and singing and other things they have about them. Meanwhile, we’d like to get an archaeological team to dig the site where they lived.”

“I see. Yes, of course, that’s an excellent idea.”

“It’s a test of our relationship with them. But I doubt either Marku or Skandu will be particularly interested.”

“I see your dilemma. You’re right, they have their own historical and archaeological interests. What about Wɛrétragéndu?”

“He’d be interested, yes, but wouldn’t want to spare any time or funds from his work in Mɛdha.”

“True. So. . . what are you suggesting?”

“We can supply some funds from the family’s trust, but if we pay for the whole thing, it’d look like we’re going around the existing programs. We need endorsement from the palace and maybe some funds; perhaps 10,000 dhanay, which if we match, would be enough to do the dig.”

“With whom?”

“I can work on that. It’ll soon be cold in Gordha and Arjakwés and archaeological work will be suspended there for the winter. If we have funds, we can probably attract an archaeologist and some students to work here until spring. I’ll be here and can help coordinate the work as well.”

“I see. Alright, I can talk to my mother about the project, but we still need to talk to Marku, Skandu, and Wɛrétragéndu.”

“I agree, but I want money and a plan first.”

The Prince nodded. “That makes sense. But are we trying to prove that the aliens’ information is correct?”

“In a way. We reconstruct the setting and they provide the recordings and other data, and we put the two together to see what we get. Then maybe we move on to a bigger, more ambitious project. We don’t even know what they have. I can imagine that they could put little devices the size of a grain of rice or a small insect with microphones and cameras almost anywhere. For all we know, they may have recorded debates in the various philosophical schools and political discussions in palaces as well as ordinary discussions in houses, religious ceremonies, legends . . . there could be a vast and rich legacy of the people of Éra available to us. But we need to have the settings. If we know the context, we’ll be ready for the details, and some things that might be shocking might shock us less.”

“I see what you mean. Very interesting. I’m glad you have thought this through!”

“I’m not sure I have. We’re slowly working our way through the dilemmas.”

“I’ll be going back to Mɛddoakwés in three days and I’ll be sure to talk to the Queen right away.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.”

527.

An Uneasy Partnership

Génménu late Oct./early Nov., 25/643

"I'm glad we have a chance to get to know each other better," said Budhéstu to Thornton and Lébé, as the two entered the priest's house.

"So am I," said Thornton. "You have two children married into our family; that must seem rather strange."

Budhéstu laughed. "At first, it seemed like a cruel joke played on us by Esto, but now we are beginning to see his wisdom." He led them into the living room.

"Lunch is just about ready," said Kalémé from the door of the kitchen. "I hope you like Kɛrda chicken."

"Of course!" said Lébé. "Let me help you." She hurried to the kitchen.

"So, what brings you to Pértatranisér for three months?" asked Budhéstu.

"There are two classes May is teaching here that Lébé wants to take for her doctoral degree, so we decided to come. Jalalu and Saré want to take some of the courses offered at Ora hospital, so that got them here, so I arranged to come and do some work here for the Royal Geological Survey as well."

"About what?"

"Reforestation. With the Route 51 connection to Bruagras finished, timber is being cut in the western mountains of Véspa at an accelerated rate. We're mapping the cleared areas to make sure they're leaving enough to prevent soil erosion and asking the timber companies to set a schedule for replanting."

"And if they don't?"

"We'll submit a development grant on their behalf so they have the money to replant. They were supposed to establish two tree nurseries but they haven't. They have to be established and I'll inquire who should be hired to do that. The province and the townships have awarded timber contracts to a dozen companies to cut the trees rather than creating public companies to do it."

"How much trouble do you think you'll have?"

"Probably not that much. We're talking about the seventh developmental priority. The palace is very supportive."

"I see."

Just then Kalémé and Lébé came out of the kitchen with platters of rice and chicken. "Come sit, lunch is served!" said Kalémé.

"Thank you," replied Thornton. He sat. "It's very kind of the two of you to invite us to lunch."

"It is our honor," replied Kalémé. She dished out rice and chicken to them and to Budhéstu, then sat and filled her own plate.

"How is your work here going?" Thornton asked Budhéstu.

"Quite well. With three priests, the temple is bountifully staffed. We don't have very many people sacrificing; this is not a city where sacrificing animals is an important part of people's lives. But the hymns are important, so we are very active in supporting the hymn hall on Primdius and offering classes about the hymns there and at the temple itself. We are also offering optional classes at the high school, both during school and afterward. And I am continuing my work about the life and hymns of Widumaj. Our

revised and expanded book *The Hymns of Widumaj* has come out in two versions, including the revised traditional spelling system. I am also working on a collection of narratives about him which will be a book, *The Life of Widumaj*."

"That sounds marvelous!" said Lébé. "There are so many stories about him. How will you decide which ones to include?"

"There is an old cycle of them in oral form. We started with them, then added others using the old cycle as theological criteria for including them."

"So, no stories about him slaying a dragon?"

"Exactly, but we will keep the healing stories, because the old cycle has some."

"But some of them are pretty . . . amazing," said Lébé.

Budhéstu nodded. "That's true, but he's Widumaj! At this point, we have no way to separate history and legend. Indeed, can there be any such separation?"

"Perhaps not completely," agreed Lébé. "But there are stories about him using his powers to multiply birds, as a child, and blinding another child who teased him. Would you include those?"

"The multiplying of birds, yes; the blinding, no. And I agree, we will be criticized. But we need to put the stories into print, to stabilize them, so they don't get more fanciful."

"Maybe you should include them all and label them as more or less likely," suggested Thornton.

"That may create even more criticism," said Budhéstu.

"My mother was the daughter of the lord of Bloripludha," said Lébé. "She knew the entire cycle and told the stories to us many times, as children."

“Really? How well do you remember them?”

“Pretty well. I’ll be glad to repeat them, if you’d like.”

“I would like that, because you haven’t seen the written version we have. That would allow me to compare your version with the standard version we have created from the various oral versions.”

“And after that, I’ll be glad to look at the standard version you are creating.”

“Thank you, but the manuscript is in the traditional writing system.”

“I can read that system, too,” said Lébé.

“You can?” Budhéstu was surprised, and Lébé couldn’t tell whether he was impressed or whether he no longer had a reason not to show it to her. “Very well, after we record your version, I’ll show you the manuscript.”

“Thank you.”

Budhéstu turned to Thornton. “What do you know about the archaeological site here? ‘Galadhabakwa.’”

“I’ve seen a map of it; why?”

“Because we have been clearing the foundations around the temple, partly to make more space for people to congregate and partly to see what was there. There was a large structure next to the temple; it appears to have been a house, possibly for the priests. It would date to the Sumi phase based on the architectural features. We’re thinking of building a new structure on its foundations at some point, so that we have room for classes and maybe offices.”

“Fascinating. I’d love to see some time. I helped with the excavation of Pɛnkwayukwa near Mɛlwika, a long time ago.”

"Really? I'm finding 'archaeology' to be intriguing as well. Let's walk over after lunch."

"Sure," agreed Thornton. They were nearly done eating. After a cup of coffee, the men headed out the door, leaving the women to talk in the living room. As they walked over to the old village site, Budhéstu told Thornton what he knew of the place, based on continued explorations of the ruins. The priest clearly was excited by the work and had become something of an expert about it.

"Galadhabakwa was a town of 3,000 or 4,000 people packed into a dense urban development only about 500 meters across," explained Budhéstu. "It had two main streets that paralleled the curving river and a network of small alleys between. The northeastern half of it has been destroyed by the city's industrial park, unfortunately, but the temple, some public buildings, and the market place were on the southwestern side."

"Is this written up?"

"It's scattered about. There is no single source where you can read about Galadhakabwa."

Thornton nodded, appreciating Budhéstu's interest. Budhéstu clearly enjoyed explaining the place to Thornton, too. They were both about the same age; Budhéstu was perhaps two years older. Both had experienced the impact of the New Knowledge as young men.

Thornton was surprised to see that the vegetation had been removed from the entire site. "The trees were pushing over the walls," said Budhéstu. "What's left is only a meter high at most, but still, it's interesting."

"Indeed. And what about all the debris?"

Budhéstu pointed to a big stone pile. “There really wasn’t much, because of the warm, wet climate. The wood rotted away long ago, which reduced the ruins to stone piles. We haven’t been demolishing walls, but if they’ve fallen over, we’ve removed the stones. The excavators have found some old copper and silver coins, a little jewelry, broken pottery, remnants of metal tools; that sort of thing.” He pointed. “Bɛlkordu is in charge and he has some archaeological training. They’re documenting where they find everything and they’re numbering the items and storing them in a room in the hymn hall. That’s another reason we need another building here; to serve as a museum.”

“Excellent. It’ll give Pértatranisér a story, too; right now it’s just a new city.”

Budhéstu laughed. “It already has quite a story, but this will give it depth.”

They walked over to Bɛlkordu and Budhéstu introduced Thornton. “It looks like you are doing a fairly professional job of excavating the ruins,” he said.

“Thank you, Lord. I’m afraid we have a fairly small grant from the city, but we have had it for six years and that has allowed us to make progress. I’m afraid my team and I only work two days a week, though sometimes I can squeeze in a third day with volunteers. The main thing volunteers can do is remove vegetation and loose rocks.”

“Are you cataloging where every item is found?”

“Yes, of course, and in what layer it was found in, if the location has more than one layer. Basically, this site has a Sumi layer and an Eryan layer and both are half a meter thick at the most. Because of the abundant rock and the high rainfall, mud brick was not used as a building material; rock was recycled from building to building and there was extensive use of wood that did not survive. The richest part of the site was the

market, as you might imagine. We found broken glass and pottery and a few animal bones from various meals that were tossed onto the ground."

"Where did you learn archaeology?"

"I took a course at Mɛlwika Génadɛma seven years ago and worked at Lilalara for several months, so I learned how to run an excavation pretty well. Marku and Skandu have both stopped by here and given me advice at different times."

"I see. I am impressed. Would you like to spend more time doing archaeology?"

"Indeed, I wish I could do it full time! But my wife's family is here."

"I see. Well, I may be able to get back to you in a few weeks with some additional work."

"Really? Lord, I'd love it!"

Chris rarely got out by himself, at age 79, but it was a lovely day for mid Génménu/early November and no one else was available to drive to Sullɛndha and help the provincial forest company, so he went himself with Roktɛkɛstu, his assistant and driver. "The Pɛnkakwés Géndha is looking quite impressive!" he said to Estoblasu, the President of the company as he entered the latter's office at the Géndha.

"Thank you; we're very proud of it. We now have 25 new students every year, which doesn't sound like many, but Lɛpawsona only has 8,000 people and 200 new 18 year olds every year, so we are educating 12% of our high schoolers!"

"And how many majors, now?"

"We only have one kwétɛryɛri, in forestry, but we have six dwoyɛris, and we are preparing to upgrade three of them to kwétɛryɛris in a few years: business, agriculture,

and teaching. Most of our students go elsewhere, if they plan to continue their education, and of course this is the only place on the Eastern Shore to learn forestry, so we get students from other provinces every year."

"And how's the relationship with Morana province?"

Estoblasu shrugged. "I guess it's getting better, with the boundaries set and everyone getting more prosperous. But we haven't forgotten they took some of our traditional lands."

"I understand. Thank you for inviting me, Estoblasu. Your letter speaks of rising demand for timber and the spread of deforestation. But you have a tree nursery and staff to plant more trees, and a budget to complete the work."

"Yes, I know. Sit down, please, lord." Estoblasu pointed to chairs for Chris and Roktɛkɛstu, closed the door, and sat himself. "They can't plant and nurture the saplings fast enough. Theoretically, there is enough money to do so. Possibly there may be some theft of funds, but I doubt it; I think they're just not efficient enough."

"The forestry companies in Arjakwés Province have been able to cover the cost of a tree nursery, plus a tree planting program and brush clearing, and the conditions there are similar; a lot of steep ground and a lot of smaller trees. The Pɛnkakwés Forest Company posted a profit last year, didn't it? I seem to remember receiving a check. I never saw any reports, but those go to Yusdu now."

"Yes, we posted a small profit, but that's because the province covered the operating deficit. We can't compete with the tribes cutting trees on the eastern and western shoulders of the Spine. They have huge trees."

“But they also have high transport expenses; all their wood has to be trucked a long distance and over mountains. You don’t have that problem, and neither do the Arjakwés companies.”

“The new minimum wage law has made the situation here worse, also.”

“In Arjakwés they have to pay more than minimum wage because of the higher living and housing costs and the companies there are still doing fine. The price of wood went up five percent and the price of gas will go up three percent this year. Have you raised your wood prices?”

“Yes, we’re charging the market rate, of course!”

“Do your timbermen have pneumatic saws?”

“Some of them, but none of the companies have been able to buy as many pneumatic saws as they need. They’ve been improved; the new ones are more powerful and less prone to breakdowns or explosions. Our men are leery of them.”

“Of course; everyone is, and many workers are used to the old ways. But they are much more efficient, and with proper protective equipment and training they’re quite safe. The palace’s safety office checked with companies. They didn’t have time to compile statistics, but more lumbermen were hurt by falling trees and branches and by trucks and misdirected axes than by the pneumatic saws. People don’t like wearing heavy gloves and eye protection, and a heavy leather apron can be very hot, but those are necessary precautions. Have you had men injured from the pneumatic saws?”

“Yes, one just three months ago; the pneumatic hose burst and it knocked him over backwards, breaking some ribs. You are right, we’ve had four injuries this year and the other three had other causes. But two of the other three were minor.”

Chris nodded. “So, what do you suggest? I can go talk to the accountants and review the books, if that is helpful. I might have some suggestions. We can look at the supply of pneumatic saws and figure out how much the efficiency of the operation can be improved if you purchase more and do a training program. The price of the saws and the training is well known, as is the greater efficiency they produce. I can go down to the tree nursery, talk to the people there, and get a sense of whether their work can be made more efficient. And I can go to the efficiency consultancy and ask them to come give your operation a thorough review. They’re expensive, but they’ll come up with all sorts of ways you can improve your operation, and you don’t have to do them.”

Estoblasu considered; he didn’t like any of the choices. “How much?”

“The efficiency consultancy? Six or seven thousand.”

“Really? Wow!”

“It’s a lot of work and they’re professionals, but they’re worth it.”

“I’m not sure we’re ready for something that drastic. I’d start with the accounting records. The Forestry Company’s accounting office is attached to the Géndha, so we can walk right over.”

“I can’t do much in an hour or two. Roktɛkɛstu can help me, though. When was the last audit?”

“The end of the fiscal year; Bolérɛnménu. We haven’t had any accounting problems.”

“Then let’s go to the tree nursery. I’ve toured just about every tree nursery on Éra and have a pretty good idea of how they work, and I’ve been to yours several times as well.”

"You have, and I know how much you love the forest."

"I do, and I want to be sure we protect the province's forests for posterity. This world is 45% forested; that's 40,000 square kilometers. In the last few years, while the quantity of cut wood increased thirty percent, the area of forest did not decrease very much. We're getting closer to sustainability. But if the population keeps growing, we will have trouble managing the forests sustainably. And if there's soil erosion and the next generation of forests has small trees that grow more slowly, sustainability will be even harder to achieve. Hence the laws to protect the trees."

"You don't have to convince me; forestry is what this géndha does."

"Let's go to the nursery."

"I'd appreciate it if you could come to the palace to have tea with me on Dwodiu at 2 bells. I'd like to consult with you about the direction the province is taking."

The words in the note echoed in Skandé's mind as she drove to Néfa to meet with Duchess Albɛsé. When she arrived, she was escorted into the Duchess's salon, where tea and cakes awaited her. Albɛsé arrived immediately and greeted her. "How kind of you to come. I hope this isn't a bad time. I know you're busy with the Village Consultancy, and that takes you all over the province."

"This was a good time because I scheduled a visit to two villages in the southern Basin this morning, then had time to go home for lunch and prepare for this visit."

"What were the places like?"

"One was Nénaskaita, which is a larger village; it has about a thousand people and hosts a middle school for five southern basin villages. The village has a five-member

council that has limited human resources, so the village consultancy has a contract with them to handle payroll. I had to stop by to pick up the payment information, then I went to Kwolsɛra—which hosts another middle school—to talk to the newly formed gabruli about their plans to purchase a washing machine and set up a bath house."

"Oh, do you help gabrulis as well?"

"Sometimes. The Rudhisér Gabruli Council has the responsibility, but they don't have the staff, so if I have any extra time, I'll stop by and help explain things."

"That's kind. How many gabrulis do we have, now?"

"In addition to the four in Néfa, Pértatranisér, Oyapéla, and Lɛpawsdomas, there are now six in the basin itself; five in the central villages with the middle schools and one in Wɛranoagras."

"Where's that? South Basin?"

"Yes, exactly, in the middle of Route 43. Their grange and gabruli are 'spontaneous' because of the coincidental presence of three or four talented men and women who also had some education. The granges and gabrulis elsewhere in the Basin are more artificial and in some ways don't work as well."

"And the Councils?"

Skandé sighed. "They're struggling, Honored Duchess. The average village has 600 people, 450 of whom are adults and maybe 100 of them can read and write to some extent. Few have much experience with decision making and fewer know accounting or how to write a proper letter. So more and more of them are contracting with the Village Consultancy for everything. I'll go meet with a typical council quarterly and that's the only time they meet. Their most common request is for me or my colleagues to

recommend something to them, then they say yes and we do it. It gets things done, but it doesn't empower the villages to develop their own vision of the future."

"How many are getting water and sewer?"

"All of them, but some people live on isolated farmsteads and they have to get their own. Some villages still have open sewers and most have inadequate sewage disposal. It all goes into a big, stinky pond 100 meters from the houses. The centralized granges are too far away and have too little equipment, but that's improving. The gabrulis are slowly getting buildings, bath houses, and equipment like washing machines, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, and gas stoves. Until every village has its own grange and gabruli, participation will be low."

"I see. This is very helpful for me because I have very little knowledge of what's going on in the villages. I would greatly appreciate it if you could stop by once or twice a month for two hours and tell me what you see. That's one reason I asked you to tea today. The Queen, as you may know, has encouraged me to get more involved in the affairs of the province. Governor Brébalu still doesn't take me very seriously; he sends me only a few reports. And I'll pay you for the briefings. If Andranu could stop by once a month to brief me about industrial developments in Pértatranisér and Néfa, I'd appreciate that as well. I need information. It's the only way."

"I will be glad to stop by and brief you every two or three weeks, and I don't need to be paid. But there is another way: visit the villages and talk to the people yourself."

Albɛsé was startled by that suggestion. "That has occurred to me, but frankly, I have no idea where to go or what to say. I don't even know what to wear!"

“You need to look elegant, but practical. You need shoes that can handle dirt and mud, for example. I have some ideas.”

Albɛsé looked at Skandé’s dress, unimpressed. “Perhaps I should ask Dɛkané or even Ninlilé.”

“Yes, that’s a good idea. There is very little formal clothing designed for women that is suitable for visiting Councils and granges. They might want to take you on a tour to show you things, for example. What would you like to visit?”

“I am not sure; it was your idea! I suppose gabrulis would be most useful and interesting. I can ask the provincial gabruli council to take me.”

“Yes, but I have another suggestion. I mentioned Wɛranoagras. They have a harvest festival coming up in a few weeks and people from several nearby villages will come. This is their first festival, other than going to Néfa for its holidays., so it should be exciting.”

“Why now?”

“It’s just about time to plant winter wheat. They’ll also plant peas and other crops that handle an occasional light frost. I think it’d be a good chance for you to attend and talk to people.”

“If my presence doesn’t ruin the festival for everyone else.” She considered. “I like the idea and if I didn’t stay very long, I wouldn’t disrupt the gathering.”

“I suspect if you agreed to go, they could plan a time for you to speak.”

“Hum. I could do that. Could you talk to the people at the festival and see what they say?”

“Yes, of course.”

528.

Artifacts

Prusménu/ late Nov., 25/643

The month of Prusménu was well named, for it was frosty that day in Gordha, even in the afternoon. Nevertheless, the ceremony that marked the opening of the gas pipeline to Arjakwés province was held in the sunshine, outside the slaughterhouse and next to the cattle yards where tens of thousands of cattle awaited their fate, meanwhile supplying the biogas digesters with a constant volume of manure. Attending were the lords of the Mégɛndrɛ, Mémɛnɛghonɛ, Krésonɛ, and Kaitɛrɛ tribes, General Pɛrku representing the army, Lord Yusdu representing the palace, the President of the Gas Company, and Amos Keino, representing the Mennea clan.

After the ceremony, several dozen invited guests headed to a tent for a reception. As it was nearing completion, Gréagru Kétamanu, head of the Gordha Génadɛma, approached Amos with several others.

"Honored Lord Amos, I am so glad you accepted our invitation to attend this event."

"Thank you for inviting me. I was in Mɛlwika anyway, and my brother in law Behruz, who usually attends events connected to the gas company, was relieved that I was invited instead."

"We meant no snub; please assure Honored Behruz of that. We invited you because we wanted your advice about an engineering project. Do you have an hour or two before you return to Mɛlwika?"

"Yes, certainly."

Gréagru pointed to his friends. "This is Sajékwu, the tribe's chief engineer; he's been in charge of the grand canal."

"Pleased to see you again. I think we have met twice, when you were in the Army Engineering Corps."

"You have a good memory, Lord." They shook hands.

"And this is Nénasɛr, who is in charge of the Dwobɛrgonɛ copper mine."

"It's good to see you again as well."

"Thank you, lord, we've collaborated on many projects before, haven't we?"

"Especially regarding the copper mine." They shook hands.

"I apologize; I should have remembered that we were all at Mɛlwika Génadɛma together, over twenty years ago," said Gréagru. "As you probably know, Pɛrku and Yusdu are here to talk to the tribal lords about a blue water gas facility, here in Gordha or farther east where the trees are. There are several big issues. Putting the plant here would bring jobs to Gordha, but most of the wood would have to trucked over Gordhamonta. The Mémɛnɛghonɛ want the plant on their land, as do the Késtonɛ. The Kaitɛrɛ badly want gas for their own steel making operation, which is in a valley that traps air pollution."

"I don't know how that matter will be resolved easily, either," said Amos.

"One possibility would be a blue water gas plant here and another one farther east," replied Gréagru. He pointed to the steep, 400-meter high ridge immediately to the east of Gordha. "But that has gotten us thinking about Gordhamonta. The road over it is very steep, is dangerous in the winter—in fact it often has to be closed for several

days—and is quite a barrier to transportation. Unlike Bɛllɛdha, it is too late to build a roadway through the gluba, which is now blocked by a dam 100 meters high."

"It wouldn't have been feasible anyway," said Amos. "I remember coming to look at the dam site. The water in the gluba was always several meters deep, even in the summer before the Sea returned and rainfall increased."

"That was my impression as well," said Sajékwu.

"So, what do you think of a tunnel through the mountain?" asked Gréagru. "Nénasɛr has the mining experience to do it and Sajékwu has the experience running a large project."

Amos considered. "Interesting idea. It'd be expensive. How long would it be?"

"Two kilometers," replied Gréagru. "There's a logical place to put it about 2 kilometers south of town. It would start at the base of the ridge on this side and slant upward about 100 meters so that it would emerge above the high water mark of the reservoir on the other side. We could start excavating from both sides."

"The army has licensed us to use explosives in our copper mine," continued Nénasɛr. "We'd need about 20 men working on each end. We'd install tracks and pull cars back and forth to remove the broken rock. Each team could manage about a meter and a half per day, on average."

"So the whole tunnel could be completed in about two years?" asked Amos.

Gréagru nodded. "It'd be 4 meters wide and 5 high, including a 1-meter excavation under the floor for a gas pipeline. It'd be a one-way tunnel with traffic lights and an electrically powered gate at each end telling vehicles whether they can go or must

wait. The tunnel would have to be illuminated. Gordhamounta is made of a fairly soft arkose; it should be easy to tunnel through."

"But it crumbles, doesn't it? Nénasɛr is the tunneling expert. I gather you wouldn't ask the army to do it?"

"No," replied Gréagru. "They don't have the engineering experience for this project. The tribe would apply for a development grant and fund part of it itself. It'll be our next grand project, after the canal."

"When will the canal be finished?"

"This spring, and with any luck we'll be ready to tackle the tunnel at that time."

"The Méghɛndrɛ want to show our capabilities to the world," added Sajékwu. "With a dam, a Grand Canal, and a tunnel, we'll have several major accomplishments."

"True," said Amos, uncomfortable with the idea that the projects should be tackled for the sake of the tribe's vanity. "The dam and the Grand Canal certainly had strong justifications, and I think this tunnel project will as well. But it doesn't solve the problem of where to put the blue water gas plant."

"It does make it more feasible to put the plant on this side of the mountain because it cuts the cost of transporting the wood, and it makes a pipeline to the Kaitɛrɛ cheaper," said Gréagru. "It'll cost 20,000 dhanay to put a pipeline over Gordhamonta."

"And what's the cost of the tunnel?"

"About 300,000," replied Gréagru. "It's a lot more, but it solves a lot of problems."

"It does indeed," said Amos. "Have you thought about the relationship of the tunnel to the seven developmental priorities?"

That caught them by surprise. Gréagru thought for a moment. “Well, it will help spread prosperity to the entire kingdom.”

“Will it? Would the Méménɛgonɛ and the Késtonɛ agree with that?”

“It’d make it cheaper to send their timber here,” said Sajékwu, his voice rising.

“It’d support minorities; we’re all Tutanɛ,” added Nénaser. “But perhaps not equally well.”

“The environment is the last developmental priority, and it will make timber harvesting more efficient, saving trees,” noted Sajékwu.

“But it could also cause overharvesting and deforestation.” Amos pointed to Gordhamonta. “Look at your own ridge. It used to be covered with pines, and now it’s bare and gullied.”

“And this project is large enough so that the priorities need to be addressed,” said Gréagru.

“We had to when we applied for funding for the Grand Canal,” exclaimed Sajékwu. “The palace wanted us to install a dozen small dams to create watering holes on the Akriakwés above the point where the Grand Canal crosses it. We still have to create a few artificial marshes. We had to dig seven diversion ditches to lead water to existing ravines and one of the ditches was almost 2 kilometers long! We’re still completing the dams and water holes on them, which added 15,000 dhanay to the total cost. That’s one reason the Grand Canal has taken so long!”

“But you are right, we need to address the developmental priorities,” said Gréagru. “I suspect the current discussion with the lords of the Méménɛgonɛ, Késtonɛ, and Kaitɛrɛ have to do with them.”

"I think so, the palace is really pushing them. Tribes and provinces can embark on grandiose projects, but they have to be able to justify them."

"So, would you be willing to review the plans before we submit them?" Sajékwu asked Amos.

"Ah . . . yes, if I can ask some of my colleagues to look them over as well. None of us have the right expertise."

"Together, you will have enough to make suggestions," replied Gréagru. "Can we take you down to the site where we'd start the excavation?"

Amos nodded. "Sure, I'd love to see it."

"Next week I'll invite all of you to Bolɛrilɛdha to tour the mine," offered Nénasɛr. "Then you'll see how we excavate and reinforce our tunnels."

Marku looked at the stretch of ground between the Atranisér and the valley edge. It was covered with short grass and cattle patties; the nearly constant noise of the new Route 51 was distracting. He turned to Thornton. "So, the aliénɛs said that a character named Papadam lived here 72,000 years ago?"

"Correct," he replied, nervous about Marku's skeptical tone.

"I don't see any evidence of habitation."

"The alien said that we'd have to dig down a meter or so. In the last 72,000 years, there's been some deposition on top of the original site."

"I see." Marku walked the length of the site again, then walked over to the riverbank, where the Atranisér had been eating into the ground. The water was too deep to wade in so that he could look at the bank, though there was a spot 20 meters upstream

where there was a bit of shoreline to stand on, and Bɛlkordu, the local archaeologist, was there, digging into the exposed sediment. He wasn't being careful with his shovel and was flinging dirt widely. Marku turned away, not impressed. "We don't have any funds or anyone to spare. Maybe in a year or two we will. But there are dozens of more promising spots. Sumilara and the lower Arjakwés are covered with ruins. The Long Valley will take centuries to excavate."

"I know; I've seen all those places."

"That's all I can offer, Thornton." Marku shrugged.

"That's alright. I think Bɛlkordu and I can coordinate an excavation here, and I have some money I can use to hire workers."

"Suit yourself, but remember that these things need to be done by professionals who know what they're doing and who don't destroy context as they dig. They have to dig carefully, slowly, systematically." He threw a glance at Bɛlkordu.

"Yes, we know that," though Thornton threw a worried glance at Bɛlkordu as well.

"You can always call me or Skandu," continued Marku. "We can give some advice. Skandu goes back and forth between Mɛdha and Sumilara every few months and has to come right past here, so he could stop by. I'm on my way to Mɛdha right now. We now have four more inscriptions that have turned up in the valley that identify the names of settlements and Skandu thinks we can use them to reconstruct the names of most of the others from the tax records."

"Fantastic. That'll be quite a breakthrough."

“It will because we can estimate the land area of each village and town, compare that with the tax records, and get an idea of population size and density. We’re very excited about that.” Marku turned and headed back to the car. Just then, Bɛlkordu stood up and held something up.

“Look what I found!”

“What?” asked Thornton.

“A stone ax head, I’d say.”

“Really?” Marku turned around and trotted over. Bɛlkordu handed it to him and Marku examined it closely. He nodded. “Stone hand ax, Shell Mound period.”

“Are you sure?” asked Thornton, partly to rub it in.

Marku nodded and pointed to the handle end. “The blade is broken, but usually it shows careful, small pressure flaking. You can see that technique was used to make the handle, though. This is flint; is there a local source?”

“We haven’t looked, but Bruagras is built on the limestone ‘brow’ of Néfa Basin, and flint can be associated with limestone.”

Marku nodded. “Probably local, then. Congratulations! You’ve found Papadam! But I’d be careful how you excavate the site.”

“I wasn’t excavating,” replied Bɛlkordu. “I had to chop away and remove the grass covering the drop off and I knew we wouldn’t be staying very long, so I wanted to see what the ground was like. I know how to run a proper archaeological dig.”

Marku looked at him with more respect. “Good. I apologize if I underestimated you.”

“So, do you have any resources you can offer?” asked Thornton.

“No, I’m sorry, but the archaeology program is severely stretched in terms of finances. You know that. And you just said you thought you could handle it.”

“Well, I can, but it’ll be easier to do so if there’s some outside support as well.”

“I suppose that’s true. We could loan you equipment. The dig at Lilalara is closed for the winter, now.”

“That would be very helpful. This is the best season for archaeology on the central western shore; it’s not tropically hot, and the rainfall is mostly hitting the eastern shore, so it’s dry here.”

“I can call Lilalara once I get to Mɛdha. Could you pick up the equipment? I’m thinking of sieves, blank books, trowels, simple surveying equipment, etc.”

Thornton nodded. “I can get to Lilalara early next week.”

“Perfect.” Marku turned to walk back to the road where he had parked his pickup. Thornton and Bɛlkordu followed. Marku drove off; Thornton and Bɛlkordu got in Thornton’s truck.

“You’ll need to secure permission to dig the site,” said Bɛlkordu. “We don’t want cows walking through.”

“Yes. I’ll go to the city hall this afternoon and determine who owns that land, and will write the owner. Will you be ready to start next Tridiu?”

“Yes. How many men shall we hire? I have five who help with the old townsite.”

“We’ll hire all five. Are they experienced?”

“Yes, but they’ll need some supervision. This hand ax was indeed a meter below the ground surface, so we’ll have to remove a lot of overburden to get to the site.”

“With five men, that task will go pretty fast.”

Thornton turned left off Route 52 and drove into the eastern end of Pértatranisér. He dropped Bɛlkordu off at the temple, where he was continuing excavations, then drove home. He found Lébé in the living room, telling stories about Widumaj's life that she had heard from her mother. Budhéstu was obviously pleased and said he had heard almost exactly the same stories. After listening for a few minutes, Thornton headed to his office in the other wing, where Skandé was busily assembling data about the Basin for the Duchess. They had a brief conversation, then he closed the door of his office and turned to the new aerial photographs of timber cutting on the western shore. Before he got far, however, his cell phone rang. It was Amos.

"Alláh-u-Abhá. How are things in Mɛlwika?"

"Quite well, how's everything in Pértatranisér?"

"Excellent. Marku just stopped by to see the archaeological site and was totally unimpressed until Bɛlkordu found a flint hand ax! So he will authorize Lilalara to release some archaeological equipment to us. I'll have to drive over next week."

"Good! Make it a two-day trip, I have several items for you here in Mɛlwika."

"Oh, what?"

"First, the fun one: Nénasɛr just took me and several Mégɛndrɛ to the Dwobɛrgonɛ copper mine. It was fascinating; they've made a very large open pit on the surface and about 400 meters of mine shafts to follow the main ore body downward. They're down 70 meters and have to run a pump to get the water out of the mine. They've had a few minor cave ins, but nothing major; only one fatality underground so far, in eight years of underground mining. He said you would be welcome to come to Bolérilɛdha and get a tour. I talked to him about safety and he was not happy about the

idea of a safety investigation; he may have regretted inviting me! But I think we can convince him to work with us to identify some safety practices."

"There are copper mines here and Bɛllɛdha, a lead mine on Mémɛnɛghonɛ land, and various iron open pits."

"Yes, exactly. There are probably 200 men who work underground or in open pit mines. We need to think about them."

"How did you get invited to the mine?"

"That's subject number two: the Méghɛndrɛ are considering a 1,000 meter-long tunnel through Gordhamonta, so Route 1 doesn't have to go up and over the ridge. It would also include room for a gas pipeline. It looks pretty feasible to me. They want the Geological Survey to come take a look at the proposed location."

"They can handle that without me. Has this resolved the issue of where a new blue water gas plant will be sited?"

"No, not at all! I was in Gordha last week. The lords of the Mémɛnɛghone, Késtonɛ, and Kaitɛrɛ were all there and all three wanted to host the plant. A tunnel through the mountain would make a Gordha location much more feasible; adding a pipeline under the tunnel roadway would make an eastern location more feasible. The Mégɛndrɛ have already identified large swaths of forest land in their northern hills and mountains that can be partially cleared to provide wood, west of the ridge, and that wood source does not depend on a tunnel. The Kaitɛrɛ can make a strong case that they need gas because they are refining more and more of the nickel iron they have."

"It'll run out in about 10 years, though."

"I know, but at that point they'll import ore to continue their steel production. Miller Motors is buying a lot of it. They have a lot of wood. I suspect they'll get a blue water gas unit for their own use and later a pipeline can be extended to them."

"That'd be good; their surplus could be sold to the gas company and if they have a shortage, they can buy gas. But their steel facility is something like 80 kilometers from Gordha. That'd be an expensive pipeline."

"That's right, but with the expansion of the economy and the steady increase in demand for gas, anything is possible. So, that's number two. Number three: Dad wants your help with the Pɛnkakwés Timber Company. They're losing money. He and Roktɛkɛstu have examined the books and there are no irregularities, but there seems to be general inefficiency."

"There are all sorts of problems over here, too. I've been reviewing aerial photos. They're cheating on conservation of the forest. Some of the strips of remaining trees run straight up and down the slope, allowing gullies to appear on the clear cut strip next to the trees! In other cases, the strips of preserved trees are too narrow. There are also places where the photos show weeds and brush, but no baby trees have been planted. One of my assistants was threatened by a timber foreman, too."

"Someone noted to me yesterday that there are no businessmen who like the seven developmental priorities! I think it's true; they are often inconvenient. The palace is requiring all development grants to at least mention all seven, too. I pointed that out to the men wanting to dig the tunnel."

"I hope it's dug, though. Gordhamonta is rather dangerous and trucks driving over it have to be lightly loaded."

“Anyway, when you get back here, these are the three things for you to do.”

529.

Wɛranoagras Festival

Mid Prusménu/ early/mid Dec., 25/643

“Am I dressed alright?” asked Duchess Albɛsé to Skandé, as she stepped out of her car.

Skandé looked at the duchess, who had an expensive dress on and had her hair beautifully coifed, but she wore comfortable, sensible shoes, and the dress did not extend all the way to the ground. Skandé nodded. “I think you need to look elegant; you’re the duchess, after all. But you want something that won’t get dirty. Wɛranoagras has its share of mud.”

“It rained two days ago,” agreed Albɛsé. She looked around. “There are a lot of people here!”

“The village only has 600, but that’s 150 more than it had before the land reform, which brought some people back. And the festival has attracted people from other nearby places as well.”

“Everyone’s having fun; there’s food, games, contests, music, and dancing,” added Andranu. “I gather you told them you were coming?”

“Yes. I even promised to speak, though I’m still not sure what to say. Do you know Arvarju, the headman?”

“Yes, we can take you to him,” said Skandé, and she led the duchess into the crowd.

The driver had parked at the far end of the crowd, which blocked Route 43 for almost 200 meters, so they had to walk the rest of the way. People had obviously come

from several nearby villages; over a thousand people were in the village that day. Some recognized the duchess, but many did not, which saddened her. Most people were wearing machine-made clothes, she noticed, but they were often old and stained; the people of the Basin were still pretty poor. Wɛranoagras, however, was better off than most; she noted some new houses and prefabs and some repairs to older buildings. It also had a grange of its own and a restaurant across Route 43. They were the center of activity; there were games in front of the grange's big barn, dancing on the pavement, and a crowd eating at the restaurant. Skandé led Albɛsé to a picnic table by the latter where two men sat with notebooks and glasses of beer.

The men looked up as they approached. They did not recognize the stranger, then one said, "Duchess Albɛsé, thank you for coming. I recognize you from the meeting of village councils in Néfa last year."

"Are you Arvarju?"

"I am indeed, and this is Mitru, the teacher in our school, who is also a member of the village council." He extended a hand to the Duchess and they shook. She felt the working man's rough skin.

"Welcome to Wɛranoagras," added Mitru, who also offered his hand.

"Thank you. I have been here once before, a very long time ago."

"Really?" said Arvarju.

"Yes, twenty years ago at least. I remember the two lines of houses facing each other, with a wide expanse of dirt in between, part of which is now Route 43." She hesitated. "My sister is the wife of Lord—former Lord—Wɛranobéru."

“Oh, of course,” replied Arvarju. “How is the lord and lady? Needless to say, we haven’t seen or heard from them for close to a year.”

“They are adjusting to their new life.”

“With much less money,” added Mitru, shrugging. “I mean no offense, Honored Duchess, but for years they extracted much wealth from us and gave almost nothing in return.”

“Yes, I understand; it was an ancient way of life and it outlived its usefulness. The entire Basin has undergone a huge adjustment; a sort of revolution.”

“Indeed!” said Mitru.

“I am impressed by the changes here in Wɛranoagras. The housing looks better and you have a grange.”

“It’s the lord’s old barn. He owned 3,500 agris and the Duke, your father, controlled 700 more. Farmers only owned 800 agris out of the 5,000 that were considered the area of the village; thirty-two farmers, to be exact, but the plots were way too small to make a living from. Most of the land was leased out, plus there were a dozen of us working the land owned by the duke and lord. Now we have 83 farmers in the grange; many have actually returned to Wɛranoagras from Néfa and Pértatranisér. A lot of these houses had been abandoned and now are inhabited again.”

“And you have equipment?”

“Not enough! We need six tractors and have three, so they work day and night and that causes them to break down a lot. But we’ll purchase a fourth tractor after the next harvest.”

Just then a woman approached the table and eyed the guests. “Can I get you anything?”

“Avstar, this is Duchess Albɛsé.”

She smiled. “I suspected! Thank you so much for coming to our festival, Your Grace! We are honored to have you here and welcome you to Wɛranoagras!”

“Thank you so much, good woman.”

“Avstar is very important to this village,” said Mitru. “We’re doing better than a lot of villages because of her restaurant. They feed the kids in the school every day and the kids in the village north of us as well. The restaurant is also the nucleus around which the gabruli developed.”

“Oh, so you have a gabruli as well!” said Albɛsé. “How marvelous.”

“Indeed we do, Your Grace. We now have two prefabs, as you can see, as well as the restaurant. We cook in the restaurant and have a daycare for the kids in one prefab and a laundry in the other. We have a brick bathhouse next to the laundry, also. In a few months we’ll get a third prefab, where we’ll open a barbershop for the men and a hairdresser for the women in one part. We’re not sure what we’ll use the rest for, yet.”

“How big is the village, now?”

“We have about 120 families,” replied Mitru. “The elementary school has 80 kids in two classrooms. So many people returned here, our school became more crowded rather than less!”

“Because grades 5 through 8 are now in the Kwolséra middle school?”

“Indeed, exactly.”

“Most villages haven’t had a lot of people come back,” continued Arvarju. “There are a few areas in the Basin that are unfarmed as a result! It’s a shame! Some of the people who left are willing to live in Néfa and commute to their farmlands every day. People have come back here because of the grange and gabruli.”

“Well, it’s also the restaurant,” said Avstar. “Living in Néfa, you get used to fresh bread, bought from the bakery daily. My restaurant bakes 200 loaves every day!”

“True, and you have excellent suppers,” added Mitru. “People want services.”

“We’re also rather far from both Néfa and Pértatranisér to ride here by bus every day,” added Arvarju. “The inner ring of villages around Néfa will never recover their population.”

“Until they become suburbs,” replied Mitru.

“How’s your Council doing?” asked the Duchess.

Arvarju nodded. “Pretty well, I’d say. But there really isn’t much for us to do. The grange is the big operation. I pay the teachers weekly, the gabruli for the school meals, and a man to clean the road and monitor the sewers for any problems. Once a month I send a check to the middle school and the high school.”

“We’re all members of the grange, so it coordinates payment of the taxes,” added Mitru.

“A lot of villages in the Basin are now hiring the village consultancy to coordinate hiring and payments,” added Skandé. “We can do it cheaply.”

“Most villages aren’t as organized as we are,” added Arvarju. “We can handle it.”

“This is a remarkable place,” added Avstar. “We’re all very proud of Wɛranoagras. That’s why we decided to organize a festival. Néfa has one; Pértatranisér

has an almost continuous one at its shopping center; why shouldn't the southwestern basin have one of its own? People are having a lot of fun!"

"I agree!" said Albɛsé. "Who planned it, the Council?"

"The three of us!" replied Mitru. "Arvarju and I represent the village and the grange—he's head of both—and the restaurant, obviously, stands to benefit."

"And it has," added Avstar.

"Do you still have a vacancy on the Council?" asked Skandé.

"Indeed," replied Arvarju. He looked at the Duchess. "One member passed away last month."

"Who received the next most number of votes?" she asked.

"We can't find the voting list!" replied Mitru. "I was supposed to keep it in the school, but I can't find it."

"He doesn't even have a desk in his classroom, and the village council doesn't have a building or even an office," added Arvarju. "I do my work at home and the Council meets at the school."

"What are you going to do?" asked Albɛsé.

"We've been waiting to find the list; we only had to report the top five vote getters to the election commission, so they don't have the name of the person who came in sixth."

"The regulations say they can appoint someone," said Skandé.

Albɛsé looked at Avstar. "Considering who was on the committee to plan this very successful festival, I think it is obvious who should be appointed!"

Avstar was startled. "Really?"

Arvarju was even more startled than she; Albɛsé wondered whether these two very talented organizers felt some rivalry or jealousy. “That’s a good idea,” replied Mitru, looking at both of them. That suggested he saw the potential for some change in the Council’s dynamics.

“Anyway,” said the Duchess, quickly changing the subject. “Did you want me to speak?”

“Ah . . . sure,” said Arvarju, thinking quickly. “You know what you could do? Give out the prizes! For example, we have a ‘best cow’ contest and a dozen cows have been entered.”

“I’m afraid I have no idea how to judge a best cow!”

“That’s alright; we have judges. We will also have an ox-pulling contest, to see which ox can pull the heaviest load. It starts in a little while. The grange also has an award for member of the year.”

“And there’s the ‘Queen of the Festival’ award,” added Mitru.

“Well, you tell me what to say, and I can give out awards,” replied Albɛsé. “I’ve gotten good at doing things like that over the last year. It’s about all I can do!”

“You can give a talk, too, if you want,” said Arvarju. “I’ve heard you; you do a good job. I think the people here will love to have you give out the awards and make a speech.”

“I agree,” said Mitru. “Especially since you aren’t extracting any wealth from us.”

“In fact the Rudhisér Foundation, which distributes my father’s accumulated wealth, is the source of revenue for the school lunches,” replied Albɛsé tersely. “Perhaps, Mitru, you could mention that to the crowd?”

"Very well, I will mention that," he replied.

Thornton pulled his coat closer around him as he stepped out of his pickup truck and walked from the parking lot to the headquarters of the Méghɛndrɛs. Their fairly new administrative building did indeed have a real parking lot, which was much better than the random parking that existed around most buildings on the planet. Sajékwu, the tribal engineer, pulled into the spot next to him. "I'm glad you have time to meet with Lord Walékwɛs. and Primu Ghususunu."

"It's going to produce a long and very strange day, because I need to be in Pértatranisér tonight, which is 12 hours west of here—it's literally halfway around the world. In between, I have to stop at an archaeological site and in Sullɛndha to talk to their timber company."

"You have plenty of time, at least. I'm glad you're working on timber companies again, because clearly, we're going to need to set one up. I'm sure Primu will ask you about it, as Chief Development Officer and Tribal Treasurer."

"I'm sure he will, too. I assume that's why they asked me to stop by."

They hurried inside out of the early winter cold and turned left into the wing of executive offices. Albékwu, the son of Lord Walékwɛs, saw them come in and hurried out to greet them. "Come into the meeting room; I'll get father and Primu. I'm so glad you have time today, Lord Dhoru."

"It is my pleasure to be of service to the Méghɛndrɛs."

They entered a very attractive meeting room with a huge round table able to seat thirty or more, as nice as anything one found in Mɛlwika. The tribe clearly wanted to

make an impression that they were as modern and advanced as anyone, as was befitting one of the oldest cities in the world. Thornton and Sajékwu sat; Albéwu hurried out, but immediately sent in an assistant with refreshments. The executive wing had a kitchenette, too.

Duke Walékwɛs arrived quickly. “Thank you for your visit, Lord Dhoru,” he said, offering his hands to the guest. “How does the site of the tunnel look?”

Just then Primanu hurried in as well, and they all sat. “The Geological Survey sent three geologists along; they’ve already headed home in their own truck. We looked at the two entrance sites and they appear to be well chosen. The entire mountain ridge is made of the same rock types, which are intermediate in hardness, so tunneling through them with the same techniques as used in the Bolérilɛdha Copper Mine should be feasible. The price estimate of 300,000 looks about right, also; the Survey asked the Army Engineering Corps for their independent opinion. The survey geologists also feel that water won’t be a construction problem. On this side of the mountain, the tunnel’s slope will allow it to flow out, and on the other side the quantity shouldn’t exceed the ability of even modest pumps.”

“Excellent, that’s good news.”

“Have you resolved the issues around the developmental priorities?”

“I think so,” replied Walékwɛs. “The main ones that apply are increasing prosperity and spreading it to every place in the kingdom, the advancement of minorities, and protecting nature and the environment. A tunnel will speed up transportation for all the tribes between here and the Spine and make it less expensive. Half of our territory is east of Gordhamonta and the tunnel will allow us to use it much more easily; in fact, it

may make a series of irrigation ditches more feasible there, which will expand our pasture and farmland significantly. Thus it advances minorities—the Mɛghɛndrɛs and the other western Spine tribes—as well. Its effect on nature and the environment is potentially serious, of course, so the tunnel will have to be accompanied by an environmental plan."

"You've already been discussing your contribution to the proposed Eastern Grasslands Park. I suggest you finalize the borders of it, especially where the park crosses the Majakwés and continues northward into the foothills of the Northern Mountains and connects to a Northern Forest Park, which the palace hopes will also be defined. That will give you something to mention about preserving the environment when you submit the tunnel proposal."

"That occurred to us," agreed Walékwɛs. "If we can irrigate lands east of here for use as farm and pastureland, we can convince the clans to cede some of their traditional lands to the Eastern Grasslands Park. We understand the importance of creating for animals a migration corridor connecting the grasslands to the northern forests. We are all in favor of serving Ermatér and her creation this way. The problem, as always, is politics. All the land is claimed."

"The Grand Canal, however, allows so much more irrigation, that we can rearrange the land claims," said Primu. "It's now urgent because we'd like to submit the development grant for the tunnel in the next three months."

"What was finally decided about the blue water gas plant?" asked Thornton.

"There will be more than one," replied Primu. "It's a waste of money to site two of them, in my opinion, but it's politics again."

“Financial efficiency isn’t everything,” replied Thornton. “The developmental priority of serving minorities and spreading prosperity must be considered. So, there will be a plant here and one east of here?”

“Correct,” said Walékwɛs. “The Kaitɛrɛ will get one to produce gas for their steel making and eventually it will be connected to here by pipeline. They are not happy at all that their plant won’t be built for at least another year. Nor are they happy that our plant will be larger and will continue to produce bottled gas. The Késtonɛ and Mémɛnɛgonɛ will supply wood to both the Kaitɛrɛ plant and ours. While I agree with you, Lord, that efficiency isn’t everything and supporting the tribes is important, we would still prefer all the gas production to be located here.”

“As I understand it, the Késtonɛ and Mémɛnɛgonɛ will no longer truck wood all the way to Mɛlwika,” added Thornton. “The gas plant here will provide Mɛlwika with gas instead.”

“Exactly,” agreed Walékwɛs.

“But we are now in need of a timber company to cut trees for gas production,” said Primu. “The forests in the northern mountains east and west of here have a lot of timber. Our Dwobɛrgonɛ cousins have agreed to advise us, as have the Kwétékwonɛ.”

“Both tribes have strong timber companies. You’ll need to invest in a bulldozer to clear logging roads and in pneumatic saws to cut the trees. The latter have greatly improved the cost efficiency of timber cutting; you won’t be able to make a profit without them. This has been the main lesson of the Pɛnkakwés Timber Company. My father has been helping them and it turns out they didn’t have enough pneumatic saws, and their men were barely using them. That made their wood too expensive, and to continue

producing at a profit they stopped raising baby trees in their nursery, so now they have clear cut areas that must be replanted. Some of the western shore timber companies have similar problems."

"Will we have to exclude timbering areas from the Northern Forest Park?" asked Primu.

"No. Divide your forest into zones and plan the order you will clear and replant them. Reserve some areas—at least 50 agris--where you will never cut trees, so some virgin forest is always around. Timber cutting and replanting is disruptive while it goes on, but afterwards it can be good for animals that prefer to eat plants that grow in the cleared areas. Do the same for hunting; divide your land into zones. Designate a large area—at least ten square kilometers--where there will never be hunting. Other areas will have hunting one year but not the next. Limit hunting by issuing licenses. That's how the Wuronɛ have set up their part of the Southern Forest Park."

"That's what I heard," said Walékwɛs, nodding. "I gather the Geological Survey helped them set up the zones. Can you help us as well?"

"Yes, the survey can do it for a few thousand dhanay. I coordinated the work for the Wuronɛ myself, but we now have a young man who can coordinate it for you, ɛndrokordu--."

"He's Ghesloɛ?"

"No, Géndonɛ, and he's going to work for the Geological Survey instead of returning to the tribe, so he'll be available to all the timber companies. He's been working on the western shore with me for the last few months, looking at their timber companies,

and will write his master's thesis about them. I've been accompanying him because the people on the western shore can't understand his accent!"

Walékwɛs laughed. "Yes, the Géndonɛ are the hardest to understand! But I hope, lord, that you will be available to take a look as well."

Thornton nodded. "I will try, Honored Duke, but we are getting more and more highly skilled and talented people all the time, and they are perfectly capable of doing excellent work. ɛndrokordu will probably become the full-time coordinator of this world's forests, and as our use of the forests continues to increase, we need such a coordinator. I can't do that."

"Very true, Lord Dhoru. We will contact the Geological Survey so we can finalize our provincial land use plans. We'll need to submit it at the same time we submit the grant request for the tunnel."

"It will ensure the tunnel plan conforms with the seventh developmental priority," agreed Primu.

"Well, I think I should go, if you don't mind," said Thornton. "I have a long day ahead of me."

"Thank you for visiting with us, Lord Dhoru." Walékwɛs rose and shook hands with him. "You are always welcome."

"Thank you." Thornton shook hands with the other two men and then headed for his truck. He climbed in and turned on the firebox. While he was waiting for the steam pressure to rise, he thought about the conversation. He was very glad the tunnel project had prompted the Méghɛndrɛs to work on a land use plan; the palace had been pressuring them about it for several years. He regretted not reminding them that the Grand Canal

project required them to create a series of artificial watering holes by diverting water from the canal into existing dry watercourses. Of all the tribes, they were the one least interested in protecting their environment and ecology, possibly because they were also the least religious tribe.

But Duke Walékwɛs's comments about the Kaitɛrɛ also worried him, because he knew they usually felt left out and ignored, even though they actually did quite well, where development grants were concerned. They were the third largest Tutanɛ tribe, and much more isolated than their neighbors. Consequently, as he sent steam to the truck's pistons, he pulled out his cell phone and asked Mɛlwika's operator to connect him to Lord Magékɛru.

"Khélo, Lord Dhoru, how are you?" asked Magékɛru, when the connection finally went through.

"I am well, Lord; how are you and your people?"

"My family and I are very well; my oldest son, whom you may recall is the same age as your younger son, is finishing his kwɛryɛri early and returning to help with the steel company. We need his business skills. As for the tribe; we are doing as well as can be expected. Esto provides."

"Esto does indeed, but it often helps if we can provide as well. How is your timber company doing?"

"Their plans are on hold. The company cuts some wood for shipping to Mɛlwika, as you know, but not much because the price of transport is so high. The plans for a gas plant are on hold for at least a year and plans for a pipeline are postponed two or more years. To add insult to injury, the army won't build Routes 97 and 99 in our eastern

mountains because they are supposed to go over the top to connect to the Géndonɛ side, and the Géndonɛ have said no, they don't want the roads! Those roads will give us access to the best forest areas, so that's another blow for our timber company."

"So I heard. Say, Lord: I am only an hour away; I'd love to stop by and talk. I'm reviewing timber companies on the western shore and helping review the Lɛpawsonɛ company as well. Perhaps I'll have some ideas."

"You are certainly welcome, Lord Dhoru. I'd welcome your suggestions."

"Very good, I'll be there in about an hour, then. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Thornton closed the connection and almost immediately took a right turn onto Route 1 where it started up Gordhamonta. The ridge was 600 meters high by Gordha and the road switch backed up and back down, passing the Gordha Astronomical Observatory when it reached the crest. Because of the zigzags the road required 12 kilometers to travel a mere two kilometers horizontally, and it was below freezing and a bit icy at the top that day. But at least the top provided a beautiful view westward, to Gordha and the fertile Majakwés plain, and eastward to Gordha reservoir and the brushland surrounding it.

The East Gordha Basin—he now knew it was a syncline in the folded rocks along the edge of the Spine—was 20 kilometers wide and was followed by another anticlinal ridge, which the Majakwés broke through in a spectacular canyon foaming over great boulders and tumbling over small waterfalls as it went. It was the best white water on the Eastern Shore, though no one had yet figured out how to shoot the rapids in canoes or kayaks, and because the road ran alongside the rapids, no one had proposed a hydroelectric dam. On the other side was the Kaitɛrɛ rift valley, a tensional gash in the

Spine Mountains 80 kilometers long and 10 kilometers wide, nearly as large as the Kɛrda Rift Valley but occupied by only a tenth as many people; 3,200, by the latest count. After going up over an old cinder cone that blocked the rift just south of the Majakwés, Thornton's truck descended into a beautiful, flat grassland that was the home of the tribe. Originally desert, an ancient network of irrigation ditches diverted rivulets descending off the mountains to the east and west into a network that kept the valley floor green year-round. Gimutroba was 40 kilometers south on Route 82, near the equator where the valley was widest. It was about 1,000 meters above sea level and therefore enjoyed a fairly pleasant year-round climate.

Gimutroba itself only had about half the tribe's population; the rest were scattered among farms or concentrated by the steel plant, built next to a scallop blasted out of the western slope by a nickel-iron meteor, which left a million tonnes of metal scattered across the vicinity. The town had the high and middle schools, an elementary school, the market, several stores and other businesses, a gabruli, a garage, and the lord's house, which was also the administrative center. Magékɛru came to the door when Thornton drove up. They were similar in age, but he had some premature gray in his hair and beard.

"Thank you for coming. Were you in Kostakhéma?"

They shook hands. "No, I was in Gordha, talking to Walékwɛs and Primu about the timber company they plan to establish and about the Eastern Grassland Park. It occurred to me that I should find out about your timber company; as I said, I'm working on a lot of timber companies right now."

"Well, we are always interested to learn more. Come in. I have the hot water ready for coffee and tea."

“Coffee for me today; I have a long way to go.” They walked into the lord’s house and turned into his gabrula or sitting room. Magékɛru’s wife poured coffee right away and offered some fresh bread. “You said the army hasn’t built any of Route 97 and 99. I remember where they go; I walked Route 99 last year. Good timber.”

“Even better along Route 97; it’s warmer and there are several places where roads can be bulldozed northward from it along the top of the valley. There are also spots where logging roads can be cleared along the eastern side of the valley, though the timber isn’t as good there.”

“I’ve been thinking about this while I drove here. Any timber you cut along Routes 97 and 99 really should be hauled out to the south, on Route 82 to Wurontroba. From there it can go to Mɛlwika or even better, to Tripola. It’s all downhill; you don’t have to haul it all the way up this valley and then over Gordhamonta.”

“It doesn’t cut costs that much because it’s the long way around. They want to build a tunnel through Gordhamonta anyway. It’s all moot because we don’t have Route 97 and 99.”

“I think that may change next year. I have a forestry assistant, ɛndrokordu, and he told me that the Géndonɛ are leaning more and more toward approving Routes 97 and 99. My youngest son, Jonkrisu, was there over the summer and they actually started clearing the two roads themselves, so they’d have better access to the forests.”

“Well, they have incredible forests; they have the rainfall and we don’t. But I hadn’t realized they had started on the roads themselves. It sounds like the army can be convinced to work on the routes this summer.”

“I think so, but I have a radical suggestion, meanwhile. You have heavy equipment already to move nickel-iron to your steel plant. Use it to start clearing a logging road along the path that Route 97 will follow. You don’t have to wait for the army. Indeed, if you start working on the road yourself, you’ll probably embarrass them into giving it a higher priority.”

Magékɛru laughed. “Clever! We’ve gotten used to the idea that the army does road building.”

“So do timber companies, and you have a bulldozer already at the steel mill. I’d use it. Was the gas company concerned about the cost of hauling the gas plant here over Gordhamonta?”

Magékɛru nodded. “That came up.”

“Because the southern entrance to your valley is a bit gentler. The road is narrow, but they can close it to two-way traffic when heavy equipment is moving on it. I’d suggest you apply for a development grant for a blue water gas plant of your own! The gas company would have to sell one to you. I suspect if you got the grant, they’d negotiate to invest in it as well and run it for you.”

“That’s a good suggestion. We were very disappointed that we won’t get a plant for at least a year and a half. And they won’t make any promise at all to build a gas pipeline here!”

“You’re 85 kilometers from Gordha; it’d cost 260,000 dhanay, which is a lot of money. But they’ll spend that much eventually, and more. The Ghéslonɛ and Géndonɛ will be getting gas plants next year. One pipeline will go from Moruagras to Réjéivika, then south along the Long Valley and over the mountains to Ora. A separate line will run

from Gendonatroba to the floor of the Long Valley and connect to the pipeline to Ora. Eventually, there will be the need for a gas pipeline to Kostakhéma from Gordha via Moruagras; that way, gas can flow to the Eastern Shore as well as the Western Shore. You need to talk to the lords of the Késtonɛ and Méménɛgonɛ and the headman of Kostakhéma about that."

"So, you really think they'll build a pipeline that far? Why?"

"To ensure the flow of gas. It'll cost 600,000 dhanay, which sounds like a lot, but it really isn't over 4 or 5 years."

"I see. I wish our Tribal Development Officer, Stélanu, were here; he needs to hear this."

"He's new and young, he'll figure it out. Meanwhile, my nephew Rostamu is down in Wurontroba several days a week, and he works for the Development Consultancy. You should give him a call. He can be here in an hour."

"I'll ask Stélanu to call him. I'm glad you stopped by, Lord. Will you talk to the army about Route 97?"

"I suggest you call Lord ɛjnokordu and ascertain the Géndonɛ's interest in Route 97, and then both of you can write to the army jointly to request the road. It'll have a much bigger impact than if I write them. That's not the job of the Geological Survey."

"Of course, you're right about that."

"I think there are ways you can get your roads and the gas plant more quickly. These are just ideas; you and your people can execute them very capably." Thornton downed the rest of his coffee. "I'm afraid I have to go now. I have a crazy day ahead of me, still, but tonight I will be at home and tomorrow I will rest."

Magékɛru laughed. “That’s what we all want. Thank you for the visit.”

They both rose from their seats, shook hands, and Thornton headed to his truck. He was glad he stopped by, and he was glad for the coffee; he still had to drive to Lilalara, then Sullɛndha, then to Pértatranisér, and he now had to cross 14 time zones! But he now had a phone call to place to Rostamu and ɛndrokordu, and probably to his father and Lébé as well. He’d be quite busy.

530.

Rudhisér Conference

Early Bɛlménu/ early Jan., 25/643

Thornton was about to turn off of Route 55 into the western end of Pértatranisér when he spotted a bright red pickup truck a kilometer farther down the road, parked on the left. That meant Bɛlkordu and his archaeological team were at work. He continued forward and parked his truck as well, so he could visit.

"You have the tent up!" he said as he approached. Bɛlkordu and five assistants stopped work to look up.

"Indeed, Lord Dhoru, we had to because of the rain. Come underneath; it's going to start again, I think."

"And this is supposed to be the dry season!"

"It's been pretty dry, but we get rain in the winter, too. How was your trip to Mitranimɛla?"

"I think it was successful. Jordanu himself had to come in order for Lord Mitranu to understand what he was agreeing to. The palace will not be lenient to him if he uses the development grant for anything other than a tree nursery and reforestation of the town's forest."

"Indeed, he has gotten in trouble before, but why did the palace agree to his timber company in the first place?"

Thornton sighed. "There are kind ways to answer that and unkind ways. The kind way is to say that they want to rehabilitate the lordly families and not imprison and

impoverish them. Lord Mitru has lost a lot of his assets because of misappropriation of funds and they don't want him to be angry and penniless. They're giving him another chance."

"They won't give me another chance!"

"Well, I like to think of Pértatranisér as another chance."

Bɛlkordu nodded. "Good point! Come see our work." He invited Thornton under the tent, which covered a 5 by 5 meter area. Starting at the riverbank where Bɛlkordu had found the flint hand ax, they had excavated a strip a meter wide and three meters long. "We're beginning to uncover a hearth."

Thornton noted the circle of stones, still blackened after seventy thousand years. "Fantastic. Any more stone tools?"

"Probably not. We're finding a lot of flint flakes, but they may be debris from tool making."

"Some of them look sharp enough to serve as small knives, though," noted one worker.

"We'll have to keep everything and see what Marku and Skandu make of them," said Thornton.

"Until we have more experience, anyway," replied Bɛlkordu. "The hearth is full of bits of broken bones. People love to throw things into fires!"

"Can you identify the animals?"

"I'd guess some are birds; maybe turkeys. The rest are game animals. My cousin is a hunter and we'll show them to him."

“Try to get several opinions. Hunters aren’t used to identifying 70,000 year old bones.”

“We will.” Bɛlkordu sounded irritated; he was quite confident of himself. “Have you seen the article in the Néfa Yoros?”

“No; did it appear? The reporter never contacted me.”

“I think I was able to answer all his questions. I haven’t seen it yet.”

“If it has come out, we need to take everything away every night; except the tent, at least. We’ll have to hope it doesn’t get stolen.”

“I have a teenage brother who could come here to sleep for maybe a dhanay a night,” said one of the workers.

“I think we could afford that, but if we start, we’d need someone every night, so we probably need two or three men. We’d also have to set up a latrine and a fireplace.”

“Rather like Papadam’s!” quipped Bɛlkordu. “The comparison might be interesting as well!”

Thornton nodded. He turned from the excavation to the sample table to look at the items. Bɛlkordu showed him the pages that mapped the location of every single one. The flint chips did look like they had been reworked; they weren’t just debris discarded from the flaking of a stone tool. The bones were fairly degraded, however. Thornton said goodbye to the men and headed back to his truck.

As soon as he parked the truck at home, he headed inside and straight to his office to drop off his satchel of papers. He could hear Lébé talking in her office next to his, so he walked to her open door. Budhéstu was there with her and they were scrutinizing comments she had written on his manuscript.

“No, I don’t want to ask Lady May for her advice,” he was saying to her.

“I’m not sure I can help you all that much; you know what you are doing, honored priest. You have answered my questions very thoroughly.”

“You are too modest. Your suggestions have been very helpful, as were your versions of the stories. As you can see, I have added quite a few of their variant readings to the footnotes.”

“You know, you should submit this and your earlier work to the doctoral committee May is establishing. You have done the work of a doctorate by producing these two books. They might suggest you take a few courses to broaden your perspective on literature, but I think you have done most of the work for a Ph.D. over the many years you have been researching and writing.”

Budhéstu laughed dismissively. “No, I don’t need a Ph.D.! The training I already have is plenty for what I want to do.”

Lébé shrugged. “Suit yourself, honored priest. My first suggestion stands, too.”

Budhéstu shook his head. “I don’t want Lady May’s input. I mean no offense,but she’s too . . . gɛdhémé.”

“And I’m not?”

“No, your mother taught you well.” Budhéstu smiled.

“I see. Alright.” Lébé looked up at the door and saw Thornton there. “Oh, you’re back!”

“Yes, I just wanted to let you know I was back.”

“Thank you. You might want to go down to the gabrula; Jordan is there talking to the prince about the visit to Mitranimɛla.”

“Oh? Thanks, I’ll head there right now. Honored priest, are you staying for supper?”

“Thank you, honored, I have been invited, and my wife is coming to join us.”

“Excellent, I’ll see you then.” Thornton nodded to both and headed for the house’s gathering area; call it a gabrula, a living room, a salon, or a parlor. He found Prince Majékwɛs there with Ninlilé, Jordan, and ɛndrokordu.

“Ah, Lord, we were just hearing about your meeting with Lord Mitranu,” said the Prince. “I gather he was appropriately humble.”

“So it seemed,” replied Thornton. “It was not the humility of a humble man, in my opinion.”

“Definitely not,” said ɛndrokordu. He was not a shy Tutanɛ; the Géndonɛ had a reputation for speaking up, and the forester was no exception, even if he was speaking to the Prince with an eastern Tutanɛ accent. The Prince nodded, seemingly in support.

“We’ll monitor the grant very closely,” said Jordan. “Every kɛntay will be accounted for.” He turned to ɛndrokordu. “Thank you for your exhaustive work, checking the cleared areas. Without your hours of hiking, we would not have known how little had been replanted. I wish you were available to help in the future.”

“As you know, I have a job with the Geological Survey waiting for me, so perhaps you should talk to the Survey’s Director.”

Everyone turned toward Thornton, who smiled. “I think that could be arranged,” he replied. “The survey has to get out into the field. We look for and evaluate natural resources, and that could include the forests.”

“At least until the palace sets up a Forestry Service,” replied Majékwɛs. “That’s what the nations do on Gɛdhéma, right?”

“Correct,” said Thornton. “And the time for that must come. Once we set up the Northern and Southern Forest Parks, someone will need to make sure the tribal wardens are doing their job.”

“And who better than a tribal member!” added ɛndrokordu.

“That’s true, but let’s go step by step. I mean no offense, but you will need to earn that position, as would anyone else,” replied the Prince. “I am concerned that you were threatened on two occasions. Lord Dhoru, do your geologists ever get threatened when they are on a field trip?”

“Not very often, Your Majesty.”

“So, sometimes they are? That is not acceptable, you are doing work for the palace. You need a uniform; maybe a special uniform shirt or coat. And special identification that says ‘Royal Geological Survey.’ All the police have that, now, and the army.”

Thornton nodded. “That’s a good idea. I’ll look into it.”

“The palace can pay, I’m sure.”

“How much longer will you be here?”

“Two or three days,” replied Majékwɛs. “May and I are talking about my doctoral work, and we’re attending the conference the Duchess has called.”

“And Lébé and I are working on a children’s book,” added Ninlilé.

“Really?” said Jordan.

“Yes, I’m very excited. Reading for the children in the schools has made me realize the need.”

“We’ll probably start a children’s press,” added Majékwɛs. “They need color books and those are very expensive, so they need a subsidy.”

Thornton saw the Néfa Yoros lying on the table. He grabbed the newspaper and saw the headline, *Stone Age Campsite found in Pértatranisér*.

“A slow news day,” he mumbled.

“No, not at all!” replied the Prince. “The city—the province---should be proud! Do you have enough funds for the work?”

“Yes, for now. A few weeks ago I went to Lilalara and borrowed equipment for the winter. Bɛlkordu is doing a good job of coordinating the work, which is accelerating. Pretty soon they’ll be excavating five square meters per week. They only have to dig down about a meter.”

“So, no pottery, no metal; just stone tools?”

“That’s right. “

“I’d like to see, some time.”

“We can go over any time. It’s a little before the history you’re working on.”

Majékwɛs laughed. “That’s for sure! There’s nothing there that will help me understand Gɛslékwɛs Maj! But some day I’ll write a history from the beginning, and that’s the beginning!”

“It is indeed,” agreed Thornton.

“Perhaps the day after tomorrow. I’ll be at the conference tomorrow. Maybe you should come as well, Lord Dhoru.”

"What's it about?"

"The development of Rudhisér province."

"It's not my area."

"Nevertheless, please come."

The old palace in Néfa had a new conference room off the old main hall and the conference gathered there. It was an odd gathering, Thornton thought. He wondered how many of those present had been invited by the Prince—who wasn't the host. Amos and May were there, but that made sense because they were the lords of Pértatranisér, the province's economic engine. But the prince had also invited Budhéstu at the last minute, perhaps because he felt the need of a "progressive" priest. Pɛrku made sense; he had been governor and was lord of Luktrudema, but Arvarju and Avstar of Wɛranoagras seemed out of place, as did Lomu, head of the Pértatranisér Hymn Hall. Skandé and Andranu were there, but so were Dɛkané and Yusdu, whose expertise and experience were greater than Skandé and Andranu's. The province's minister of education was there and looked uncomfortable. When Governor Brébalu came in, he looked sullen, even angry. Thornton leaned over to Skandé and whispered, "What's going on?"

She hesitated, then leaned over very closely and whispered, "The Duchess decided to call this conference, then the palace decided to support it and sent the prince, who has invited a few people as well, without telling the Duchess. Then Brébalu, who didn't think a conference was necessary unless he called it, had no choice but to attend as well."

"Ah," said Thornton, feeling embarrassed that he had attended.

The duchess entered and immediately said, “No, don’t stand, only for His Majesty!” The Prince followed and they all stood for him. The two of them walked to Brébalu and conferred briefly. Then they walked to the three chairs on the stage and sat. Duchess Albɛsé beckoned Lomu to come forward. He chanted a hymn with power and beauty; Skandé listened and thought his voice had improved lately. When he finished, Albɛsé rose.

“Thank you, all of you, for coming today. I have called this conference to discuss the continued development of Rudhisér province. I am grateful that Prince Majekwɛs and Governor Brébalu were able to find time in their very busy schedules to come. I am sure all of us will benefit from their wisdom and experience. Your Majesty, please come forward and address us.”

Majékwɛs rose from his seat and walked to the podium. “Thank you, Honored Duchess. When Her Majesty heard of this conference, she was thrilled and immediately called the Duchess and the Governor to thank them for their initiative. It has become increasingly clear that, of all the kingdom’s large provinces, over the last two decades, Rudhisér had advanced the least. But that means it has great potential to catch up. In the last few years, there have been important developments that have laid the foundation for a leap forward; every village has an elected council, every village has or is served by a grange, and every village has or is served by a gabruli. Most villages have seen some modest growth as people have returned, especially from the Long Valley and Néfa. Every village is now connected with a paved road. All but one have electricity and telephone connections, and the last one will be connected in a few months. Bus transportation in the Basin has improved immensely, thanks to a grant from the Rudhisér Foundation. What

the palace would like to see now is an increase in family incomes. The seven developmental priorities summarize things well. Health has been improved by ambulance service and fire service reaching every village, but sanitation and education will improve it more. I just mentioned increasing prosperity. The advancement of women will certainly improve family incomes and overall quality of life and is dependent on education. Strengthening small businesses and cooperatives in each village will greatly increase rural income and also requires education in accounting, business practices, and literacy, and will attract people to move to the villages, rather than away from them. Protecting nature and the environment is ongoing here but mostly refers to the forested areas outside the Basin, because the Basin itself is nearly all farmed. In the last few months the forestry companies have all undergone a review requested by the palace and have been strengthened. I have saved reinforcing and strengthening the values of diversity, honesty, trustworthiness, service, and vocation for the last because these values will automatically improve if people feel they can continue to live in their villages with their friends and relatives and live prosperously.

"To bring about these changes, the palace commits an initial 100,000 dhanay, and will commit more depending on what this conference proposes. Her Majesty looks forward to hearing a report." The Prince turned to Brébalu. "We will now hear from the Governor."

Majékwɛs sat to applause while the Governor walked to the podium. "I want to thank Duchess Albɛsé for her growing involvement in the province and her initiative to suggest this conference today. I am sure it will be followed by a more representative gathering in the future to refine the ideas discussed today.

“I am pleased to say that in the two and a half years since I became governor, tax revenues have increased fifteen percent and the population has grown three percent,” he began. “The population increase represents some modest in-migration. The tax increase suggests an annual economic growth of seven percent, which is almost as much as the entire kingdom’s. Basically, we have stopped falling behind. But that doesn’t tell the entire story. The year land was redistributed disrupted agriculture temporarily, but this year’s harvest has recovered and the winter crops appear to be bigger than ever. The agricultural sector is our largest and I think it will grow at least ten percent by ɛjnaménu, thanks to the granges.

“As for industry, the passing of the Duke and the breakup of the large estates set back plans to open new factories, because the system of investments was undermined. But that problem appears to be behind us as well, and new factories are sprouting up at eleven percent this year, so far. What is badly needed, however, is opening factories in places other than Néfa, Pértatranisér, and Luktrudɛma. Today I am announcing the appointment of a provincial ministry of industry. Next week I will meet with the board of the Néfa Tomi and ask them to change their name to the Rudhisér Tomi and pledge to establish small production facilities in at least six villages in the province over the next two years. This shouldn’t be difficult because they have a list of eight facilities that are fairly small and do not require special waste disposal, such as flour mills, bakeries, pasta production, and frozen vegetable processing.

“With changes like these, I think that next year we will grow faster than the kingdom and start to catch up. This should happen; we have talented people, we are well located on the western shore and near Kɛrda, and now the dominance of the few has been

replaced by a more inclusive and fair economic system. I look forward to leading the province forward to ever greater prosperity."

Brébalu returned to his chair to polite applause. "That last line was directed at the duchess," whispered Skandé, and Thornton nodded.

Arvarju immediately raised his hand. "In many provinces, granges open factories. Is that possible here?"

Brébalu had not expected a question and stood up. "We haven't considered that."

"Development grants can always be applied for," added Yusdu.

"Tomis don't have to own everything," added Majékwɛs. "Indeed, strengthening cooperatives is part of the sixth developmental priority."

"Can we see the list of factories that need to be opened in the province?" asked Arvarju.

"Ah; yes," replied Brébalu reluctantly.

The Duchess rose. "I was hoping we could generate some discussion, exactly like this. Amos and May, do you have anything to add from the point of view of Pértatranisér?"

"Thank you, Duchess, for convening this meeting," replied Amos, rising. "Pértatranisér businesses have already been investing in businesses outside the city, and that can be encouraged. Bruagras has several small production facilities, in addition to the cement plant, and the three factories in Luktrudɛma that you alluded to are all connected to our city. I am sure we can encourage additional investment in other places such as Kwolséra and Nénaskaita, which have middle schools and are also in the southern Basin."

"If there is anything I'd like to see, it is more investment in the gabrulis," added May. "They have immense potential to uplift the women of the Basin."

"But we have already helped several to form, and they are not functioning," replied Brébalu.

"We need to patiently continue to give support," added Albɛsé.

"No, I have another suggestion," replied Avstar, rising from her seat. "Our gabruli is very successful because of two things. One is my restaurant and the other is our contract to provide the school kids with lunches every day. That guarantees that our kids get a good meal and their parents don't have to pay for it, so it helps the family as well. I thought every school in the province provided free lunches, but now I understand it is only six or seven schools. I recommend you provide every elementary school in the province the money to pay for lunches and hire the local women to make them. And give the women's groups the money to build a proper kitchen with running water, sinks, stoves, and a large ice box. They could attach the kitchen to the school, even; a thousand dhanay would be enough."

"That would really stimulate the organization of gabrulis," agreed Skandé. "And once they have a common kitchen, even if it is at the school, they could open a bakery to provide everyone with fresh bread and a restaurant to provide suppers to those who want them. They could make and sell preserves and other food items. And all of that would also stimulate the purchase of washing machines and setting up bathing facilities."

"Yes, that's true," said Avstar.

"That's fascinating," said the Duchess. "And how much would it cost?"

“The meals cost twenty kɛntay per day each, and the province has 8,000 children, so it would cost 1,600 to feed them every day,” replied Avstar.

Brébalu paused to do the math in his head, not trusting the calculation of a peasant woman. “That’s almost 320,000 per year,” he said, shaking his head. We could hire a hundred teachers for that, and we have a shortage of teachers.”

“But children will learn better if they are well fed,” replied Ninlilé. “I visit a lot of schools and I see hungry children in the classroom. There are some teachers who give their children a snack every day, from their own salary!”

“I understand, I understand,” replied Brébalu, raising his hands.

“Perhaps this is an issue that should go to the House of Commons and Lords for the whole kingdom. How many children does the kingdom have? Maybe 80,000; ten times as many as Rudhisér. The kingdom could afford 3.2 million dhanay per year.”

“The money would all be spent locally,” noted Skandé. “The women would receive a salary for cooking and they would buy the ingredients locally as well. It would help spread prosperity to rural communities.”

“And speaking of spreading prosperity, why should the province support a tomi when it could support cooperatives to open factories?” asked Arvarju. “There is a development priority to encourage cooperatives such as granges and gabrulis, but there is no specific developmental priority for rich people investing in tomis.”

“Tomis are the main engine for increasing prosperity, which is the third developmental priority,” replied Brébalu, raising his voice slightly.

“We need both,” replied Amos.

“Why is that?” asked Arvarju. “Cooperatives can work just as well. The investment comes from development grants—from taxes, ultimately—rather than from a few rich people. Taxes and cooperative structures seem very effective.”

“It may very well be that in the future, cooperatives will grow more and more important,” replied Thornton. “But right now, the kingdom has rich people, and the Queen wants them to invest their money in things that will bring about prosperity. Hence the Tomi, which benefits everyone.”

That seemed to settle that discussion. “I have a different subject to bring up,” said Albɛsé. “I read the Néfa Yoros very carefully, cover to cover, every week, but as we know, it is really a paper printed in Pértatranisér for both cities and the entire province. I wonder whether it makes sense to ask the paper to change its name to the Rudhisér Yoros.”

“That should be possible,” agreed May. “It really would be a correction, because the paper serves the entire province.”

“Then why not change the name of the Néfa Génadɛma?” asked Budhéstu. “It serves the entire province as well and has campuses in both cities.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” agreed May. “It should be Rudhisér Génadɛma.”

“Good,” said Albɛsé, pleased. But Brébalu shifted uncomfortably in his chair at the thought that Néfa was being dethroned.

I was hoping we could talk about the village councils,” said Dɛkané, looking around at the others and feeling concerned that the gathering seemed to have no agenda or structure. “After two years, most of them are still struggling simply to meet, let alone make decisions. The Village Consultancy has contracts with about half of them, mostly to

handle payroll and sometimes to help with hiring. Some of the others handle their own and some, I think, really don't function at all. I see two solutions. One would be to abolish the village councils altogether and create councils for clusters of several villages instead. The other is to create more agencies that serve clusters of villages, like the Middle School Boards that handle grades 5 through 8 for groupings of villages."

"Just because some Councils don't function is no reason to abolish them all," replied Arvarju immediately, raising his voice. "Our council meets monthly and we are constantly discussing the needs of Wɛranoagras. We help coordinate the grange and gabruli. We've been improving the village's water and sanitation. We're doing quite well."

"That's very true," added Skandé. "Wɛranoagras is one of the villages in the Basin that handles their own budget and payroll."

"I've figured out accounting some," added Arvarju.

"And they even added me to the Council last week," added Avstar.

"Good," said Dɛkané. "I don't mean to criticize your Council. It sounds like you are one of the success stories. Let me ask you this: let us say your Middle School Board were also in charge of all the elementary schools in your grouping of villages. Your school wouldn't be closed; it just would be managed by the Board. The Board currently has one full-time administrator and he would also visit the elementary schools in the grouping, see how they are doing, see whether they need new textbooks, would hire replacements and arrange for substitute teachers, would get all the elementary school teachers together for training several times per year, would track whether the schools are getting overcrowded . . . these sorts of things. Would Wɛranoagras join such an

arrangement? It would cost you more; maybe a few hundred dhanay a year more. But you'd get services that would make your school better."

Arvarju looked at Avstar and they thought for a moment. "We can't speak for the Council," she pointed out.

"But we might agree to something like that, especially if the additional service was partially funded by the province," added Arvarju.

"Ah, of course," said Albɛsé. She looked at Brébalu, who looked unhappy, but who said nothing.

"Alright, now let's add a sanitary district," said Dɛkané. "Let's say they are for the same grouping of villages, though it could be larger or smaller. They look at your water and sewer, see what needs to be improved, make sure your system meets the standards of the province—Rudhisér doesn't have standards now, but it will need them eventually—and submit the development grants to get the money to do the work. That might cost Wɛranoagras a lot if its system had to be upgraded a lot, but there would be development grants, and the sanitary district would write them."

"This is getting complicated!" said Avstar.

"It is, but when we walk around Wɛranoagras, we really don't know what to fix and what to tolerate," said Arvarju. "We also don't know how much any fixes will cost. Furthermore, the kingdom's law that subsidizes purchase of flush toilets, sinks, and bathtubs is causing more people to buy them, and that is increasing demand for water and is filling up the sewers. The sewer is an open ditch once it leaves the main street and continues to the cesspool and sometimes it overflows. Sometimes the pond overflows when it rains, too. But fixing the system will be expensive."

“A sanitary commission would know what to do, and a lot of the money has to come from the palace or the province,” said Dɛkané. “I think the Basin would benefit from a parks commission, which would set aside and improve areas for recreational use. It probably would have to start with the elementary school playgrounds, making them bigger and better. Another parks commission could be made for the eastern townships. The provincial police also need to expand their services to include the villages, perhaps by establishing districts similar to the school districts and hiring several full-time officers for each district.”

“Is that how things are done in Arjakwés province?” asked Lomu.

“No!” replied Dɛkané. “The villages in Arjakwés province are larger and have more literacy than the villages here, so the Councils generally are more sure of themselves and less interested in cooperation. As a result, the Village Consultancy is busy coordinating things between villages, and that isn’t our job. Rudhisér actually could be ahead of Arjakwés, because the province will have to create various districts and commissions eventually.”

“That’s very interesting,” said Brébalu, perking up. “I’d be in favor of setting up various districts of the sort you suggest.”

“I am in favor as well,” added Albɛsé, looking at Brébalu. “Honored Governor, perhaps we could work on this together?”

He looked at her and his eyes narrowed, but then they relaxed. “Very well, honored Duchess, I will be glad to collaborate.”

531

Assistance from On High

Early Plowménu/ end of Jan., 25/643

"So, have the Kwolonɛ proposed boundaries for their part of the Eastern Grasslands Park?" asked Primu, looking at the map that Thornton had just unrolled across the conference room table in the Méghɛndrɛs' administrative headquarters.

"I'm visiting them tomorrow," replied Thornton. He put his finger on the map. "But it will be roughly a third of their total land, mostly in the northeast."

"They have a lot more land than we do, and the northeast is the driest and least useful," noted Albékwu, son of Duke Walékwɛs.

"True, but with the return of the Sea, the northeast is wetter than any of their land was twenty-five years ago, and with a dozen artificial waterholes created using windmills, it should support more wildlife than their entire territory used to." Thornton pointed to the Krésonɛ territory, wedged between the Kwolonɛ and the Méghɛndrɛs. "The Krésonɛ have agreed to cede to the park a strip along their southern boundary five kilometers wide, except where it is within ten kilometers of Sértroba, and the entire western twelve kilometers of their territory. That western twelve-kilometer strip will connect directly to the western twelve kilometers of your territory. The Médhɛlonɛ have agreed to add to the park the easternmost twelve kilometers of their territory, so that gives the Eastern Grassland Park a corridor twenty-four kilometers wide to connect northward to the Northern Forest Park. So, can the Méghɛndrɛs agree to designate the westernmost twelve kilometers of your territory as part of the Eastern Grasslands Park?"

Primu rolled his eyes; he hated to give up anything to the animals. But Albékwu nodded. “Yes, father has agreed to that, and the southern five kilometers of our territory, where we will install a dozen small dams on the Akriakwés to create watering holes and diversion canals to irrigate about 100 hectares of scrubland. The development grant we have submitted for the tunnel also includes a request for 15,000 dhanay to install 15 windmills and artificial ponds in the southwest, in the animal corridor you propose.”

“Excellent! That will help a lot.”

“But we will agree to this only if the Kwolonɛ agree to cede a substantial part of their land to the park as well,” continued Albékwu. “What commitments have the Wuronɛ and Kwétékwonɛ made?”

“Large ones, as you can see.” Thornton pointed to a green line on the map. “The Kwétékwonɛ will assign their westernmost 20 kilometers to the park and the Wuronɛ their easternmost 20 kilometers, all the way southward to the Southern Forest Park, whose boundaries have not yet been defined. What about your northern forest lands?”

“Everything 20 or more kilometers north of the Majakwés,” replied Albékwu. “But we reserve the right to cut timber there.”

“Of course, I understand. And east of the Gordhamonta?”

“We have not made any determinations yet,” replied Primu. “The land there is pretty arid, but it is easy to irrigate from the various creeks that flow in from the north and south. Many of our people want land there for farming or cattle raising.”

“Have you considered further ways to keep the wild animals in the park, so they don’t destroy farms?” asked Albékwu. “This is the biggest concern we have to deal with.”

“I’ve consulted with the Miller Engineering Institute. An electric fence can be set up for about 300 dhanay per kilometer. It’d have two horizontal wires 1 meter and 2 meters off the ground set on posts about 5 meters apart, with an electric charge running through them that will give anything that touches them a shock. It’ll stop all large animals like elephants and lions. Setting up the electric fence will take a few years, though.”

“Clever,” replied Albékwu. “Alright, I’ll write up our commitment and you write up the others. Once I have the commitments of the other tribes, I’ll send you ours.”

“That’s fine, Albékwu. I should have it to you in a few days.” Thornton smiled. “It appears the Eastern Grasslands Park will soon come into existence.”

“I know you’ve worked hard for this over at least a year. But the effort was worth it, Thornton.”

“I’m sure also, and my father will be greatly relieved. He fears we’ll destroy this little world of ours and civilization will collapse.”

“That won’t happen soon, at least,” replied Albékwu. He rose and shook hands with Thornton, then the latter left.

It was bitter cold outside when he left the tribe’s headquarters. He had left his car in “hot mode,” meaning that the firebox had a steady drip of alcohol into it to maintain a head of steam; that way he didn’t have to sit in a freezing car for five minutes for the engine to be ready. He put the engine into gear and headed out of the parking lot. Mɛlwika was a bit over an hour away in a steady drizzle of snow, but the tribal snowplows had just cleared Route 1 so the tribal bus could make its hourly run, so he had no problem getting halfway home. Route 1 was poorly plowed for fifteen kilometers from the end of the Méghɛndrɛ territory to Arjdhuna township, then it was smooth and dry. He

rolled into the garage as the World Table was ending and walked into the house in time for supper.

"How'd it go?" asked Chris.

Thornton nodded. "Good; as long as the Kwolonɛ come through, the Méghɛndrɛ will as well. They agreed to a twelve-kilometer wide strip along their eastern edge to become part of the Eastern Grasslands Park. That connects the Eastern Grasslands Park to the Northern Forest Park. All of their land twenty kilometers north of the Majakwés will be forest park."

"Excellent. But no corridor across the Majakwés in the middle of their lands?"

"No, I didn't even ask, because I had already heard through correspondence that that was impossible. The clans want to hold onto the land they already have. Even a twelve-kilometer corridor will be controversial because some of that land is already used. I bet it'll take a few years to clear it out."

"What about the township east of Arjdhuna? Did they bring it up?"

"No, fortunately. The Médhɛlonɛ have agreed to give up a twelve-kilometer strip along their eastern border with the Krésonɛ, but that runs up against the undeveloped township. I think we should add half of that township to the Eastern Grasslands Park. The other half could be made longer to the south to partially compensate for the loss, or it could be added to Arjdhuna to make that township larger."

"That's a matter for you to take to the palace, when the boundaries of the parks are finalized."

"Yes. I wish the Geological Survey hadn't been tasked with negotiating these boundaries! But I suppose we're the logical agency to do it."

"Well, sit and enjoy some tea while we wait for supper."

"I will." Thornton sat and poured a cup from the pot. "How's the economy?"

"It's rather nice that I can sit back and get summary reports, rather than having to make phone calls for hours to compile the information. Yesterday Yusdu sent me the weekly report he puts together about industrial output, and Aryéstu released the GDP and employment report for last month this morning. They'll all be published in the Royal Standard tomorrow. There are jitters about the cold winter and the unusually heavy rain on the western shore while the eastern shore gets lower than normal amounts, but agricultural output seems to be fine. Industrial output is up twelve percent compared to a year earlier and GDP—and tax revenue—is up ten percent. I was talking to Yimu Miller and he plans to increase vehicle production to 5,000 per year; that's a bit over thirteen per day. Sugarcane planting is exceeding demand for alcohol, so the price of fuel may drop a bit."

"How much longer can we keep growing at ten percent per year?"

Chris shook his head. "No one knows. Household income is now almost 4,000 dhanay per year. By terrestrial standards, we're a middle income country! I'd say we have a lot more growth ahead of us because illiteracy is still significant, and that holds back people. Infrastructure holds us back, too; we don't have adequate roads, gas supplies, or electricity. I suspect we can double household income in another ten years or so."

"That sounds right to me."

Just then the door to the tunnel opened and Liz came in. She came up the stairs and joined them at the table. "How was your trip to Mɛddoakwés?" asked Chris.

“Good. The Queen and I had about an hour together; she wanted to know how the gabrulis were doing. I said that next time, perhaps Mɛlitané should give the report and she replied ‘I know she’s the secretary of the All-Gabruli Council, but this is my excuse to meet with you.’ That was very nice. We talked about the gabrulis for half an hour and about lots of other things—a lot of family things—the other half hour. Oh, and you won’t believe who I saw, while I was waiting to see Her Majesty.” She waited for someone to reply, but then continued. “Duchess Albɛsé. We talked briefly; after she came out of her audience with the Queen, looking pleased, it was fifteen minutes before I could go in. She had asked for an audience to discuss Rudhisér province and her involvement in it. She told me about the development conference she organized and some of the ideas that came up and complained about Governor Brébalu, but said if she got the authority to choose the governor, he’d be a lot more cooperative.”

“Oh, is that what was going on!” said Thornton. “I was at that conference. It wasn’t much of a conference; a rather random group of people and no clear agenda. The randomness of the audience worked out well, though, because it included Budhéstu, Lomu—the head of the Pértatranisér Hymn Hall—and two members of the Wɛranoagras Village Council, who are heads of the grange and gabruli as well. Amos and May were there, and Pɛrku, Dɛkané, Skandé, and Andranu. So it had balance, and the brainstorming was pretty effective.”

“It sounds like she’s making a move to become a real Duchess; that is, one with authority,” said Chris. “As Duchess, she would nominate the governor and the provincial assembly would ratify the choice.”

“That will bring Brébalu around,” said Thornton. “I think that would be good. He is a numbers man; his vision focuses on economic development, dhanay spent, and increase in economic output and taxes. Those are important, but they aren’t the only concern.”

“They’re only a part of the seven developmental priorities,” agreed Liz. “Albɛsé seems to have a good heart, and she has growing confidence in her role. So good for her!”

As she finished her comments, Jordan entered with Tiamaté and the kids. As the food came out, Jonkrisu, Jalalu, Saré, and Kalé appeared and sat for a stew of chicken, potatoes, carrots, and cabbage. They talked about classes and various plans. As they were drinking the after-dinner tea, the telephone rang. Agné the cook answered it and looked rather worried. “It’s for you, lord.”

“Thank you.” Chris took the phone. “Khélo?”

“Lord Krisobéru, this is Mitrané in Mɛddwoglubas.” Her voice was quavering. “My father Duke Estodhéru, Lord of Mɛddwoglubas, just passed away.”

“What? By Esto, this is very sad and terrible! What happened?”

“Dr. Aréjé is examining him now; she thinks he had a stroke. It is a terrible tragedy for all of Lɛwéspa and a terrible blow to me, Lord.”

“Have you informed the palace?”

“No, I’ll call them next. I suppose we must have a Bahá'í funeral for him.”

“That would be his preference, honored lady. I’m sure you know that.”

“Yes, of course. He was the first lord to become a Bahá'í; he will go down in history that way. As you know, ɛjnésu and I have declared as Bahá'ís, though we have

never been particularly active, but we are committed to continue his legacy. Could you and Lady Liz come help us plan the funeral? It would be a great service to us."

"Yes, of course, but Stauréstu and Aréjé and Migélu are all there and they can do an excellent job."

"Then come as a comfort to me please, lord."

"Yes, of course, right away. When will the funeral be?"

"I think the day after tomorrow. That'll give us time to prepare properly."

"Good. We are grief struck, Lady Mitré, and we will keep you in our prayers, as well as your blessed father."

"Thank you so much. Please let us know when you will arrive, so we can get you a room in the Fort Hotel. We are beginning to let everyone know. Once we inform the palace, we'll call the radio station in Pértatranisér. Goodbye."

"Goodbye." Chris hung up the phone. "Did you all hear?"

"Yes, the speaker is loud enough," replied Liz. "How very, very sad. How old was he?"

"I'd say five years older than me, so mid eighties."

"A real tragedy," said Jordan. "He was a visionary. Lɛwéspa is transformed because of him."

"Let's say some prayers," said Liz.

They bowed their heads and said a round of prayers. Agné came out of the kitchen to join them. When they finished, Chris said, "If you can manage it, Liz, we could pack and leave in the next two hours. We'd get to Mɛddwoglubas by midnight or 1 a.m. our time, so we shouldn't be sleepy."

“In time for supper there,” added Jordan. “I can drive you. I’ll clear my calendar.”

“I’m supposed to go to Mɛdhpéla tomorrow to talk to Duke Staurɛkɛstɛr about the boundaries of the Eastern Grasslands Park,” said Thornton. “It may be late to postpone that meeting.”

“Stop at Mɛdhpéla for your meeting tomorrow, then drive to Mɛddwoglubas,” suggested Chris. “You’ll be there in plenty of time for the funeral.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“I’ll come with you and walk around Mɛdhpéla during your meeting,” said Lébé.

By 8 p.m., Chris, Liz, Lua, Behruz, Jordan, Tiamaté, and their kids were on their way to Mɛddwoglubas, 285 kilometers and 8 time zones away, in three cars. They arrived 4 hours later at 4 p.m. local time. Thornton and Lébé left for Mɛdhpéla at noon the next morning for a 1 p.m. meeting with the Kwolonɛ.

“Spread out your map and show us what the other tribes are willing to do,” said the Duke, after greetings were exchanged. “We hope the Méghɛndrɛs were as generous as they implied they would be.”

“They were,” replied Thornton, unrolling a huge map of the Eastern Shore on the conference table. The others present put cups and staplers and other weights on the corners to keep it open. Thornton pointed. “The Meghɛndrɛs have agreed that the southern 5 kilometers of their territory can be part of the park. They have also assigned the western 12 kilometers of their land to the park and all their land 20 kilometers north of the Majakwés to the Northern Forest Park. The Médhɛlonɛ have contributed the eastern 12 kilometers of their territory, and the Krésonɛ the western 12 kilometers of

theirs. We plan to approach the palace about the two easternmost unsettled townships in Arjakwés, east of Arjdhunas, and see whether they can be added to the park as well. South of you, the Kwétékwonɛ and Wuronɛ have each pledged twenty-kilometer strips adjacent to each other for the park, and the Kwétékwonɛ have pledged the northern five kilometers of their territory, to match the strip of your land south of the Swadakwés that you have already designated as park."

"That's good," said Staurɛkɛstɛr. He scrutinized the map closely. "And what about watering holes?"

"The Méghɛndrɛ will construct 15 watering holes on the Akriakwés or away from it, using windmills."

"Good." He grabbed a rolled up map of his own and spread it out. Thornton looked and was pleased to see the lines.

"We'll extend the strip forty kilometers wide on the Kwétékwonɛ and Wuronɛ territory across our land to the Krésonɛ territory. That leaves for Awstroba a strip of brush and grassland along Route 78 and the base of Gordhamonta about 10 kilometers wide and 30 kilometers long. That's where most of their cattle are already, because of the convenience of the road and the various semipermanent streams running off Gordhamonta. The area we'll give over to the park is relatively little used by us, except for hunting, and making sure there will always be hunting is one of the purposes of the Eastern Grasslands Park! That will connect to the 12-kilometer strip of the Krésonɛ and Meghɛndrɛs that runs northward to the Northern Forest Park. We won't concede any territory that will match the strip the Médhɛlonɛ are adding to the park because that comes too close to Mɛdhpéla."

"I see. Not even a small bit?"

Staurɛkɛstɛr shook his head. The land closest to the city is particularly valuable. We still want Route 77 extended across the park all the way eastward to Route 78, too. The army has not committed itself to the project, yet."

"What about your western territory?"

"We're keeping that for cattle raising and farming. But the 40 by 30 kilometer strip we're giving to the park is 1200 square kilometers. That's a substantial area. The strip along our southern border adds another 90 by 7 kilometers, or roughly 630 square kilometers, and some of that is the wetter tallgrass prairie in our western lands. That's about half of our total territory! But 1,800 square kilometers is plenty of land for only 10,000 people; even the half we have left is pretty empty."

"Even so, there are many who are opposed to this arrangement," noted Arjstɛru, a clan chief and now a lord. "My clan loses about 300 square kilometers to the park, land we never used much, and which we can now spare because we can water the rest of our land better."

"We plan to dig some deep wells and install some powerful pumps on them," explained Staurɛgéndu. "If we can get the development grants, we'll install as many wells and windmills in the park as possible, to provide plenty of water and grass for the animals."

"Excellent," said Thornton. "It should be possible to get grants to install electric fences around the park to keep the large animals from straying, also. I am very grateful for the generosity of the Kwolonɛ. The wildlife on this world will benefit greatly."

“That’s what we want, because we want the elephants, giraffes, bison, wildebeest, zebras, hippos, and rhinos to be around for our great grandchildren,” said Staurekɛstɛr. “Can you have some lunch with us? Do you have to hurry back to Mɛlwika?”

“I can stay. Lébé and I are on our way to Mɛddwoglubas, but we don’t need to be there for some time. Yesterday, Duke Estodhéru died.”

“He did?” Staurɛkɛstɛr was surprised. “I’m sorry to hear it. He was a generous man.”

“He was indeed, and he will be greatly missed.”

“He was a Bahá'í, right?” asked Arjstɛru.

Thornton nodded. “Indeed; the first lord to become a Bahá'í.”

“And he’ll have a Bahá'í funeral?” asked Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“Yes, at 1 p.m. tomorrow, Mɛddwoglubas time. That’s 9 p.m. here. He’ll be buried in the Bahá'í cemetery, which is near the Bahá'í temple.”

“That’s right; Mɛddwoglubas has a Bahá'í temple,” said Staurɛkɛstɛr. “What will the funeral be like?”

“They haven’t sent out the details, but there will be Bahá'í prayers, hymns of Widumaj, some other songs, and the Bahá'í Congregational Prayer for the Dead.”

“And a funeral pyre?”

“No, Bahá'ís are not supposed to cremate their dead. He’ll be buried.”

“I see. And who will attend?”

“I assume all lords and dukes are invited, and possibly Her Majesty. She usually attends funerals of dukes.”

“She does.” Staurɛkɛstɛr nodded, thinking. “Estodhéru was a good man. He was kind to me on several occasions at the gatherings of the House of Lords. Few lords were so kind.”

“Indeed, he was a kind man.”

“His passing was mentioned on the radio this morning,” said Staurɛgéndu. “I’m sorry I didn’t mention it to you, father.”

“That’s fine.” He pondered a minute. “All dukes should attend the funeral of a fellow duke, and I am a duke, so I should attend.”

“I am sure you’d be welcome, honored duke, and I doubt they have time to send out invitations. I agree, it is a good idea for you to represent your province at the funeral.”

“Then Staurɛgéndu and I will attend.”

Thornton and Lébé waited in Mɛdhpéla a few hours to be sure Staurɛkɛstɛr and Staurɛgéndu were going to Mɛddwoglubas the next day and knew where to go. Staurɛkɛstɛr had never been even to Tripola, let alone the western shore, and was nervous. Thornton assured them that the drive was quite easy; just follow the “Route 2” signs. As soon as Thornton and Lébe arrived in Mɛddwoglubas, they talked with Chris and Liz about how to be sure the chief of the Kwolonɛ would be comfortable and conveyed their concerns to Mitrané and her husband, ɛjnésu.

The next day, dukes, lords, and the royal family poured into town in fancy cars. At 1 p.m. the program began in the Bahá'í House of Worship with an acapella choir singing sacred tunes and readers reciting prayers and passages from the Bahá'í Writings and the hymns of Widumaj. Behruz was particularly pleased to hear Sugérsé chant a

Bahá'í prayer in perfectly pronounced Arabic and Bidhéstu chant another prayer in perfectly pronounced Persian. Migélu Khɛrmdhunai, Secretary of the Central Spiritual Assembly, chanted a passage from the Bible as well.

Then the entire crowd processed to a tent set up by the graveside. As Liz came out of the Temple, she spotted Staurɛkɛstɛr and Staurɛgéndu standing nearby, looking at the Shrine nearby. She pointed them out to Thornton and he went over to them to bring them to the graveside, which meant Jordan came over to help Chris.

There was a large tent set up by the tomb with seats reserved for the lords. Thousands from Lɛwéspa stood outside; the crowd was so large that most had been unable to fit into the temple and had listened to the service via loudspeakers. Mitrané gave a eulogy about her father, followed by shorter appreciations by four other speakers, including Chris Mennea. The crowd sang a popular religious song that included a few quotations from the hymns, accompanied by pan pipes and trumpets. Once the Bahá'í congregational prayer for the dead was recited, the coffin was placed in the tomb and everyone placed flowers against it. The VIPs were invited inside the old fort for a reception sponsored by the family; more food was set up outside for the thousands. But Liz and Thornton headed straight to Staurɛkɛstɛr.

"Greetings, Honored Duke, and thank you so much for coming," said Liz. "I hope you had no trouble driving here?"

"No, not at all; Staurɛgéndu followed the signs," replied Staurɛkɛstɛr. "It proved easy and quick; we got here in a bit over three hours. We might even drive all the way around the Sea on the way home."

“It’s a good drive, but will take you maybe six hours,” said Thornton. “Before the service here at the tent, you expressed interest in the Shrine. Would you like to see it now?”

“Can we? Is it open?”

“Yes, of course, anyone can go in. It’s open from dawn to almost midnight.”

“Thank you!”

The four of them started to walk over to the Shrine. “Why was some of the service in the temple and some here at the grave?” asked Staurɛgéndu.

“Because the only words uttered in the Temple are scripture,” replied Liz. “The Bahá'í writings, the Bible, and the hymns all count. The eulogies couldn’t be delivered there, nor could the song with the musical instruments.”

“So, our hymns could be sung in a Bahá'í temple?” asked the Duke.

“Yes, of course,” replied Liz. “But they couldn’t be accompanied by a drum inside. The only musical instrument is the human voice.”

“And why didn’t we pray at the Shrine?’ asked Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“Because it is primarily for silent personal prayer.”

The two Kwolonɛ both nodded. The Shrine was crowded because many people stopped there to pay their respects before going to the reception outside the castle. They circumambulated the eight-sided structure on a path of crushed red roofing tiles and entered the main entrance where they stood for a moment. The interior, which had a glass clerestory and dome, was dominated by a central marble platform three meters in diameter and a meter high, covered by beautiful carpets, pots of fresh-cut flowers, and electric candelabras. People sat cross legged on the floor in the eight alcoves formed by

the octagonal structure or on a sitting bench against the eight walls; on that day the crowd overflowed onto the wide aisle surrounding the platform. When people finished their prayers, they put their forehead on the raised mahogany threshold of the platform, then left.

Staurɛkɛstɛr and Staurɛgéndu stood silently, transfixed, for a moment. Then the latter pointed out a beautiful Kwolonɛ rug on the platform, and his father nodded appreciatively. They silently circumambulated the platform, looking all the time at the objets d'art on the platform, then exited. "That's a beautiful Kwolonɛ rug!" said Staurɛkɛstɛr, obviously pleased that something from their tribe was included.

"There's something beautiful from every tribe and province," said Thornton. "This is a place for everyone."

"And we don't get to see the hair of Bahá'u'lláh?"

"No," replied Liz. "It is inside a silk Sumi pouch, inside a gold box made in Lɛwéspa, inside a silver box made in Mɛddoakwés, and placed in a vault under the marble platform. We do not worship Bahá'u'lláh's hair; it's just hair. We don't pray to it for miracles. But it is a reminder to us that a Manifestation of God came to us, to teach us how to live, that He was a human who suffered just like us. By praying to Him, while facing a remnant of Him, it reminds us to orient ourselves to His teachings."

"I see," said Staurɛkɛstɛr, nodding.

"Beautiful," added Staurɛgéndu. "But there's no place to give money or . . . sacrifice in some way."

"No, because only Bahá'ís can contribute to the Bahá'í Funds," replied Liz. "A custom has developed of people throwing coins into the pools around the temple and the

shrine. That money is used for charity. And you may have noticed the lit candles outside the main entrance." She pointed to a spot to the north and south sides of the entrance. "People bring candles, light them, and leave them there. They are very pretty at night."

Staurɛkɛstɛr nodded. "Thank you for showing us the Shrine."

They all walked to the old fort and inside, where the invitees were in a long reception line to shake hands with the family. They waited in line, then went to the buffet table for a very nice meal of chicken and beef chunks, cheese-covered bread, and stuffed mushroom caps, with coffee, tea, and cake for dessert. The Kwolonɛ joined the Menneas to talk, and Lords Patékwu and ɛndranu of the Krésonɛ and Wuronɛ joined them as well. During their informal chat, which sometimes involved other passers by as well, Duchess Albɛsé stopped by to talk to Liz.

"By the way, Her Majesty approved my request," she said quietly.

Liz smiled. "Excellent! I'm glad. It's been a journey, hasn't it?"

"It has. I never imagined myself being a lord, let alone feeling like I could actually do it."

Just then Mitrané and her husband ɛjnésu stopped by. "We are so honored that all of you came," said Mitrané. "My father would have been so pleased that even the Duke of the Kwolonɛ would come here to show respect to him."

"He was kind to me on several occasions at the House of Lords," replied Staurɛkɛstɛr. "That was more unusual than it ever should have been. The Tutanɛ have not always felt welcome there."

"Here, here," echoed Patékwu.

“I will remember that and be sure to extend ample hospitality to anyone who seems ignored or slighted, then,” said Mitrané.

“And I will welcome all of you as well,” said Albɛsé. “I hope you can come to Néfa some time. Lady Mitrané, I welcome you as well as a fellow Duchess. It’s nice to not be alone.”

“I am sure I can learn much from you.”

“On the contrary, I from you! I haven’t been Duchess long and have been growing into the role gradually. You have watched your father for decades and have been his chief support. Your experience is very valuable.”

“I am blessed with a husband who actively supports me,” replied Mitrané, looking at ɛjnésu. “He was the provincial and city treasurer while I was the development officer. Now, if Her Majesty confirms my role as lord and as duchess, he will be the provincial governor.”

“I’m sure she will,” replied Albɛsé.

“And I want to assure you, Lord Kristobéru, that Lɛwéspa will continue to be run in a Bahá'í manner,” Mitrané continued. “ɛjnɛsé and I understand the concept of consultation and the emphasis on the nobility of every human being that Bahá'u'lláh teaches and that my father constantly emphasized. Lɛwéspa is basically a Bahá'í province; a quarter of the people are declared Bahá'ís and most of the rest are on their way. The Bahá'í way of running things has helped make this province successful and we will continue it.”

“Thank you, but I never doubted it,” replied Chris, though he had worried because Mitrané’s faith had never seemed deep and heart-felt.

“I am curious; what does it mean to govern in a Bahá'í way?” asked Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“It means to use the principles of consultation,” replied Mitrané. “These are principles of how you live your life, really, by respecting everyone, listening to everyone, speaking kindly but frankly in gatherings, always living up to the highest principles of honesty, always acting in service to others and not yourself, choosing what is best for the community even if it is not the best for yourself or your family . . . Lady Lizé, what would you add?”

“I think that’s an excellent list,” Liz replied. “But perhaps I’d add that consultation always includes praying together, so we are inspired to seek the truth.”

“This is very much what Kowéranu has been urging, especially since he became a Bahá'í,” said Staurɛgéndu.

“It is,” agreed Staurkɛstɛr. He turned to Patékwu and ɛjnanu. “When you visited me and urged me to consider Bahá'í guidance in running the tribe, is that what you had in mind?”

“Indeed it is,” replied Patékwu. “We have been trying to implement the principles of consultation gradually, but as a small tribe, we have always consulted a lot, anyway. The tribal company became a vehicle for learning more about it. The big challenge for us has been to broaden consultation beyond a gathering of older men to include women and younger people.”

“That has been a challenge for the Wuronɛ as well,” agreed ɛjnanu. “Having Rostamu and Sɛlané with us has helped a lot.”

Staurɛkɛstɛr looked at his son. “I think it is time for us to try out consultation, especially with the younger people. We have several generational gaps in our tribe. First, the older generation, mostly over 50, who remember the old days fondly when we were feared, but lived a very difficult life in a semi-desert: they resent some of the changes. Then there is the generation aged 25 to 40, who grew up through all the changes and are too young to have participated in our defeat outside Mɛlwika; they are the ones who led the changes and run the tribe today. Finally, there are the teenagers and those in their early 20s, who take the changes for granted, want to see the Kwolonɛ to become a great people, and are becoming Bahá'ís in large numbers.”

“Kowéranu has kept the three generations together,” agreed Staurɛgéndu.

“I can come with some members of our tribal council,” replied Patékwu. “And perhaps Lady Lizé, could you come as well?”

“Yes, of course. The members of your council can speak from practical experience. I would be honored to focus more on the written guidance.”

“I would welcome that very much,” said Staurɛkɛstɛr. “Perhaps in two or three days, we can make a plan.”

“I would welcome learning about consultation as well,” said Albɛsé. “It sounds like exactly the sort of advice I need. For three years I have thought that I have to fill my father’s shoes, but at the same time I have known that I can’t—my personality and approach to people is very different—and no one wants the province to be run the way he

ran it, anyway. So I have been left with no model to follow. I can't be the province's stern, powerful father."

"No, but you can be the wise auntie or the loving grandmother," replied Liz. "And indeed, I gather those are the roles you have been gradually moving into."

Albɛsé nodded. "Indeed, I think that is a good description of the role I have been trying to create for myself."

"Then I have a suggestion," said Mitrané. "In another month or so, when things settle down here, maybe you and Lady Liz can visit me for a few days? We'll talk about the writings about consultation and about the practical side of it."

Albɛsé nodded. "Thank you, I would love that."

Many of the lords and dukes left shortly after the reception ended, especially those driving back to the Eastern Shore. Staurɛkɛstɛr and Staurɛgéndu waited until they were getting sleepy and Mitrané insisted they spend the night in the palace where Prince Mégékwɛs was also staying, which produced long conversations.

By the next morning, nearly everyone had left Meddwoglubas. The exception were a few Bahá'ís who had come into town for the funeral and remained to meet people. Estobaisu, a Bahá'í philosopher at Isurdhuna, and May Keino had arrived for the funeral and had been in the huge crowd outside the tent. They stayed on to meet with the five researchers at the Institute for Bahá'í Studies. The Institute was housed in its own stone two-story building next to the Central Spiritual Assembly's administrative building. It had a large classroom and two smaller seminar rooms on the first floor and offices and a library on the second floor. The Institute's weekly seminar had been postponed because

of the funeral and was now attended by the five researchers, the two out of town guests, Behruz Shirazi—who had been in Mɛddwoglubas for the last few months—and several staffers from the administrative offices.

That day, Sugérsé Klɛnvikai read a paper she wrote about a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh she had just translated from Arabic to Eryan, complete with commentary on the context and importance of the work. Her paper generated a lively discussion about some of her translation choices—at least two other researchers knew Arabic well enough to ask intelligent questions—and other audience members asked about how the tablet related to other teachings.

"Very impressive!" exclaimed May, after the applause was over.

"Her Arabic is much better than mine!" said Behruz. "In the last few months here, I have been doing more learning than teaching!"

"No, your advice is still invaluable," replied Bidhéstu, their youngest researcher, who had come from Dhudrakaita as a 17 year old just 7 years ago. "You have experience we lack."

"That's very true," agreed Sugérsé.

"How have you managed to improve your Arabic so much?" asked Estobaisu, who sounded a bit jealous that the researchers had access to knowledge that he didn't.

"Now that we have access to a tablet at night, we can get video Arabic lessons from Earth's worldwide web," replied Sugérsé. "We read Arabic newspapers and watch Arabic movies. That's true of Persian as well, though the Persian we need to learn really isn't used much on the web."

“It’s a nineteenth century literary form that is hard for modern Persians to understand,” confirmed Behruz.

“How much of Bahá'u'lláh’s writings do we have access to?” asked Migélu Khɛrmdhunai, secretary of the Central Spiritual Assembly.

“About two thirds,” replied Sugérsé. “After twenty-five years, we have about three percent available in Eryan. But consider; on Gɛdhéma only 5 percent is translated into English.”

“We spend most of our translating time translating the messages of the Universal House of Justice from English to Eryan,” added Vochéstu. “The aliens generally get them up half a year after they become available.”

“Vital work,” said Modolubu, the former secretary of the Central Spiritual Assembly, who had moved back to ɛjnopéla but was back in town for the funeral.

“Speaking of essential work,” said May. She reached down and pulled out her notebook. “I’ve been talking to Behruz and Estobaisu about your educations. Sugérsé and Wérbéru: both of you have completed a Masters degree. Vochéstu: you are very close. Estoilubɛsu and Bidhéstu: both of you have completed Kwétɛryɛris. We want to see Sugérsé and Wérbéru to pursue doctorates and the rest of you to complete Masters degrees in preparation for your own doctoral work in the near future.”

“This is important because we want the Institute for Bahá'í Studies to become an accredited génadɛma,” added Behruz. “We want you to be able to teach courses related to the Faith here and at other génadɛmas. The Faith has advanced to the point where it has to have highly educated translators and scholars, and that means you; who else can do it? This is important for the advancement of the Faith.”

“We agree that it is, but where will we find the time to study?” asked Sugérsé. “The five of us are overworked as it is!”

“We can afford to hire another full-time researcher and one assistant, who can make work more efficient,” replied Migélu.

“Really? Fantastic!” said Bidhéstu.

“But in what field?” asked Wérbéru. “There is no one with a Ph.D. to oversee the work.”

“You’ll have to oversee the process yourselves with our help,” replied May. “You don’t all need to get a doctorate in the same field. A degree in Arabic and Persian Studies would be best for translators, but someone who is translating House messages on specialized areas of knowledge from English will need the training in English and in that specialized field. That can be accomplished by a Ph.D. in English with a dissertation and some exams in the specialized field. For each of you, we will establish a three-person committee that will include at least one of your peers.”

“But how many courses will we need?” asked Sugérsé. “This could take us years, and I am not sure what we will gain.”

“How long have you been holding these symposia?” asked May. “Five years?”

“No; at least seven,” replied Sugérsé. “And we have all the papers filed away. They often were drafts of something we had to write.”

“Good. Are there records of who attended?”

Sugérsé looked around. “We can figure it out, barring when someone was sick or out of town, which was pretty rare.”

"Good. If you can give me a complete file of all the papers and the dates they were given—the month and year will be sufficient—I'll go through them, arrange them into semester units, and determine how much credit each one is worth. They were graduate seminar type papers, after all; I've sat in on a few of them, as has Behruz. I suspect some of you will earn up to 14 courses of credit, right there."

"How many will we need for a doctorate?"

"If you already have a Masters, 16 additional 3-credit courses, but they can't all be seminars. There will have to be 4 to 6 courses that provide background, depending on your focus, and then writing your dissertation will be worth two courses. Most of the courses you can take together, depending on the focus of your degree, and of course you can study for the written exams together."

"If we work together, it really won't be too difficult," said Bidhéstu.

"But I'm still not sure what we need this for, other than prestige," replied Vochéstu.

"Don't minimize the importance of prestige," replied Estobaisu. "But it's more than that. The quality of education here is steadily improving. Talrando, who's getting old, wants his students to get a proper seminar education and get doctorates in philosophy. My colleagues at the Philosophical School in Isurdhuna want to do the same. Pretty soon, debates about philosophical and religious matters will be occurring at a higher level. And we need more books about the Faith! They need to be written by proper, acknowledged experts."

“And the Institute for Bahá'í Studies needs to be a place with such experts,” added Behruz. “A place that can offer special courses to anyone on Bahá'í topics. A place that can exchange with the philosophical schools in Isurdhuna and Anartu.”

“And represent the Faith properly,” said Sugérsé. She looked at her colleagues. “What do you say? Shall we all go through this together?”

“Yes,” said Bidhéstu. And one by one, the others nodded.

532.

Canals and Parks

Late Plowménu/ early ɛjnaménu / end of Feb/early Mar. 25/643

The Life of Widumaj was absolutely wearing the priest Budhéstu out. As he reread the final draft of the manuscript one more time, he worried about whether a variant of particular story should have been included, at least in a footnote; whether a particular verb should have been replaced by another verb that was almost as common in the various versions of the story he had heard; whether a particular story should have been inserted into the traditional cycle of stories where it belonged chronologically, or whether it should have been placed at the end. The traditional cycle of stories had proved much less cohesive than he had thought; if all the variants had been included, the volume would have been three or four times as long. No doubt a longer parallel version of the book would be needed at some point where all the variants were provided side by side; he had already consulted with various experts about how the Christian New Testament was studied and had learned something about their techniques, and about the arrangement of interpretations in the Talmud. What Budhéstu had put together was the simple first edition; one version of each story with a few variants in the footnotes, and some of the really fanciful stories left out. The correspondence he was getting from fellow priests, the philosophers, the organizers of Hymn Halls, and the followers of Widumaj told him that there was both much to love and much to hate in his version. Alas, it could not compete with Bahá'í historical texts, with their greater level of historical certainty. Too much about Widumaj had been lost in 600 years of oral tradition.

He looked up when the front door of the house opened. Estoimigé, his oldest daughter, was returning from the Hymn Hall and she looked a bit disheveled. It was late at night, which worried him. “Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine, father. It was quite a gathering tonight. I wish you had come.”

“I’m not terribly impressed by ecstasy.” He looked at her more closely and saw a bruise on her face. He pointed. “What happened? Are you alright?”

“Yes; it’s nothing. We were doing the whirling dance and I fell down, that’s all.”

“You know, we aren’t Kwolonɛ,” Budhéstu replied, making a play on kwélérɛ, “one who turns or whirls” and kwolonɛ, the tribal name, which means “one who moves around.” “Widumaj never said we should dance and chant his words at the same time; certainly he never said to dance in a circle while chanting ‘I sing the hymns of Widumaj to love Esto.’”

“Father, you know as well as I that the kwélkoni ‘whirling dance’ is a traditional dance. We didn’t invent it. We just added chanting to it.”

“It may be tradition, but it isn’t called the ékhkoni, ‘drunk dance’ for nothing! Spin around and you’ll fall down, as you have demonstrated tonight!”

Estoimigé rolled her eyes. “I’m not going to argue with you. We’ve been doing this every night for just a week and the crowds are getting larger and larger! That’s why I keep telling you that you have to come and see; come and experience it yourself. We are experiencing Esto’s love for us, directly, personally. It’s very powerful. Very personal; people are coming away with a love for Widumaj and Esto that is really extraordinary! And every night the crowd’s getting bigger! We had over 100 at the Hymn Hall tonight. When have you seen so many people there, except on Primdiu?”

“That’s impressive, but what you are talking about, Estoimigé, is raw emotion. Are they really experiencing some sort of transformation? Are they feeling inspired to go out and change the world? They’re just feeling good.”

“No, you’re wrong.” Estoimigé raised her voice. She pointed at the manuscript. “You think that’s going to transform people? It’ll just prove that Widumaj’s life and words are far more uncertain than Bahá'u'lláh’s! How’s that going to help? But if people feel filled by the power of the hymns, yes, that does change people! And yes, they will arise and make the world a better place! People arise when they feel inspired. This kwélkono has the potential to transform the Hymn Halls all through the realm. People will still want to memorize the hymns; if anything. More of them will want to memorize them, once they experience the power of the Word of God.”

“Well, I’m not going to argue with you,” said Budhéstu, ending the conversation.

“Good night, father.” She headed for her bedroom. Budhéstu watched her go. He tried to turn back to the manuscript, but a cloud seemed to hang over it. He did not like the turn to ecstasy and speaking in tongues that Estoimigé was advocating; indeed, she had started the movement. It was one thing to focus on personal sacrifice rather than animal sacrifice; he could accept that reinterpretation. But replacing personal sacrifice with personal indulgence; that was a completely different thing, which he had to fight.

Thornton was impressed by the size of the archaeological excavation along the side of the Atranisér River. One tent had been replaced by two, then three, then four as the area dug up flowed out from under the protection against the weather. Another tent nearby housed

a caretaker, with a canopy covering stacked and numbered wooden boxes that included artifacts.

Bɛlkordu looked up from the table where he was cataloging artifacts. “Lord, you’re back! Welcome!”

“Thank you, Bɛlkordu. I’m so impressed! It looks like you’ve excavated 20 by 20 meters!”

“Indeed, that’s about right. We’re starting on square 391 today, so we’ve excavated 391 square meters. But we seem to be at the end, now. The entire perimeter hasn’t yielded anything. I think we need to dig up another meter outward; in other words, about another 80 square meters.”

“So; 20 more days?”

“Or less. When we dig up a square that has nothing in it, we can complete six per day. We’ll probably find something everyday, though, like an old animal bone that was chewed on and thrown away, or a broken stone tool.” He pointed to an area. “We finished that entire area while you were away. It had a fourth stone hearth, lots of broken tools, the post holes for two brush shelters, and a few small piles of bones.”

“Big shelters, or small?”

“Average, so we have found two big ones, two small ones, and four middle sized ones. If they held an average of five people, the camp had about 40. We found more evidence that it has two habitation layers, too, though they’d be only 5 or 10 years apart.”

“And you said the multiple post holes suggests rebuilding of the shelters.”

“Yes, but there’s no way to figure out how often. My guess is that the band spent parts of several years here, then there was a break, then another series of visits. I think

they threw most of their bones in the river, so that scavengers and carnivores wouldn't hang out nearby."

"It's a pretty clean site," agreed Thornton. "So, when you finish here, you'll go back to the old city site?"

"Yes, lord, and thanks to your help on the development grant, all six of us will continue full time there! And the city is promising that with the new budget this summer, we'll get the funds to build a small museum, mostly for the Galadhabakwa excavation."

"I heard. I'll be back this summer for at least a month. Meanwhile, please start writing down a report we can publish."

"Lord, really, I absolutely can't do that. I don't know how to write all this up."

"Bɛlkordu, start by writing a list of points. 'We found five hearths.' 'We found 25 spear points.'"

"Twenty-six, now."

"Alright, 26. Start by writing down a list of things that need to be said. Then think of how they should be arranged. For example, there should be a summary at the beginning of the major things we accomplished and the big things we found. Then maybe we should tour the site; what was in tent 1, tent 2, etc. With tent 3, we discovered the post holes and then went back and found some in the tent 1 area as well. Think about writing it as a story."

"Alright, I'll try that, lord." Belkordu sounded skeptical.

"Give it a try. So, what have you found?"

"Come see." Bɛlkordu moved the wooden box for square 391 off the table and picked up box 253. "This seems to be a flute," he said, after he removed the box top. "We

haven't tried to play it, though, because it'll break! But if I have time, I'll try to make a duplicate."

"What kind of bone is it?"

"I showed it to a friend who is a hunter. He said it was probably a deer or gazelle antler."

"Oh, of course. It looks like it."

Bɛlkordu put the box down and moved boxes around until he found 207. It was filled with glittering nickel-iron tools. "These all come from around hearth number 7, which we think is the newest hearth and in the later phase of habitation. It appears they learned to put nickel-iron pieces in the fire, heat them up and pound them into shape. Possibly they heated up nickel-iron chunks, put them in the river to shatter them, then reheated the fragments to make spear points and knives."

"Very clever. They were in the 'iron-stone age'!"

"Indeed they were. There's nickel-iron all over this world and they were quick to exploit it. But no pottery, no arrowheads—they didn't have bows and arrows—and no dogs or other domesticated animals."

"Any pollen or plant remains?"

Bɛlkordu shook his head. "We'll have to reconstruct their diet from the bones. It had lots of fish, turkeys, monkeys, ducks, and some larger animals—deer, gazelle, wild cattle, and horses or zebras. No really big animals like bison, elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, etc. They couldn't easily and safely kill them with spears."

"That makes sense."

“One more thing.” Bɛlkordu closed box 307 and pulled out box 363. He opened it and pointed to a small tray full of tiny beads. “These are very pretty beads made of conch shell. There are enough here for a necklace; too many for a bracelet.”

“So, they made jewelry!”

“I think so.”

“That’s a touching discovery.”

“What we don’t have are any burials. If we can find some of them, we’d have a much better idea about their material culture and maybe even their beliefs.”

“Who knows, maybe someday we’ll find some graves. That’ll be exciting. Thanks, Bɛlkordu.”

“Are you heading back to Pértatranisér right now? Because I’d like to show you where we want to build the museum.”

“Sure, I’d love to see.”

“Let me take the truck; you can follow me. It’s next to the temple and across the street from the Hymn Hall.”

“Alright, let’s go.” Thornton followed Bɛlkordu back to the road and the men got into their pickup trucks and headed for the city. It was less than 5 minutes to the Hymn Hall. When Thornton got out, he was surprised to see a big crowd across the street at the Hymn Hall.

“What are they doing?”

“Chanting hymns.” Bɛlkordu pointed to an open window. “You see inside? They’ve moved the chairs out of the way and they’re whirling.”

“Really, and chanting?”

“Exactly. The chanting will get a lot louder as the whirling continues, then a bunch of them will fall down. It’s been getting bigger and bigger every night for the last two weeks. On Primdiu there are as many as a thousand people here, though not all at once; people just keep coming all day, chanting and whirling.”

“I’ve never seen a whirling dance before!”

“It’s not a custom of Widumaj. It’s an old folk dance and was done in times of plague, to ward off the disease. They didn’t usually chant a hymn though, just ‘Oh Esto! Oh Esto!’ This is different.”

“I see!”

“I think Lomu thinks this will provide the traditional religion with something to stop converts to your Faith. I hear it has spread to the Hymn Hall in southern Kɛrda, but the priests are furious.”

“It doesn’t look like it’ll increase animal sacrifice.”

“No. Do you think it will keep people away from the Bahá'í Faith?”

“I don’t know, but I suppose Bahá'ís could go there to chant and whirl, too. There’s nothing about it that’s forbidden.”

“Oh,” replied Bɛlkordu, who seemed to be disappointed. He pointed to a spot in the ancient village site where a set of low walls could be seen. “That was the house of a rich man. It had a courtyard and seven rooms set around it and seems to be about the right size for a museum.”

“I see.” Thornton walked around the old walls, surveying the site, then he nodded. “I agree, this would be good.”

“Excellent, lord. I hope you’ll be here when we start building over the summer!”

“I’ll be sure to be.” Thornton shook hands with Bɛlkordu. When they walked back to their trucks, the singing from the hymn hall was indeed much louder. Thornton drove to the house, rather worried. As soon as he got in, he went to the sitting room, where May and Amos were drinking tea and waiting for supper. “People at the hymn hall are singing very loudly and Bɛlkordu tells me the crowd is getting bigger every day.”

“Probably true,” replied Amos.

“It’s interesting,” said May. “Skandé and Andranu say that Budhéstu is not happy about it because the worshippers are just having an ecstatic worship experience and are neither sacrificing nor doing acts of service for others. Andranu says that it’s a matter of time before Lomu and the Hymn Hall begin to emphasize those other aspects of worship. Skandé’s not so sure. Her sister Estoimigé read an article in the Mɛlwika Nuɛs by Migelu Khɛrmdhunai—the secretary of the Central Spiritual Assembly, no less!—about Christianity on Earth and he mentioned Saint Paul’s emphasis on speaking in tongues and other gifts of the spirit. That’s where she got the idea! Apparently the Hymn Halls in Kɛrda are now trying it and the priests are furious.”

“So; Pentecostal Widumajism!” exclaimed Thornton, with a laugh.

“Yes, exactly,” replied May. “Who would have thought?”

“But it may prove to be a problem for the Faith,” said Amos. “We’re waiting to see. There’s nothing we can or should do, of course.”

“Yes, of course.”

Thornton poured a cup of tea for himself. “So, how is everyone in Mɛlwika?” asked May.

"Good; waiting eagerly for spring. Dad had some trouble with his arthritis, but Lua adjusted his medication and he's doing better now."

"I know it's really late for you and you'll want to get to bed soon," said May. "But I can give you all of tomorrow to talk about the park ranger curriculum."

"And I've freed up the morning," added Amos. "I've taken a look at the web pages you've accumulated, and I had friends in Kenya who became rangers. That all seems like centuries ago, now! The curriculum will need to overlap with the police curriculum."

"Yes, a park ranger is part policeman and part wildlife biologist," said Thornton. It's going to be a lot of fun to develop the curriculum."

"And you need it pretty soon," said May. "What negotiations are left?"

"Minor ones; I'm making a last round of visits to the tribes next week. The borders are pretty well set, but each tribe has a different set of ideas about regulations and what resources can be exploited by whom and when. The palace is letting me resolve all those details and put them in a report, so they can finalize everything."

"This is really big," said Amos. "I'm impressed, Thor."

"Thanks. We've been building relationships with these tribes for twenty-five years, and now the effort is bearing fruit."

"I must preserve the sovereign control of my tribe over our territory," emphasized Walékwɛs, with a definitive tone.

"Honored Lord, we have been discussing the terms of the Central Grasslands Park for days and weeks," responded Thornton calmly. "No one is talking about taking away

your sovereignty. The issue I simple; if someone enters the park to poach wildlife and is spotted by, in this case, a Krésonɛ ranger, and he pursues the poacher to the tribal border, he has no way to notify a Méghɛndrɛ ranger and ask him to take up the chase. He needs to pursue the poacher and either catch him or follow him home."

"It's only fair," added Patékwu. "If a Krésonɛ poacher crosses onto Méghɛndrɛ land and is detected there, we pledge that your ranger can follow the poacher onto our tribal territory. A reciprocal arrangement is the only just one to make."

"I understand your position, but my tribal council will not agree to it. We are a powerful tribe; one of the most powerful in the world. After today, we are even more powerful. My council wants respect for that. We have hunted south of our tribal boundary for centuries and the Krésonɛ did not object. There weren't many of them and they could not use all the game on their land anyway."

"The reason we didn't object was because you had more warriors," replied Patékwu, trying to stay calm. "Our tribes have agreed that the highpoint between our lands is the boundary; what today Lord Dhoru calls the 'watershed.' That has been the boundary for centuries."

"Lord Walékwɛs, we Kwolonɛ seek respect as well," said Duke Staurɛkɛstɛr. "But that does not prevent us from granting the right to the rangers of the other tribes in the Central Grasslands Park to cross onto our land if they are pursuing someone for violating the terms of use of the park. We are here to consult together and come up with a truth we can all agree to. The Central Grasslands Park will allow all of us to use these lands while preserving the park from damage from cattle grazing and ensuring that our grandchildren's grandchildren will have animals to hunt."

“We Krésonɛ are sacrificing very extensively,” added Patékwu. “Our lands are not even 20 kilometers wide and we are granting half our territory to the park.”

“Well, the Krésonɛ have extensive marshlands for your farmers and herders that you are retaining,” replied Walékwɛs. “And I understand the Kwolonɛ are leasing a strip of land from the Médhɛlonɛ, so they can afford to be generous as well.”

“And you have far more marshlands than either of us,” added Staurɛkɛstɛr. “And after today, with the completion of your Grand Canal, you will be able to irrigate even more of your land. You can afford to be generous as well.”

“We are free to decide how to use our lands,” added Andamékwɛs quickly. The Médhɛlonɛ were the smallest tribe but had a lot of land.

“I think the Lord of the Mɛghɛndrɛs has made the position of his council clear,” exclaimed Thornton. “This position, of course, holds up the signing of the treaty creating the park. I am glad we have been able to have this meeting today, which has been quite long, because we have resolved every other issue. The treaty creating the park is all but complete.”

“Her Majesty will not be pleased,” said Patékwu, and ɛndranu of the Wuronɛ nodded in agreement.

“The ceremony was supposed to start half an hour ago,” added Staurɛkɛstɛr, frustrated.

“Then perhaps today we should just celebrate the opening of the Grand Canal, and not include the treaty for the park.”

“I think I should ask Her Majesty about that,” said Thornton, rising. “If you gentlemen will excuse me briefly.” He headed out of the tent where they were seated and

walked across the grass to the tent where Queen Estobidhé and her retinue were waiting. He cast a glimpse at the larger tent nearby where the ceremony was scheduled to occur; it was full with hundreds of people who were waiting while a musical group performed.

He stepped into Her Majesty's tent. He could immediately see that she was visibly angry. "What's the problem?" asked Wɛpokɛstɛr.

"Everything is resolved but one item. Walékwɛs will not agree to allow other tribes' rangers onto Méghɛndrɛ land to pursue people misusing the park, such as poachers."

"I knew it was Walékwɛs!" exclaimed Lord Kandékwɛs. "This Grand Canal has turned him into a pompous ass!"

"Right now, he is enjoying the opportunity to hold me up and make everyone wait," said the Queen, shaking her head.

"He said it is a decision of the tribal council," said Thornton.

"I don't believe it," said Kandékwɛs, shaking his head.

"Nor do I." The queen thought for a moment. "Tell him I want to talk to him right now. If he wants me to inaugurate the canal—if he wants the title of Duke!—he had better come around right away."

"I'll tell him right away," replied Thornton.

"Thank you, Lord," she replied. "And Lord Dhoru, I want to thank you for your exhaustive efforts to make this park happen. You have made it possible."

"Well, there's still this one obstacle."

"And I will remove it," she replied with a smile.

Thornton headed back to the tent with the six tribal lords. “My Lord Walékwɛs, Her Majesty wishes to speak to you.”

“I see. Well, I won’t succumb to pressure.”

“You are keeping hundreds of people waiting,” pointed out Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“You know, I don’t keep a watch! I don’t watch the time!”

“Bullshit, you know we’re late!” replied Ménɛgékwɛs of the Kwetékwonɛ tribe.

Walékwɛs swore at him and stepped out of the tent. The other five lords looked at each other shaking their heads. “His head is swelled up by this canal,” said Patékwu.

“I suspect the Queen will make short work of him,” added Staurɛkɛstɛr. “Any idea what she’ll do?”

Thornton shook his head. “Let’s just say she is not happy.”

“I hope this doesn’t sink the treaty,” said ɛndranu. “The Wuronɛ have made quite a contribution as well, not only to this park, but to the Southern Forest Park. Half that park is on our land.”

“And half the connection between that park and the Central Grasslands Park is on our land,” agreed Ménɛgékwɛs. “The Meghɛndrɛ provide the connection to the Northern Forest Park as well, which will allow animals to migrate from pole to pole.”

“I wish we had been able to negotiate a park for the Spine Forests as well,” said ɛndranu. “The Wuronɛ lands are probably the main connection to that park.”

“Maybe next year,” replied Thornton. “I can do only so much!”

The others laughed. “You’ve done a great job,” said Patékwu.

“Do you think it is possible Her Majesty will dedicate the canal today and not announce the Central Grasslands Park?” asked Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“I doubt it,” replied Thornton. “This canal exists mostly to irrigate land for human use. Her Majesty has become very concerned about the environment; the seventh developmental priority. So she wants to link development and environmental protection whenever she can.”

They heard a rustling at the door of the tent and Walékwɛs entered, looking defeated. “Her Majesty has persuaded me,” he said quietly.

“Thank you,” said Thornton. “Let’s sign the treaty and get it finalized.”

“I have to hurry,” said Lord Walékwɛs. “I’m needed at the dedication ceremony.”

“Very well.” Thornton pulled out the thirty-page treaty and turned to the last page, where Lord Walékwɛs signed and affixed his seal. He then hurried out. The other lords took their turn signing as well, then congratulating each other for completing such a complex agreement.

When they walked across the thirty meters of grass to the big tent for the ceremony, it was clear that Her Majesty had ordered the ceremony to begin immediately. As they left their tent, the last chanter chanted a hymn. They had to walk the length of the tent along the ravine that would receive the water to reach their assigned seats up front. By the time they had sat, Lord Walékwɛs was taking the stage.

“Your Majesty, Prince Consort and Duke Kandékwɛs, distinguished lords, chiefs, elders, and other important leaders, greetings and welcome to the land of Meghɛndrɛ.” That was not true; they were actually in a hunting area well beyond the Méghɛndrɛ territory. “We are honored today to have Her Majesty, Queen Estobidhé, present to

inaugurate the Grand Canal. This is a feat of engineering beyond the imaginations of any of our ancestors, even back before the Great Drought a thousand years ago. This canal, 42 kilometers long, 3 meters wide, and 2 meters deep, can carry up to a third of the flow of the Majakwés River and is able to irrigate hundreds of square kilometers of shortgrass prairie. With it, the Méghɛndrɛs will be able to raise more wheat and corn, export vegetables and fruits, feed thousands of cattle, and sell even more beef than ever. Our tribe built the canal ourselves; it took four years. We paid for it with our own taxes and with development grants from the palace that were less than our total tax contributions to the palace. Today we open the gates at the very end of the canal and let excess water into a ravine at the head of the Sorakwés, which flows into the Ornakwés. That river, already overburdened by irrigation and industrial uses, will have its low summer flow doubled, and in turn it will return the water to the Majákwés near its mouth, completing the cycle. A thirty-kilometer extension across the lands of the Kwolonɛ and Médhɛlonɛ could bring irrigation to their prairie and contribute water to the little Gramakwés in Swadnoma, if the tribes can raise the money to build the extension. The Méghɛndrɛ have made this gift of water available to the tribes to our west and are pleased to share our water with them.

"In short, we are thrilled to offer the kingdom this important development project, which has many implications for the future. I will now turn the podium over to Her Majesty, who has a few words."

There was strong applause for the lord as he sat. The Queen walked to the podium. "Thank you so much, Lord Walékwɛs. I can't tell you how pleased and excited I am to be here today to inaugurate this canal. This morning I drove along the last ten kilometers of it and I am very impressed by the workmanship.

“But in addition to the benefits our people will see from this canal, the wildlife of the central grasslands will also benefit greatly. Along the ten kilometer stretch I saw there were three ravines and the canal crossed each one behind a dam that produced a substantial waterhole for wildlife. A small pipe allowed water to escape into each ravine, converting them into permanent streams. Soon they will be lined with willows and cottonwood trees, with pockets of marsh reeds and areas of rich grassland. While we are taking land away from the animals, we are also improving the remaining land to support them better. The Méghɛndrɛ have built a dozen dams on the Akriakwés to back up the trickle that flows through it to provide wildlife with more water and food. The Akriakwés is virtually dry where the Canal crosses it behind a dam that creates a large pond and allows more water to flow down the Akriakwés, where it is used for irrigation as well as grazing.

“In order to maintain the balance between land used by people and land used by wildlife, the construction of this canal mandated a plan to preserve and improve large areas for wildlife. I am pleased to report that today, three new parks have come into existence: the Southern Forest Park, the Central Grassland Park, and the Northern Forest Park. The first starts at the permanent snow near the south pole; the last ends at the peaks of the northern mountains. The Central Grassland Park connects them together. These parks encompass nearly 10,000 square kilometers of our world and are the prime habitat for elephants, mastodons, mammoths, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, giraffe, bison, sabertooths, lions, tigers, wolves, and many other species. They are our responsibility. Could the Lords of the Kwétékwonɛ, Kwolonɛ, Krésonɛ, Médhɛlonɛ, Méghɛndrɛ, and

Wuronɛ come up on the platform with me to receive our gratitude and accept our thanks for their efforts to bring these parks into existence.

““I also would like to ask Lord Dhoru to join us on the platform. He was the palace’s special representative to hammer out the details of the treaty that created these three parks. It took months of work to finalize the details. Each tribe will be hiring rangers to police their portions of the park; others will be hired by the provinces of Arjakwés and Dɛksawsakɛla to police their portions of the parks. Lord Dhoru has also developed the curriculum the park rangers will be receiving to train them in their new jobs, a curriculum that will be expanded into a major in environmental preservation. Lord Dhoru, please rise.”

The seven men rose and headed for the platform to the applause of the crowd. Thornton brought the signed treaty which Her Majesty held up, then she personally shook hands with each man and thanked him.

“A final note before we inaugurate the canal. The Méghɛndrɛ deserve great credit for this ambitious and complex feat in engineering, as does their chief, Lord Walékwɛs. The great increase in irrigation water will enable them to raise even more cattle and grain and will make the tribe more prosperous than ever. I am happy to report that from this day forward, Walékwɛs is Duke of the Province of Méghɛndrɛs.”

The crowd erupted in applause—most were Méghɛndrɛ—and Duke Staurɛkɛstɛr shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “I guess we’ll have to finish that canal,” he muttered. Thornton nodded. Walékwɛs had been calling himself “Duke” for some time, but now it was official that the Tutanɛ had two dukes. Walékwɛs rose and nodded to the crowd in thanks.

The Queen waited for the applause to die down. “And now, let us open the gates!” she said, as the lords ans Thornton left the stage.

The queen walked across the platform to the side bordering the canal, where a wheel stood that raised the sluice gate. Everyone in the tent rose to stand by the ravine, where a tiny trickle of water leaking from the gate already flowed. The lords stood against the rope with a perfect view while the people pressed behind. Walékwɛs joined Her Majesty, and Kandékwɛs came to the wheel in case additional muscle was needed.

They slowly turned the wheel and the gate rose, spilling an increasingly powerful stream into the ravine. The crowd cheered and applauded as the precious water of the Majakwés poured out, sweeping grass and loose dirt ahead of it. “This will cause a lot of erosion!” said Staurɛkɛstɛr, happy to find something to criticize.

“It has lengthened the Sorakwés. There’s a dry dam every kilometer with a concrete spillway,” replied Thornton. “The eroded dirt will fill the ponds and create marshes.”

“They’ll be perfect waterholes for the wildlife,” added Patékwu.

“Prosperity for us and prosperity for them,” quipped Staurɛkɛstɛr.

“I think this is a good time to break for lunch,” suggested Liz. “We’ve had quite a busy, even intense morning, and we deserve a chance to rest and let it digest with our food!”

“Thank you, Lady Lizé,” replied Duke Staurɛkɛstɛr. “I’m told the food is ready, so let us go out to the hallway to load up our plates, then return here to sit together and eat.”

“Thank you!” exclaimed several others, and there was a scattering of applause as well. The hundred people in the Kwolonɛ tribal hall rose to stretch and head for the food. Thornton, Lébé, and Jordan moved forward to talk to Liz. “They seem to be absorbing the points about consultation quite well,” observed Jordan.

“Although several people in my group were upset that the first morning session was about spiritual behavior, rather than consultation tips,” said Lébé. “By the end of the session, though, they began to see that consultation was really a spiritual attitude rather than a bunch of rules.”

“Attitudes toward people, toward ideas, and toward the process of decision making,” added Jordan. “My group finally is getting that.”

“That was clear from their group report,” agreed Thornton. “Our groups really are too large, though. We needed ten or twelve each, rather than twenty-three.”

“I talked to Albkordé briefly at the break and she said she’d take a group,” said Liz. “Chris is on his way, and he’s bringing Tiamaté. We’ll have seven group leaders and that’ll reduce the groups to fourteen each.”

“Why don’t we find Sunéru and ask him to take a group, too?” suggested Jordan. “He’s chair of the LSA; he’d pick up the materials quickly.”

“Yes, good idea,” agreed Liz. “That way, each of us could keep our existing group but split it in half after we give the instructions. That would help the second facilitator as well.”

“Perfect. I’ll call Sunéru,” said Jordan.

“By the way, I’m having lunch with Gɛlékwu,” said Thornton. “He wanted to hear about our excavation at Pértatranisér and wants to show me their new museum display about the Philosophical School of Rudhdiu.”

“I think we’re done,” said Liz, wrapping up the discussion.

Just then, Dɛkané and Yusdu approached. “Thank you so much for allowing us to attend,” said Dɛkané. “I’ve heard many short explanations of your Bahá'í concept of consultation before, but this day-long training session—if I can call it that—has really helped me to understand it.”

“Me too,” said Yusdu. “I wish the tomi boards could use it! Some of them provide very bad leadership to their personnel.”

“I wish the village councils practiced it,” said Dɛkané. “Some of them are dominated by one or two personalities.”

“There’s no guarantee consultation will solve those problems,” replied Liz. “But generally it helps.”

“How did this meeting get arranged?” asked Dɛkané.

“A discussion at the funeral of Duke Estodhéru; Duke Staurɛkɛstɛr requested it, then the Kwétékwonɛ and Médhɛlonɛ heard about it and asked to send some people, and the Wuronɛ and Krésonɛ wanted a refresher.”

“I’m so glad Lord Andamékwɛs came,” said Dɛkané. “The Médhɛlonɛ need all the help they can get! They’ve actually had too much money because they’ve sold land several times and then they’ve invested it in factories that were ill-conceived because they didn’t have the skilled workers to do the work.”

“They have a lot more skilled people now,” said Thornton. “Because they’ve been sending their kids to Mɛlwika high school.”

“Yes; Yusdu and I are working with them. Could you do a training like this for village councils?”

Liz considered. “The issue would be including the Bahá'í quotations. Consultation works because of the scriptural imperatives. Many people would feel uncomfortable if we included the passages.”

Dɛkané shook her head. “Please don’t worry about that. We are the kingdom of the two widus now: Widumaj and Bahá'u'lláh. Widumaj mentions consultation only in the briefest way. Bahá'u'lláh fleshes it out. Everyone needs to consider these spiritual values when living in a community with others.”

“In fact, the spiritual values of letting go of your own ideas after sharing them, of taking everyone’s ideas seriously, of working together to shape common ideas into a vision of the truth: these values have made me think about our process of voting without mentioning names in a new way,” said Yusdu. “This detachment and viewing people without bias is what makes our voting system work as well.”

“That’s true!” said Liz, startled by Yusdu’s insight.

“I hope we can build consultation workshops into the Queen’s tour of the kingdom this summer,” said Dɛkané. “I’ll ask Her Majesty about the idea and get back to you.”

“Excellent,” said Liz, though she wondered how she could organize such a huge program. It would take a lot of people. She looked at Jordan and he nodded; he’d do it.

The discussion over, Thornton headed out of the room to find Gɛlékwu. The young Kwolonɛ archaeologist was in the hallway outside. He waved to him and they shook hands. “It’s good to see you again!”

“Thank you, Lord Dhoru; what brings you to Mɛdhpéla?”

“A consultation training session for about fifty Kwolonɛ government leaders, plus another fifty from several other tribes. It’s being very well received, too.”

“Consultation; that’s something they could really need!”

“What do you know about it?”

“When you were here, that first youth training summer, you talked about it. Maybe you don’t remember because it wasn’t a formal class, but it was something you and the other Bahá'ís often mentioned, and you explained what you meant as well.”

“Interesting; I have only a vague memory of mentioning consultation.”

“Maybe because you were very concerned not to push your faith on us, and we appreciated that, but consultation was a way to make decisions, so it didn’t come off as part of your religion.”

“Oh, that’s interesting, and maybe that explains the interest here, though we are talking a lot more about scriptural passages at this meeting.”

“I think the Kwolonɛ are used to hearing about your scriptures, now. Can we grab food from the buffet here? That’d be the fastest.”

“Yes, I’m sure there’s enough. Let’s do that.” They headed over to the buffet, which was still well stocked even though most attendees had helped themselves.

“That’ll give us more time for the display,” added Gɛlékwu. “I think you’ll like it. We’ve excavated pretty much the entire school, now. The top floor was a big open space for classes—seminars, you might say—and there were a few spaces that appear to have been offices. The first floor had sixteen small rooms; probably dorm rooms for sixteen students. The display has drawings based on what we can reconstruct. There was a building nearby that may have housed more students that we’re still excavating. There were two other buildings that may have housed teachers and their families. So right now it appears the school had two, maybe sometimes three, teachers, and at least 16 students, maybe as many as 30.”

“How long did it function?”

“Probably two hundred years, based on the coins we have found. That’s twice as long as the earlier guess. It was destroyed a few years before Lilalara, probably because of troubles between Eryan groups.”

“I wonder how it was funded. Probably an Eryan king.”

“Or farm rents; the land around it was cleared and irrigated and pretty densely populated, near as we can tell. We’re also getting an Eryan translation of Mitrodato’s treatise about the singularity of Esto! One very old Sumi translation has been found, the original text being lost. We are very excited because it will be the oldest book in the Eryan language that we have.”

“I heard about that. Alas, we’ll never have the original language, but still, it is quite exciting.”

They reached the food, so they paused their conversation while they filled their plates, then they walked outside to eat at a bench under two palm trees. “Tell me about Papadam’s encampment,” said Gɛlékwu.

“We’ll have a lengthy panel discussion at the All-Génadɛma conference in two months. The band of forty or fifty people lived there for several seasons, hunting and gathering. They had no pottery and no domesticated animals, but they did make beads of shells and fairly sophisticated stone tools. We just found some hammered iron tools as well; they seem to have discovered how to work nickel-iron, which is pretty abundant in the area. That’s about all we know. We can’t date the site in any way, but the aliens have said it was inhabited 72,000 years ago. These are the ancestors of the shell mound people.”

“Fascinating. Speaking of shell mound people; you know the story of King Mégékwɛs, founder of Gordha, slaying a dragon with his special sword?”

“Yes, of course. And we now have found his tomb, and it did indeed have quite a remarkable sword in it.”

“The archaeologists in Gordha have been asking around about sword manufacturing and have found one problem: the sword is made of bronze, and no one here makes bronze weapons because iron is so much better. Gordha, also, had hot-hammered nickel-iron tools and weapons even in its earliest archaeological stratum. So Migyusu, who is now running the archaeology there, has a theory: that the sword came from Gɛdhéma.”

“Really? If so, that would be quite remarkable, to actually have a terrestrial artifact from the arrival of the Eryan here!”

“Exactly, it’s quite exciting. But I have another theory to run by you.” Gɛlékwu’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “You know the story of Mégékwɛs slaying the dragon to protect Gordha. Some versions of the story refer to Wɛrétra, the primordial dragon in many of our myths. This is a very old name, considering that it ends in -a, and it is clearly an Eryan word. But the dragon has another name, a very strange name, in many versions of the story.”

“Yes, something like Lilu.”

“Exactly: Lilalu, to be exact. Such a strange name! Not Eryan or Sumi. It’s used in the Gordha version of the story. The version of the name used in Mɛddoakwés is Lilasiamlu.”

“That almost sounds Sumi.”

“Then there’s the Kwolonɛ version of the story where the dragon is ‘Lilapléba.’”

“I haven’t seen that version before.”

“No, it’s only used here. But consider this: ‘Lilalu’ is ‘lila’ with ‘lu,’ Sumi for ‘a man.’ ‘Lilasiamlu’ is lila plus the Sumi word for ‘person.’ And ‘Lilapleba’ is lila plus an old Eryan word for ‘people.’ Mégékwɛs wasn’t slaying a dragon. He was defeating a people, the ‘Lila.’”

Thornton opened his mouth in surprise. “Fascinating. But who are the ‘Lila’?”

“My theory is the shell mound people. We have two words, ‘Lilalara’ and ‘Sumilara’ that have this ending, ‘lara,’ which is not Sumi or Eryan either. Let us assume

it means ‘place of’; the place of the Sumis and the place of the Lila. And we have one other very rare word that includes the root ‘lila’; ‘Lilarana.’”

“That’s . . . an old name for Moritua, right?”

“Exactly, it’s the Sumi name for Moritua, but it isn’t a Sumi word. Let us assume it means the ‘lake of the Lila.’ That suggests that the Majakwés Valley was the valley of the ‘Lila’ tribe of shell mound people.”

“Yes, it would.” Thornton stopped chewing to think. “The aliens told us that the Sumis were first placed here at Lilalara. So they could have picked up the name from the natives. They could have easily called the people here ‘Lilalu’ also.”

“And the people in Gordha would have used ‘Lilapleba.’ And if you read all the various versions of the story, it’s clearly a poetic account of a big battle. The enemy is described in the singular, but that may be a feature of the retelling.”

“Yes, you’re right.” Thornton shook his head. “You’ve come a long way from an uninterested teenager who didn’t do well in school, Gɛlékwu.”

Gɛlékwu laughed. “A lot of that was a façade. When I discovered archaeology, it all crumbled!”

“I guess so! I think you’re right. It’s just a theory, of course, and unprovable, but it fits the details very well.”

“I don’t agree that it’s unprovable. There are Sumi inscriptions all over the Majakwés Valley and lots of records on Sumilara, and they have place names. I bet a careful study of them will reveal other names that have no obvious Sumi or Eryan etymologies. I suspect we’ll recover several other words from the Shell Mound language.”

“I bet you are right, and we can even ask the aliens if we are right.”

“Yes, but not yet! Let’s not spoil the fun.”

Gɛléwu and Thornton had finished their lunches, so they returned the dirty plates and walked over to the Kwolonɛ tribal museum. They walked right through the main entrance and turned to a small room on the right side of the main hall where the permanent exhibit about Mitrodato’s school had been set up. Thornton gravitated to the model about a meter across with the limestone cliff and its indentation formed in white clay and the various floors and rooms made of small wooden beans, rather like a doll house. “What beautiful work!”

“It represents several years of excavation and research, too. We’re still debating some details.”

Thornton read the description and nodded. “So I see. This is a nice, fair, description of the controversies.”

“I try to present everything fairly. As you told us some years ago, the truth will come out in the long run, so we might as well help it along!”

Thornton chuckled and nodded. He remembered a long philosophical conversation one late night with Gɛlékwu and several other students about truth. They walked over to a long display of artifacts dug up at the site and a map on the wall showed where each found, marking the location of the kitchen, food storage, latrine, and the two houses for faculty. “You’ve done a great job of explaining how you’ve reconstructed everything.”

“Thank you. A lot of that is the work of my colleagues. We work pretty closely together.”

Thornton pointed to a reference to Mitrodato's essay on the 'Singularity of Esto.' "Isn't the use of 'Esto' controversial? I'm surprised you used it. We can't be sure what the Eryan word was, after all, since all we have is a translation into Middle Sumi."

"True; fair enough. It might have been 'Déo' instead of Esto. But 'Déo' isn't used at all here in Kwolona and it is rare in normal Eryan, so that word is not suitable for a translation. Everyone understands Esto. It's better than using ɛndro or Wɛrano because they are both aspects of the divine. They can't represent the singularity of the divine."

"Fair enough. That's a pretty sophisticated topic, we're talking about what year? Twelve hundred years ago?"

"Yes, and 600 years before Widumaj and 75 years before the Long Valley flood. From what I gather about the Greek philosophers and Christian theologians, they had done some discussion about this, but the Islamic philosophers talked about it the most. But they were later. All of this suggests some pretty lively intellectual life and philosophical discourse here, before the flood. Mitrodato's school may not have been the only one."

"We'll have to look in Lilalara to see if there's evidence of a school."

Just then, two of Gɛlékwu's archeological colleagues entered the room. Like Gɛlékwu, they were young; in their 20s. Gɛlékwu introduced them to Thornton and he asked them to describe their work. "Gɛlékwu's a great boss," said one at the end of her description. "He listens and lets us take the initiative."

"But he accompanies us when we need it!" added the other.

“So I see,” replied Thornton. “I am here in Mɛdhpéla to provide a training session about Bahá'í consultation to the tribe’s leaders, but I see that it is already actively practiced among the youth!”

“Oh, it is!” agreed the woman. “I’m a Bahá'í and can testify to it. We’ve been having Bahá'í junior youth and youth classes and summer service trips for almost a decade, now. They’ve had a big impact on the tribe.”

“I agree, and I’m not a Bahá'í,” added Gɛlékwu. “I think even the tribal chiefs and their associates have been influenced to some extent.”

“Perhaps that explains why the ideas have been so well received today,” said Thornton.

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Future Forums

Late ɛjnaménu / Mar. 25/643

The weekend after the trip to Kwolona was the weekend for the Future of Era forums, when the population gathered in small groups all over the kingdom to discuss and debate where their society was going. Mɛlwika's 35,000 people gathered in 12 different neighborhood groups to consider matters of mutual concern, and all of them were chaired by local women.

Upɛrwika Wɛga or Overtown Avenue ran from East Street, where it reached the crest of North Hill, diagonally northeastward to the northeast corner of Mɛlwika by the northern shore of the lake. North Hill was the first place the Kwolonɛ had camped when they attacked Mɛlwika 24 years ago; they had been driven away in the middle of the night by fire bombs launched by Thornton's trebuchet. The hill had been covered by houses within a few years. The Overtown neighborhood was the poorest and most remote of the city's older districts and was built on the northern slope, out of the sight of the rest of the city.

Now Overtown Avenue, which ran through the heart of the neighborhood, was packed with a crowd of several thousand people. As Erduktɛr looked over the crowd from the podium at the crest of the hill, she noticed that three quarters of the audience members were men. But it was a warm spring day and all the windows along the street and the side streets were open. That meant the wives, who were busy watching the children, were listening as well. That gave her encouragement.

“We really should get started,” exclaimed Jɛrgu Wiraykwénu. He was one of the neighborhood’s representatives.

Erduktɛr shook her head. “It’s not time yet.”

“Just about everyone who’s coming is here.”

“They’re early?”

“Indeed. They want to see whether a girl can handle the job!”

Erduktɛr glared at him. She was feeling a bit intimidated, but she was also determined. All twelve of the women chairs had met the night before to discuss problems and how to solve them, including jokes to say. She had a few of them and they were rather bawdy, but they were probably well suited to the rough and tumble nature of Overtown.

Just then, the city bells began to ring. “Now we can get started,” she said to Jɛrgu. She turned to the three chanters and motioned them to go up on the stage. When the crowd didn’t immediately quiet down, Erduktɛr strove on up onto the stage as well, and rang a bell. “It’s time! Let us pray!”

That quieted the crowd. The three chanters, two women and one man, chanted two hymns of Widumaj in a most beautiful and mellifluous fashion. Because of the sound system, Erduktɛr could hear their voices echoing off of distant buildings. When the chanting finished, she strolled to the stage. “Welcome to the Future of Era Forum,” she said, mixing her refined university accent with the colloquial accent of her original village. “I am Erduktɛr, and as you can probably hear, I am from Yimuaidha. I’ve been asked to chair this forum today. As is the city’s custom, I do not live in this district; that way the city isn’t influencing the election by choosing the chairs of the forums. If you

want to know who is in your district, we have a book up here listing everyone eligible to vote and be voted for and we encourage you to come up here and look at it during or after the forum. You can also go to the City Hall and request a chance to look at it at any time before the election next weekend. As you know, our elections occur without nominating or campaigning. Each voter is encouraged to decide by him or herself who to vote for. It has been found that when the choices of who to vote for are reduced to two or three the result is a powerful desire to influence the voters by making exaggerated promises or inappropriate attacks on the other candidates. Campaigns of that sort get expensive and candidates take what essentially amounts to a bribe in order to further their campaigns. If you are aware of anyone who is campaigning for the office of representative, or is advocating for someone else to be voted for, you should inform the City Hall immediately. They will investigate such claims, and if they find any truth to them, the people electioneering will be disqualified from voting and being voted for.

"We can now turn to the forum itself. There are microphones along the street in three different locations. Please walk up to the microphone nearest to you, form a line, and we will call on people in their order. I see there's already someone at microphone number two. Please, what is your comment."

Erduktɛr could see that Jɛrgu, who was sitting in the front row, was concerned because he knew the man was a troublemaker. Erduktɛr looked at the man, and he looked back at her. "I was wondering whether you were interested in marrying me."

Erduktɛr hadn't expected a comment like that, which created some laughter in the crowd. "You look handsome enough, but your clothes are pretty dirty, so I suspect you stink pretty badly. No."

“Well, I clean up pretty good.”

“Then clean up first. You all know the old line ‘girl, I’ll grab you by the hair and marry you; sir, and I’ll agree, and we’ll have many sons.’ Well, do you know how it goes now? ‘Girl I’ll grab you by the hair and marry you; sir, and if you grab me by the hair, I’ll grab you by the balls and refuse.”

It was bawdy by Eryan standards, but half the audience erupted in laughter. The other half was surprised and insulted. “Now that we’ve got that matter out of the way, sir, do you have a real question for the forum?”

The man retreated from the microphone, unhappy, and Erduktɛr nodded to the woman at microphone number one. “Many of us are very concerned that there isn’t enough bus service in this neighborhood,” she said. “We need a bus that runs the length of Overtown Avenue straight to Miller Motors and another one that runs down the avenue and straight to Mɛddoakwes. Many of us work in both places and we really need better transportation.”

“Thank you,” replied Erduktɛr. “My colleague here is writing everything down. That one will go first to the City Council, but since the buses to Mɛddoakwés are subsidized by the province, that one will also go to the representatives of the city to the provincial assembly, once they are elected. The bus service has improved enormously in the last year, thanks to the government subsidies, but everyone always wants more buses.”

She pointed to the man at microphone three, way down at the bottom of the avenue. “Many of us are very concerned that so much of our tax money goes to supporting the villages. We came here to escape the poverty of our villages. Now we have

to pay taxes to help make them better. If people really want to get ahead, all they have to do is come to Mɛlwika, or one of the other big cities."

There was murmuring in the crowd; clearly, many people agreed with the comment. "I understand your sentiment," replied Erduktɛr. "But I have a cousin here who helped my cousin back in Yimuaidha to get a truck. Over the last few years, my village has become much more prosperous and cleaner. It's become a pleasant place to live, thanks to the Third Developmental Priority, which is to spread prosperity to the entire realm. Because of the buses, more and more people are commuting to work in the bigger towns. There's no reason for the cities to become larger and more impersonal. It's a development priority to make it easier for people to live in smaller places where they are surrounded by their friends and relatives, and they have a commitment to their community. Most people in the kingdom seem to agree that this developmental priority is important and valuable for the future of all of us. But, of course, we will write down your comment and pass it on to the City Council. No doubt there are other people making similar comments, and they will be counted up to get a sense of how strong that particular sentiment is. Now, to the man at microphone number two."

"I am a hunter and I'm very concerned that the developmental priorities about the environment are not being properly enforced. There are still areas in the hills that have been deforested completely and there is gullying there. There are also people hunting without licenses and this is causing the population of game to steadily decrease. All of this is a violation of the Seventh Development Priority to protect nature and the environment. It's really no longer possible to make a living here as a hunter. I'd like my son to be able to take up the profession, which is exciting and noble."

"Thank you. This is a serious issue and one that the palace is concerned about, but still needs to do more about. The woman at microphone number three."

"I am concerned that the women who are providing daycare in the neighborhood aren't supported enough. I have one in my home and I never have enough money to do all the tasks that the regulations require. In this neighborhood, many people don't have the money to pay their share of the daycare bill. But sometimes they absolutely have to have daycare or they have to leave their small children unattended at home. Something needs to be done about this."

"Such as, raising the subsidy from the city?" asked Erduktɛr.

"Yes, something like that."

"This also sounds like something the *Mɛlwika Nuɛs* should look into, as it relates to the Third Developmental Priority," said Erduktɛr. She nodded to the man at microphone number one.

"I want to start a plumbing business, but I can't get the seed money for it. Everybody here in Overtown wants indoor plumbing and if we all get it, this place won't stink anywhere nearly as much as it does now! But to start a plumbing business I need a truck and a place to operate from. And I don't know how to handle the taxes and rules. This relates to the Sixth Priority about small businesses, doesn't it?"

"It does, and there are people in City Hall who can help you with things like that," replied Erduktɛr, seeing that Jɛrgu was about to jump up and answer that question. "One of my cousin's friends started a plumbing business in his village, and all he had was a pushcart! He operated out of his house. But as I understand it, the City Hall and the Chamber of Commerce both offer courses on how to handle taxes, and the Chamber of

Commerce even provides a simple service to help people with their taxes. The woman at microphone number two please."

"Education is the first developmental priority, but I don't know how to read and write. I need help with that. We also don't have a woman's gabruli here in this neighborhood, and we really could use one! I have to take my laundry all the way across town to the nearest gabruli to do it there."

"I am sure the city gabruli headquarters would like to open one here as well, so if there are any women who want to help with that, please contact me and I'll put them in touch with the headquarters. Many gabrulis sponsor reading classes, and I'm sure there are classes in the elementary school here at night. Of course, if you work, it's very hard to get to them, but that becomes a matter of how you arrange your life. Now, the man at microphone three, please."

"We live in the biggest and most prosperous city in the world, yet there is still poverty here. This neighborhood in particular has many people who struggle very hard to make a living. We need help!"

Erduktɛr nodded. "I used to live here; I know. There is no easy solution to poverty. Every society that's ever existed has had some. Many people say the solution is a spiritual one, and not something the government can solve itself. By spiritual, I don't just mean that people must work harder and have hope, however. I also mean that people who are not in poverty must work harder to help others get out of poverty. Accompaniment is part of the solution as well. But your comment will go to the City Council and to the elected representatives for their consideration. I hope that's helpful."

“So do I,” replied the man and he walked away from the microphone. Erduktɛr nodded to the woman at microphone number one.

“I think there’s a lot more we can do for ourselves here in Overtown,” she said. “I’ve been trying to organize a gabruli here on Overtown Avenue and a group of women is ready to work for it. We’ve already been in touch with the gabruli headquarters in the city and I think we can rent a space to get started in a few months. Furthermore, Overtown has quite a few businesses and they really should organize a neighborhood business association to help people like this man who wants to become a plumber. We don’t need to look to City Hall all the time for solutions. Many of the solutions are right here in our own neighborhood.”

That brought applause from quite a few people. Erduktɛr could hear it echoing out of the open windows as well. “Thank you for that encouraging remark. Every neighborhood should have a business association and every neighborhood should have a gabruli. You have an elementary school; does it have a parent teachers association? It should. And are there evening classes held at the elementary school? The university often offers them. The Bahá'ís often offer them, too. The temple offers them as well. These services should be available in Overtown.” She pointed to a man at microphone number three who had just stepped up to it and who looked excited.

“You are quite right about that, Erduktɛr,” he replied. “The Bahá'ís have requested assistance to establish a Bahá'í center in the neighborhood, and once we have that, we plan to provide all kinds of literacy classes. They’ll be free, of course. And your point about a Parent-Teacher Association is a very important one. They are part of the educational priorities, and several people I know have been trying to establish one.

There's already one for the high school that covers this area and it has organized quite a few evening classes for parents."

Jɛrgu had now walked to microphone one, so she recognized him. "Quite a few of us have been helping this neighborhood improve over the last few years, and I hope the results are clear to everyone. The city wants to establish committees for every neighborhood, but so far we don't have enough volunteers in this neighborhood to establish them all. We've heard about the need for a Parent-Teacher Association and a business association and a gabruli, which would establish themselves, but we also need a Recreation Committee to look at recreation services for children and youth and an Adult Education Committee to help provide classes for adults at convenient times. We're trying to find office space where doctors, lawyers, and other professionals can get established so that people don't have to walk or take the bus to get those services. There's quite a lot that can be done to improve Overtown and I hope more people can get involved to do it."

Erduktɛr nodded. "That's the real future of this world; groups of people coming together and serving each other for the common good. When we lived in villages, we did this informally, but we now live in big cities and here it has to be done more systematically. It's very encouraging to hear all the plans that people are making here in Overtown. Could we possibly focus much of our remaining time on things we can do here in the Overtown neighborhood?"

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The next morning, the *Mɛlwika Nuɛs* covered all twelve of the future forums in a detailed multi-page article.

“They must have been up all night writing, editing, typesetting, and printing this article,” exclaimed Chris over breakfast.

“It’s amazing journalism,” agreed Thornton. “And it’s a relief that for once, I did not have to lead a team somewhere--like to the Géndonɛ and Ghéslonɛ--to teach them the electoral system!”

“Dɛkané was an excellent chair of the meeting we attended,” said Liz. “She didn’t have to do much to keep everyone focused on the Seven Developmental Priorities, either. The seven have really permeated discourse over the last month and people had a lot to say about them.”

“They were the focus in the meeting I chaired, too,” agreed Lébé. “There was still the occasional ‘we need to focus on the needs of Mɛlwika and ignore everyone else’ but that was pretty rare.”

“Did you encounter any resistance from men to your leadership?” asked Chris.

Lébé shook her head. “No, not really. I think there was some initial surprise, but when it was explained that the meeting chair had to come from outside the electoral district and that the city had decided that this year, all the chairs would be women, it was fine. I just hope the experience will lead to greater open mindedness about voting for women.”

“Among the women as well as the men,” agreed Liz. “Eryan women aren’t used to voting for women, either.”

“The fact that Mɛlwika had just women chairs was broadcast on the radio last night and will be mentioned in all the papers,” said Lua. “So I think it will have an impact. People were very friendly to me when I chaired, and several people--men and

women--came up to me afterward and thanked me. The reporter covering that neighborhood meeting even interviewed me afterward."

"Yes, it's in the paper!" said Thornton. He pointed to a page he was reading, then handed it to Lua to read for herself.

"This is nicely done," she said a minute later. "He was a bit uncertain what to ask me."

"This is my favorite section right here," said Chris, pointing to the page he was reading. "It's a selection of voters' comments arranged topically. Over twenty voters expressed the desire for more bus service, for example."

"With the crown subsidy, there seem to be buses running everywhere all the time!" said Liz.

"Well, people want more," replied Chris. "There is a bus from Mɛlwika to Mɛddoakwés every ten minutes during the day, 15 minutes in the evening, and every half an hour all night! Even smaller destinations like Yimuaidha and Arjdhuna have service either every 15 minutes or every half an hour."

"People can now live here and work almost anywhere, or live almost anywhere and work here," said Thornton. "That has worked out very, very well. But it hasn't stopped Mɛlwika's growth. That's the surprising thing."

"I think it has slowed it, and that may be the best we can expect," replied Chris. "Housing prices are still climbing, but more slowly. Housing prices in the villages up to 40 kilometers away have been going up, and villages have indeed been cleaning themselves up. The cheap busing policy has been very successful that way, and it will shape development in the future."

“What has it done to demand for cars and trucks?” asked Thornton.

Chris nodded. “It appears to have slowed demand for cars. People feel less need for them. But demand for trucks has continued to grow, probably because more small businesses in villages can now afford them. And that’s good.”

“What are the comments about housing,” asked Liz, glancing over Chris’s shoulder at the paper.

“People want more grants and loans to install indoor plumbing, furnaces, gas, electricity, even a telephone,” said Chris, pointing to the section about housing. “There are complaints about our modular housing--that it’s ugly, which is true--and praise that it is available. Thornton and Lébé, did you see the section about education? A lot of people are pushing for raising the age for compulsory education to 16!”

“We can’t enforce the current compulsory age of 12,” replied Lébé. She shook her head. “I don’t know why it’s so difficult. Ten percent of the elementary school children are still not in school.”

“Some old ideas die very slowly,” replied Liz. “The fact that we have 90% literacy in the young generation is pretty amazing. Every year, the percentage of 6 year olds starting first grade is going up.”

“And some of those kids will learn later,” added Chris. “There are even comments here about expanding the génadɛmas. That pleases me. People are beginning to understand the importance of education.”

“What about the environment?” asked Thornton, looking at the section Chris was holding.

Chris read it quickly. “It’s more mixed. Some businessmen are complaining about pollution rules, but there are also complaints about air pollution.”

“And comments about deforesting the northern hills,” said Liz, pointing to one comment.

“That is still happening,” admitted Thornton. “It's the worst on the western shore and the *Rudhisér Yoros* has been publishing articles about it. I wonder what the comments will be from the meetings in Ora and Pértatranisér will be.”

“And the polling,” added Lébé. “I’m glad that we are now getting polls on various subjects.”

“Even so, I’d rather visit the villages and see what’s happening in them by myself,” said Liz. “The gabrulɛs are good places to get a sense how rural life is improving. The women can tell you whether they have running water and flush toilets, electricity, and gas.”

“The statistics are trending in the right direction,” said Chris.

“What is the average family income now?” asked Thornton.

“Thirty-nine hundred,” replied Chris. “And when we arrived, it was 420 per year, so it has increased over nine fold. Of course, inflation accounts for almost half of that; let’s say income is now five times higher than it was.”

“But when we arrived, almost all of that ‘income’ was food grown for your own family. Almost none of it was actual cash,” said Behruz. “A family may spend 800 dhanay a year on food now, but it’s mostly cash. They don’t raise their own. And they have 3,000 surplus dhanay now for housing, clothes, etc.”

“So, how do we compare to Earth?” asked Lébé.

Chris thought about that for a moment. “It depends on where on Earth you are talking about. The United States had its automobile revolution in the 1920s and 1930s; in Europe it occurred mostly after World War II. That’s also roughly when the average population got electricity and running water in those places. Telephone service spread more slowly. That’s about where we are, now. But we have higher high school completion rates and college graduation rates than advanced societies at that time. We have to because we have a much smaller population, so higher economic productivity requires more education. And the aliens have given us computers and cell phones, no doubt so they can study us better. That has pushed up our economic productivity as well.”

“And let’s remember that economic productivity is not everything,” added Liz. “It’s half of one developmental priority. The important development is unlocking human potential and building a peaceful, just, unified society. And I see evidence of that in the forum comments. People are asking how to bring neighbors together better. They’re asking for more time to spend with their families. They’re mentioning the need to establish more clubs and sports leagues. They’re commenting about the spiritual education of their children.” She pointed to one comment. “I like this one: ‘we need to learn how to help each other more.’ Isn’t that something? That would never have been said at one of these town meetings, ten years ago!”

“True, people were complaining about litter and holes in the streets and unemployed men hanging around, drinking,” said Chris.

“I think our trip to Mɛdhpéla last weekend was very telling,” said Thornton. “At most, ten percent of the Kwolonɛ tribe is Bahá'í, and lots of the Bahá'ís are not very

deepened. Literacy is still a challenge down there. But Bahá'í values are clearly spreading in Kwolonɛ culture."

"Yes, absolutely!" agreed Liz. "This is how Era will become a Bahá'í world. The society-building power of the teachings is beginning to become manifest, and it attracts people, whether they have faith in Bahá'u'lláh or not."

"Faith is a funny thing," agreed Behruz. "Some people have it and some don't. It's very hard to give it to people or to help them change their faith. They have to do it themselves. But they can accept Bahá'í teachings and culture without accepting Bahá'u'lláh. And that's what is happening."

"We haven't hit a max by any means, but I agree; we're growing in a different sort of way, now," said Liz. "I need to talk to Jordan and the Central Spiritual Assembly about this. We may need a different strategy. And the messages of the Universal House of Justice hint at the strategy we must adopt, because they are writing to Bahá'í communities that encompass a similar fraction of the total population."

"That's true," said Chris. "There's still a month before the central Bahá'í convention." He sighed. "Meanwhile, I'm looking forward to a week of commentaries about the town and neighborhood meetings, and the results of the kingdom-wide elections next weekend. That will tell us about the direction society at large is moving."

535.

Dedication

mid Bolérɛnménu early April 26/644

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen Tɛrskua look so good,” said Liz as she and Chris exited Route 1 and drove into the village.

Chris nodded. “It’s been over two years since the fire and they’ve recovered very well. With the lord off their back, the council has really pulled together and done an exemplary job of managing the township.”

“Now they have Soru’s new school,” added Liz. “That’s a big accomplishment as well.”

“It helps that Kanawé is from Tɛrskua,” commented Chris. “But even more important, because Soru taught the whole family the Faith, they helped to organize this village and now are some of the leading citizens.”

“I don’t know what I would do without Mɛlitané to run the gabruli,” added Liz. “And you send a huge number of construction contracts to Moléstu.”

“Because he’s honest, talented, and consultative. He was all those things before he became a Bahá'í, but the Faith reinforced them. As a result of the Dénugénésɛ family, Tɛrskua is the largest traditional village in the entire area. Someday it might even get bigger than ɛjnopéla.”

Liz looked at him, surprised. “That’s a pretty ambitious prediction!”

“What percentage of Tɛrskua is Bahá'í?”

“Certainly a quarter, maybe a third of the population.”

“That might do it right there, “responded Chris. “It’s amazing how far consultation and the Bahá'í economic principles will take you.”

“And I suppose the Bahá'í principles have something to do with why the school is sited here,” added Liz.

“Do you mean the traditional stigma against handicapped people? I think that’s true. Soru had a lot of trouble with people in Mɛddoakwés. I’m sure there are superstitious people here, too, but perhaps the problem is more manageable.”

Liz nodded. “I hope so.”

They drove diagonally down the steep slope to the lower end of the village and turned right, heading west. After they passed the gabruli on the right and Dénugénésɛ construction on the left and a few related businesses, they came to the school. It was impressively large, with about 20 classrooms of various sizes and a large area of administrative offices. Up the hill from the classrooms were a series of dormitories built into the slope that could accommodate up to 100 children. To the west of the buildings there was a large enclosed play area that included a soccer field and a basketball court for older kids. All of the pathways were wide and they sloped gradually so that wheelchairs could be pushed on them easily.

Gathered on the soccer field were as many as a thousand people, with more streaming in all the time. Across the street next to the businesses was a field where people were parking their cars. Chris and Liz put their car there and slowly walked across the street to the school. Soru saw them coming and hurried over to greet them. “Welcome! Thank you so much for coming!” he said.

“We wouldn’t miss this for the world,” replied Liz. “It’s a huge day for this world.”

“It certainly is,” agreed Soru. “Today the blind, deaf, and severely handicapped children get a worthy institution to support them.”

“Do we know whether there is money to bus the kids here from across the eastern shore?” asked Chris.

“Not yet. That will be up to the assembly when it meets in a few months. But we have long had enough money to bus kids from all over the western shore to Pértatranisér. That’s been established for several years and I don’t see any reason why the same can’t be arranged for the eastern shore. The funding for this facility came through quite well, thanks for the support of your foundation and Moléstu’s very careful and frugal construction. We have half the money we need to bus kids here from as far north as Bɛllɛdha, as far south as ɛndraidha, and as far east as Arjdhuna. I’m confident we’ll get the rest.”

“And what about the third facility in Tripola?” asked Liz.

Let’s not get ahead of ourselves! There’s good support for it as long as the economy stays strong. When the South Shore facility is built, we’ll be able to take care of over 500 children and house 300 of them. That should represent the bulk of the blind and deaf children, and some of the severely handicapped. Of course, there’s always more if you broaden the definition.”

“Even so, this is a huge accomplishment,” said Liz.

“Who do you have to run the Pértatranisér facility?” asked Chris.

“Estoiluku! Do you remember him? He’s the blind kid you met down in Lɛwéspadɛma. He’s 23 and has been my assistant for the last year, since he finished his kwétɛryɛri. He’ll need a lot of help, but your grandson in law, Andranu, is stopping by every other afternoon and has to cosign any contracts.”

Just then a limousine pulled up. Out stepped Queen Estoibidhé, Duke Kandékwɛs, Prince Mégékwɛs, and Princess Ninlilé. They all hurried over to greet the royals. “What an incredibly beautiful school!” said the Queen. “I had no idea it was so nice! I must have a tour after the ceremony!”

“Thank you, Your Majesty. Moléstu did an absolutely incredible job of building something that was both beautiful and comfortable. We can accommodate 100 day students and 100 boarding students, for a total of 200. It requires a staff of 30 because some of the children require considerable assistance to stay healthy and learn.”

“And how well can they learn?” asked Duke Kandékwɛs.

“All human beings can learn,” replied Soru. “Some learn some things quickly and other things slowly. Children who are blind can have an incredible ability to hear things and amazing memory. Children who are deaf can be taught elaborate sign language and to read people’s lips. And children with mental limitations can often perform some complicated tasks that can earn them a living, so that they are not a burden on society and have a sense of worth. Our goal here is to help every child make a contribution to its own life and to advance our civilization.”

“Really?” said the Duke, impressed. “Let’s go in. We’re almost late.”

Chris and Liz dropped back to follow the royal party into the event. As they passed the Prince, he said, “What did you think about the election two weeks ago?”

“We were very pleased,” replied Chris. “There was a strong focus on the developmental priorities in the future forums. People appear to have really embraced them, and that gives the kingdom a unity moving forward, which is very encouraging.”

“And let’s not forget the election of women!” added Liz. “In Mɛlwika 13 of the delegates elected were women!”

“That was very impressive,” said Ninlilé. “I gather all of your future forms were chaired by women.”

Liz nodded. “Yes, exactly. None of the women who chaired were elected delegates from those particular neighborhoods because they didn’t reside in them. However, their names were mentioned in the newspaper as having chaired future forums in other neighborhoods and as a result, eight of them were elected delegate in their own neighborhoods. Most of them have never been delegates before, also.”

“That was an excellent strategy,” said Mégékwɛs. “Overall, ten percent of the delegates who were elected throughout the kingdom were women. Her Majesty was extremely pleased to see that.”

“That’s part of the fifth developmental priority. We moved it forward significantly,” agreed Liz.

They all entered the field and stepped up onto the platform. The crowd fell silent and went down on their knees in respect for the queen. She beckoned them to rise, and she sat in the large chair that had been placed on the stage for her. The Tɛrskua town council came up onto the stage as well and greeted the royal family, followed by a local group of chanters. Once the greetings were over, Soru gestured to the chanters to step forward and chant the sacred words of Widumaj. When they finished, Moléstu, the chair

of the Township Council, rose and walked to the microphone. He carried with him notes and looked a bit nervous. “Good afternoon to all of you and welcome to this dedication ceremony. The village and township of Tɛrskua is immensely honored to be the new home for this facility for blind, deaf, and mentally challenged children. And on this day there can be no greater honor than to welcome her Majesty Queen Estobidhé, her husband, Duke Kandékwɛs, Prince Mégékwɛs, and Princess Ninlilé. The entire population of Tɛrskua welcomes you today and thanks you for coming to our humble village.

“We are also very pleased to see among us Count Kristobéru and Lady Lizé, who have been steadfast and generous friends of Tɛrskua. Much of our progress over the last 25 years can be traced back to them and their patience, loving support, and investment in this place. That investment has now resulted in Tɛrskua becoming the home of one of the kingdom’s most important new institutions. We honor our dear brother Soru for his dedication to these children and pledge our eternal support to his endeavor. Allow me to introduce Soru Dénujénésɛ.”

Soru walked up to the microphone, shook hands with Moléstu and gave him a hug. He turned to the microphone. “Thank you, Molestu. My wife and I are delighted to be moving permanently to Tɛrskua, which we have visited many times over the last 24 years. This is a remarkable village and we chose it for the new school not just because of its geographical position in Arjakwés Province, but because of its accepting attitude towards our children. When we opened our first school in Mɛddoakwés we encountered many people with a prejudice against children with various handicaps. They thought that perhaps the children were possessed by demons or had perhaps done something evil that

caused their handicap. But Tɛrskua was far more open to us. Fewer people held such prejudicial views. Our children are just ordinary children who happen to suffer from some kind of handicap; perhaps they had a disease as a young child which deprived them of some or all of their eyesight or hearing, or perhaps they were born with a birth defect that limited their ability to speak, or relate to others. But all of them are human beings like the rest of us and they deserve the fair and loving treatment that any human being deserves. We are immensely grateful to Her Majesty for understanding this and supporting our school generously. We're also immensely grateful to the Mennea family and their foundation, which has consistently supported our school since the very beginning. In fact, they supported this work even before the school began; they encouraged me to start teaching children with disabilities before we even thought of creating a school for them.

"Today is a great day for the development of our civilization on this world, for now we make a major advance to supporting the more helpless members of our community. This is both an important support for the first developmental priority—education--and the fifth, the advancement of minorities, for these children are a precious minority. On their behalf, I cannot thank all of you enough. You have opened your hearts to us, and we will be eternally grateful for that." Soru's voice broke a bit as he closed his remarks. Tears streamed down his face, and Moléstu patted him on the back as he returned to the microphone.

Moléstu turned to the royal family. "And now we have the great privilege of hearing from Her Majesty, Queen Estoibidhé. Please welcome her."

The crowd broke out into powerful applause as the Queen stepped up to the microphone. She smiled and nodded to the crowd in thanks for their welcome. She let the applause die down naturally, and then began to speak.

"I am delighted to be following two remarkable developments today," she began. "The first is this community, this village. Once upon a time it consisted of a few hundred small mud brick houses of farmers, scratching out a living on the arid plain between here and the river. They were poor and often were hungry. They struggled to support their families and live a reasonably comfortable life. Today I see one of the most prosperous and successful villages in this world. It is surrounded by thousands of agris of beautiful irrigated green farmland, tilled by farmers who live far more comfortably than they did in the past, farmers with electrified houses and running water. I see a school to educate their children and a grange that helps everyone to advance. I see a large construction company with amazing facilities that brings prosperity to this village and to many of the villages in the area. I see one of the strongest gabrulis in the kingdom where the women of Tɛrskua come together to socialize and work, to serve their families. And I see a strong, unified, vigorous, and effective Township Council, perhaps the most effective locally elected governing body in the entire kingdom.

"And now I see the second wondrous development, the facility we have all come to celebrate today: the Eastern Shore School for Blind, Deaf, and Handicapped Children. It has been a long and challenging struggle for Soru to build this facility. He started by serving a few scattered children, then was able to open a larger facility in Mɛddoakwés, then a well-developed and modern facility in Pértatranisér for the entire Western Shore. Now he opens a new flagship facility for the children of the Eastern Shore here in

Tɛrskua. And soon a third facility will open in Tripola to serve the South Shore and many of the tribes to the east of it.

"Supporting the school and serving these children is one of the great delights of my life. It is an achievement that everyone in the kingdom can be proud of, for we have learned that even the least of us deserve love and a supportive environment to grow. Even the least among us can make a contribution to the kingdom. Even the least of us can grow to have a happy and productive adult life.

"These are the lessons that we have been learning over the last 25 years. Today, we achieve this great milestone in this magnificent school. My congratulations to Soru, his wife Kanawé, his staff, and to all of the children in the past, present, and future who will benefit from this effort. Thank you."

The crowd erupted in applause. Chris and Liz were a bit surprised by the intensity of the reaction and looked at the faces of the thousand or so people gathered there. "Do you think they understand?" asked Chris.

Liz nodded. "I think they do. At least a little. It takes a long time to overcome prejudices against people with limited abilities. It will be many years before the handicapped achieve close to full acceptance in this society. But today, they have made a very important step forward towards that acceptance."

Chris nodded. "This may be one of the greatest achievements we've been able to bring about. One of the things that makes it possible is an accumulation of wealth. Without that, it'll been almost impossible to train the people to provide the services."

Liz nodded. "But let's not forget the spiritual side, my dear. The school represents a fundamental change in the understanding of the nature of human beings here on Era.

That’s a momentous accomplishment and it would’ve been impossible without Bahá'u'lláh.”

Chris nodded. “I couldn’t agree with you more.”

535.

Back to the Géndonɛ

nid Dhébɛlménu /early May, 26/644

Driving from Mɛlwika to Géndonatroba was always a tricky thing. Thornton and Chris left home shortly after the eclipse ended, as the sun was approaching the western horizon. Within an hour, as they approached Gordha on Route 1, the sky finally achieved complete blackness and all the stars came out in their full glory. They drove up Gordhamonta and down the other side, then followed Route 1 up and up as it climbed the Spine to Kostakhéma and its pass through Éra's high peaks, which were barely visible as snowy silhouettes against the star-spangled firmament. Kostakhéma was still encased by almost a meter of snow and Route 1 had icy spots Thornton had to traverse carefully. He also watched his 80 year old father carefully; the thin air at 3,000 meters was a challenge for him.

From there, the road turned downward. In another hour, as the sky was brightening with dawn, they turned left onto Route 96. Three and a half hours after leaving Mɛlwika, as their bodies sensed that it was 9:30 p.m., they pulled into Gendonatroba. The local time: 7:30 a.m. the same day they had left home.

It was a beautiful chilly morning at the village's 2,000 meter elevation on Era's equator. Spring warmth was just arriving; soon it would be time to take advantage of the area's short growing season. At the northern edge of the village they crossed over a brand new concrete-lined canal that would handle large volumes of water when the hydroelectric turbines were switched on; that way, the flood would avoid the village.

Next to the canal they saw an area that had been cleared of trees and prepared for construction. A great pile of logs was building on its edge, which was being explored by ɛndrokodu, a Géndonɛ who worked for the Royal Forest Service. They stopped to greet him. “Hail, ɛndrokordu!” exclaimed Thornton, as they got out and walked over. Chris took his time; the air was a bit thin for him.

“Hail, Dhoru!” replied ɛndrokordu. He shook hands with both arrivals. “I just got here a few minutes ago and had to stop at the site of the future gas plant, assuming the Géndonɛ agree to build it, that is.”

“It looks like they’ve started to stockpile wood to run the plant,” said Chris. He looked closely at the enormous logs. “These are huge; it must have been very hard to get the logs here. What are they, chestnut?”

“These are here.” ɛndrokordu pointed to several. “Over here are oak, beech, elm, maple . . . everything. This area has an incredible broadleaf forest, thanks to the relatively mild weather and the high rainfall. It extends north and south about 30 kilometers and uphill by 500 meters, then is replaced by firs, which are better adapted to colder weather.”

“Like the forest at Moruagras,” said Chris, nodding. “You know, chestnut is a prized wood for construction and furniture making. They should sell this rather than burning it up for gas.”

“They don’t have the contacts.”

“I can arrange it, I have the contacts. That’s why I came along. Is there a lot of chestnut here?”

“I’d say a quarter of the forest around here is chestnut. The nuts are a major source of food for us because wheat doesn’t grow so well here, though now we’re growing potatoes instead and we’re importing flour to make bread. Chestnuts are a major food source for our pigs, too. I think we have to be careful cutting down our forests, which is why I came here.”

“Something else to talk to Lord ɛjnokordu about,” commented Thornton. “We had better get to the village hall.”

Thornton and Chris got back into their car and followed ɛndrokordu to the center of the village, where a new village hall was complete. It was a magnificent wooden structure; the Géndonɛ were expert builders, and now they had a sawmill to cut the wood faster. People were still assembling; a dozen of the village’s leading elders and managers had been invited. They saw Andamékwu heading for the door and waved to him. He walked over to Thornton and Chris. “Allah-u-Abha,” he exclaimed to them.

“Allah-u-Abha,” replied Chris. ‘It’s good to see you again.”

“Yes; we saw each other at the central Bahá'í convention just a week ago! That was quite a gathering.”

“Good goals were set,” said Thornton. “The convention will give them energy.”

“People here aren’t so happy that the province is getting a Regional Council because we’d rather have one just for the Géndonɛ. There are more Ghéslonɛ Bahá'ís and we are afraid they’ll dominate it.”

"Give it a chance," replied Chris. "The Géndonɛ only have two local spiritual assemblies; the Ghéslonɛ have three. Your numbers aren't that much lower, right?; 35 Bahá'ís, versus about 50? A council to coordinate things here should prove helpful."

"Well, I hope so. The Ghéslonɛ are money-grabbers; all they worry about is being paid, and paid well. We had better get inside."

Thornton and Chris followed Andamékwu in silence, as they were uncomfortable with his broad generalizations about the Ghéslonɛ. ɛndrokordu had already gone in and was talking to Lord ɛjnokordu; General Gɛlnébɛlu was there as well, and just then Lord Magékɛru of the Kaitɛrɛ tribe entered. He walked to the gathering up front as well; Lord ɛjnokordu frowned at him as if he was unhappy the Kaitɛrɛ leader had come. But he invited everyone to finish grabbing cups of coffee—the Géndonɛ had fallen in love with the drink just in the last year—and to sit.

"Thank you to everyone for coming this morning," began ɛjnokordu. "A special welcome to our guests who come from afar; General Gɛlnébɛlu, Lord Dhoru, Count Kristobéru, Lord Magékɛru, and our good friend and fellow tribesman, ɛndrokordu the forester. Allow me to begin with a few announcements. The dam upstream was finished just before the winter snows set in and it has stored a considerable amount of water for peak hydroelectric production. Over the winter, the hydroelectric pipeline was painstakingly welded together along ledges and down cliffs and last week reached the first hydroelectric turbine station 200 meters below the top of the cliff. Yesterday we ran water through the diversion canal around the village and through the pipeline, though without running the generators, and it worked well. There were a few minor adjustments

necessary and those should be completed this afternoon. The electric line connecting us to Moruagras and the power lines there was completed a few months ago as well. We propose to generate the first power on our system this evening and we hope our guests can stay for that momentous time.

"Regarding plans for Géndonatroba to become a major producer of gas from our forest, Andamékwu has been reviewing the budget and has many concerns about how much we will be paid for the gas, and in turn how much we can pay the men who will cut and transport the trees and run the plant. We have plenty of time to discuss this matter because it will be at least two years before the gas plant can be built and connected to the pipeline system. But I think everyone will agree that we want to resolve the issues as soon as we can, since the construction season up here is shorter than it is in other places. "Finally, regarding the construction of Routes 97 and 99, connecting Géndonatroba and Gérpola across the mountains to the land of the Kaitɛrɛ: we are ready to start construction of them in the lower hills close to the two villages, but do not yet grant a permit for the work that will actually cross the Spine Mountains. We do not have an assurance that the roads won't lead to poachers and others coming onto our lands and exploiting our resources, particularly our game. But that is a later matter to discuss; first, we will hear from Andamékwu."

"Thank you, Lord," replied Andamékwu, who was not only the chair of the local Spiritual Assembly in Géndonatroba, but the schoolmaster and the informal tribal development officer. "I reviewed the entire budget for the blue water gas plant in detail and asked a lot of questions of Géndukordu, the Ghéslonɛ development officer. Together,

asking each other questions, we figured out a lot about the plant that raises questions that both of us now must ask of the World Gas Company.

"We have no objections about the construction costs because we don't have the experience to understand the details. But we do have many questions about the operating costs, which are the main expenses that set the cost of the gas. There is a consistent assumption that our labor is worth less than the labor in Arjakwés province. Workers there earn 5,000 dhanay per year, or 1.5 dhanay per hour. The labor costs here are set at 2,500 dhanay per year, or half that! That's not fair to us and we want fair pay for our people. That includes the people working on the hydroelectric project, who are also getting 2,500. Our demand is very simple: we want a substantial raise, to 5,000."

There was silence in the room. Thornton looked around at the Géndonɛ men, who were stone faced in their determination. General Gɛlnébɛlu was shocked; Magékɛru had no idea what was coming and was surprised. Thornton didn't know what to say in response. He looked at Lord ɛjnokordu, who stared back at him in return. Then they both turned to Chris, who was formulating a response.

"How much did this beautiful tribal hall cost to build?" Chris finally asked. The Lord had not expected that question and frowned. He wasn't sure. "Many worked as volunteers, and some who needed the money were paid. It took 100 of us working all winter to complete it."

Chris looked at the detailed carving and the beautiful glass windows. "About a quarter million dhanay, if you had to pay people 5,000 per year. Because no one would work as volunteers when a salary like that is available. That would be about half the tribe's total annual tax revenue, but 2/3 would go to the palace, and if you were a

high-income village, you wouldn't get any of the revenue sharing available to you now. So you'd have to borrow most of that amount and pay interest on it.

"And consider the problems that would arise if 100 of the tribe's 450 men were earning 5,000 per year. The other 350 would be jealous and would want the high-paying jobs. They might not want to continue as animal herders, farmers, or hunters, but they wouldn't have an alternative. And their friends who were earning 5,000 would be buying trucks, putting glass in their windows, wearing nicer clothes . . . walking in here, we heard someone comment about how greedy the Ghéslonɛ are. That's because the people working the hydroelectric plant or adding more pipeline to it down the escarpment are paid 2,500 when the average family is earning maybe 2,000 at most."

"So, are you saying we aren't worth the money?"

"No, I'm saying that wages have a lot to do with local conditions and they have to increase gradually. There are Ghéslonɛ earning 2,500 per year or even more who aren't working for the hydro plant because they're running stores or providing services that would not be possible without the men with the higher salaries. Everyone benefits to some extent, but it takes time. The farmers have a little bit more money and their grange can buy more tractors and fertilizer or provide more literacy classes. You can't simply double the income of a quarter of the workers overnight. But if the wages go up ten or fifteen percent per year, everyone benefits and neighbors have less tension with each other."

"In Mɛlwika, it costs a lot more just to live," added Thornton.

“But some costs are higher here, remember,” responded Andamékwu. “It’s expensive to truck in items. The pipelines and wires to carry our energy to the rest of the world are quite long.”

“But you don’t pay for the pipelines and wires; everyone else does,” replied Thornton. “The gas and electric companies are arranging some government grants to complete the wires and pipelines, and they are raising the cost of the energy to the consumers as well.”

“And the cost of trucking isn’t that much,” added Chris. “The bigger cost is the fact that so few items are trucked in. I’m sure you have noticed that some things are cheaper in Moruagas than here, and even cheaper down in Réjéiwika, even though it isn’t that far away. My suggestion is to aim for 2,750 dhanay next year and 3,000 the year after. You may need to wait a while after that so that the salaries of everyone else in the village catches up. I know how much you prize tribal solidarity. Raising the salaries too quickly will damage solidarity.”

“It’s asking the army a lot to pay local people 2,750 dhanay per year to work on Routes 97 and 99,” exclaimed Gɛlnébɛlu. He looked around at the stares he received in reply. “But we can budget it.”

“I know dirt roads have already been cleared part way up the mountain slopes,” exclaimed ɛndrokordu. “But where dirt roads will be placed, and where the paved roads will go, need to be planned carefully. There are areas near the two villages where more farm and pastureland may be needed. Those are areas to choose for complete clearing. Farther up, however, the timber needs to be cut more selectively. We may want to spare the chestnuts and cut the oaks, for example. We may want to clear long lines of trees

running across the slopes in order to avoid soil erosion. We'll want to preserve some blocks of virgin forest forever."

"And I suppose we'll have to use the new pneumatic saws," added Wérspéku, an elder who had coordinated tree cutting.

"You can't avoid it," replied Thornton. "The wood will be too expensive if it's cut with ordinary axes."

"Are you able to stay and help us plan where we will cut?" asked Lord ɛjnokordu. "The forestry service has agreed to pay my salary through the fall so that I can serve here. With your permission, my Lord, I will prepare a tree map of as much of Géndona as possible, so we know what resources are available to us and where we should start to use them."

"We would be immensely grateful, ɛndrokordu."

"The Royal Forestry Service is also concerned with establishing uniform practices across this world's forests," added Thornton. "That means deciding what to cut and when and what not to cut, and what areas to designate for hunting and which not to allow hunting in."

"Yes, we've heard about that," said ɛjnokordu. "Can ɛndrokordu explain it to us?"

"Yes, he knows the regulations very well."

"And this is important if we ever build Routes 97 and 99 over the Spine, because we are trying to use the same regulations on our side," said Magékɛru. "The tribes that formed the Central Grassland Park have given the rangers of the other tribes authority to

pursue and arrest poachers crossing tribal boundaries. But that can only be done if everyone trusts each other and respects the same rules."

"We already have professional guides taking hunters into our upper mountain areas from Kostakhéma and poaching our game," said ɛjnokordu. "We don't want that to happen farther south where Routes 97 and 99 will come into our territory."

"I pledge to you that we will not allow that and will fine anyone who does it," said Magékɛru.

"We are not too worried about completing Routes 97 and 99 over the Spine," added Gɛlnébɛlu. "We would like to finish one of them, perhaps Route 99, because the pass there is lower and the route is shorter. It will reduce your transportation costs and it will open up another route over the Spine, which may be important in an emergency. It will also provide another route for an electric line, which improves transmission of power."

"You could complete the power line without the road, too," noted Thornton.

"I want to return to your comment about guides taking hunters onto your land from Kostakhéma," exclaimed Chris. "My understanding was that Kostakhéma has a certain area around it where its residents can hunt."

ɛjnokordu shook his head. "The boundaries have never been defined. The Ghéslonɛ have the same problem."

"I think the Késtonɛ do as well," said Magékɛru. "They may come far enough south to be on Kaitɛrɛ land as well."

“It sounds like there needs to be a meeting in Kostakhéma to resolve this matter, then,” said Chris.

“It’ll be important if we set up Eastern and Western Spine Forest Preserves,” added ɛndrokordu.

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The discussion continued until lunchtime–2 a.m. Mɛlwika time–at which point they had a big meal and the visitors drank a lot of strong coffee. They went outside to see the site of the future gas plant and look at the logs that had already been brought to the village, some of which were indeed being considered for construction. Walking around allowed more informal discussion. ɛjnokordu came to trust Magékɛru a bit more. Andamékwu came to understand better the problem of raising the salaries to 5,000 dhanay per year.

Once they finished examining the future location of the gas plant, ɛndrokordu suggested that they drive up the dirt road that would become route 97 to see the tribe's forest areas. Lord ɛjnokordu immediately agreed and procured a pick up truck. They all climbed in the back, except Chris, who sat up front with ɛjnokordu, and they headed west, out of the village towards the forest. There has always been a wagon road from the village up into the mountains; it was arrow straight, and when Thornton looked very closely, he noticed that the ruts were ancient and almost looked like they had passed through the dirt to stone underneath. This was a road from the time before the flooding of the Long Valley.

They stopped at a grove of chestnuts and examined the ancient trees. ɛndrokordu estimated that some of them were several hundred years old. They continued up the road

to continuous forest and stopped to examine the oaks and beeches, some of which had trunks a meter across. Clearly, the tribe had incredible forest resources, both for construction and for the manufacture of gas. Before they got back on the truck, Thornton stopped to examine the roadway very closely. It was built into a slope, and he went to the edge to look at it there. He felt a stone under his feet and cleared the dirt away from it. "This road once was paved."

ɛjnokordu came over and looked at the ancient paving stone and the crumbled concrete around it. "So, that's pavement? Our ancestors actually paved this road?"

Thornton nodded. "This must date from the time before the Long Valley flooded when it had over 100,000 people living in it, and a major city, Mɛdha. They must've been very short of firewood down there, hence the need for a paved road that goes up to the forests up here."

"Then this is actually a continuation of the road the ancients built up the escarpment," said Gɛlnébɛlu. "That made our paving of the road much easier. We had to remove landslide debris, widen it in spots, and add a few switchbacks where it was extremely steep. I wonder how high this goes?"

"Quite a long way," replied Wérspéku. "Our grandparents and great grandparents have kept it open for hunting and timbering. I'd say it goes halfway to the pass through the Spine, maybe farther."

"Interesting," said Thornton. "But I explored the future path of Route 99 to Gérpola and we never saw any evidence of paving. But this is into a more thickly forested area."

They continued up the road a good hour before they reach the end of the stretch that had been cleared by the tribe the previous summer. Beyond that, it was still suitable for horses and wagons with large wheels, but not for pickups. Before they turned around and headed back to the village, ɛndrokordu pointed to an ancient stone wall. “Look! Way up here our ancestors cleared the land of rocks so that it was better for pasture! And note the huge, ancient trees growing along the wall!”

“Those are really big and old,” said Thornton. He walked to the nearest one, which was almost two meters in diameter. “If you ever cut any of these down, be sure to count the tree rings, so we can get an estimate of their age.”

They headed downhill back to Géndonatroba. When they got there, they drove straight to the hydraulic electric facility at the edge of the escarpment to see if it was ready. The electricians had indeed completed the various adjustments that they had identified the day before and were ready to try to generate electricity. Ejnokordu nodded and the Director threw a switch that opened the sluiceway of the pond above the village. That sent a torrent of water down the canal around the village and into the pond next to the control facility. When the water began to reach the pond, the Director threw another switch and sent water into the pipeline, which plunged 200 meters down the escarpment to the generating station. There were sensors at the generating station that indicated the water pressure in the pipeline. When it reached half the maximum the Director threw another switch and sent the water into the two turbines. They immediately began to spin, and rotate the electrical generator as well. They watched the total power output slowly climb as more and more water entered the turbines.

The staff began to adjust various meters to change the speed of the generation and synchronize the alternating current being produced with the power in the tribe's power line. They used three lightbulbs to determine the synchronicity. When two finally went dark and the third one was bright, the Director called the power company's central control facility in Ora to confirm that they could feed power into the grid. By then, the western shore was waking up and power demand was climbing. Once they had the go ahead, the Director threw a switch to send the power into the grid.

"That's it," he said. "The tribe is now sending 10,000 kilowatts to the rest of the kingdom."

"How much of that can we use?" asked ɛjnokordu.

The Director shook his head. "We only have 2,300 people here and we never use more than 1000 kilowatts at once. When the pipeline is extended all the way down to the bottom of the escarpment, we'll be able to produce nearly 120,000 kilowstts which is more than the entire kingdom needs right now."

Ejnokordu shook his head. "Amazing. And this is equivalent to how many horses?"

"The thousand kilowatts is equivalent to about thirteen thousand horsepower," replied Thornton.

Ejnokordu opened his mouth in amazement. "We have twice as much power at the tips of our fingers here than the entire Kwolonɛ cavalry!"

Wérspéku began to cry. At first, it was just tears welling up in his eyes and he wiped them dry, but at the moment later he began to sniffle as well. ɛjnokordu turned to him. "What is it Wérspéku?"

Wérspéku shook his head. He refused to say anything, but by then everyone was looking at him. It made him feel embarrassed. Finally, he said, “Our way of life is changing so much. I’m not sure we will recognize it anymore.”

“But in many ways, it’s changing for the better,” replied ɛjnokordu. “To have a lot of light in our houses at night without having to spend hours making candles, or spending great quantities of money purchasing oil, and even then, for a little dim light; this is better.”

“And the women and children don’t have to fetch water all the time once we have pipes to bring it to our houses,” added Andamékwu. “In two or three years they won’t even have to cut and stack huge quantities of firewood because we will have gas for heating.”

“And we have a great deal for purchasing the gas as well,” added ɛjnokordu. “We get it for half price because it comes from our trees.”

Wérspéku nodded. “I understand all that, and I understand that now our children won’t die of diseases when they’re little and they can grow up and learn to read and learn all the secrets of nature that other people have found. But once we have cars and gas and electricity and telephones, what will happen to our language? Will the children still understand the old sacred stories? Will they still sing our hymns? Our tribe will survive certainly, and their life will be more comfortable, certainly, but will we still be the same people?”

Thornton decided to speak up. “Culture is not fixed and unchanging, it is always developing. It was changing even before my family got here. The important thing is that

the tribe is able to make decisions about its culture and what to preserve. As you know, in my religion, the Bahá'í Faith strongly emphasizes the importance of preserving culture. Our teaching is unity in diversity, not unity in uniformity. It's important that your tribe preserve its heritage."

"That's why I became a Baha'i," added Andamékwu. "I went to Mɛlwika Génadɛma and learned about the importance of unity in diversity. And I try to teach it to our students. Our school teaches the hymns and the stories; we even make them the central part of teaching language and writing. Our students can learn standard Aryan when they study science and math, but when they study the land around here and its animals and the history of our people, they learn that in our dialect. And that's very important."

"And it's difficult to teach children in two different ways of speaking," added ɛjnokordu. "But I'm very proud of what our schools, and what Andamékwu is doing. We are advancing as a tribe and carrying forward the ever advancing civilization of this world, but we are also preserving our own history."

Wérspéku nodded. "Yes, I understand, I understand. And I agree with the philosophy we are taking. And I agree we are implementing it well. But please indulge an old man when he grieves a bit for the parts of our heritage we have left behind. We may have lived in cold and dark houses in the winter and struggled to eat a decent meal every day, but that also bound us together as families and as a people."

"Then we must continue to find new ways to bind ourselves together," replied ɛjnokordu.

537.

Asking the Aliens

late Blorménu/ early Kaiménu/ early-late June 26/644

Thornton parked his pickup truck on the side of Route 55 and got out. The archaeological dig for Papadam's camp was just 75 meters away. He walked down to the bank of the river and westward along it until he reached the dig.

Bɛlkordu saw him coming. "You're back! It's good to see you! We're just about finished here."

"So I understand." Thornton shook hands with Bɛlkordu and entered the tent covering the dig. It was hot underneath: the tropical sun beat down on the fabric. He looked at the 20 by 20 meter excavation, which has gone down about a meter and a half. "So, are you sure you're all the way down to the original ground level?"

"We seem to be. We've dug down below any artifacts that we had found, and we're not finding any more. Altogether, we've recovered about 2000 items; bones, spear and hand ax points made from various kinds of rocks, shell jewelry, and of course, the hearthstones for several campfires."

"It's really impressive. And you don't think we need to expand the excavation any further?"

Bɛlkordu shook his head. “No. We’ve excavated about 3 meters beyond all of the various artifacts that we found and we haven’t found any more. Maybe if we excavated 10 or 20 meters to the east or west we might find some more, but it could take two more years and cost quite a lot of money. Perhaps in the future, additional excavation should be carried out, but right now I think we’re better off writing up the results and publishing them.”

Thornton nodded. “I think you’re right. Perhaps in another decade or two we’ll have more money we can devote to this site and will have more experienced archaeological teams. We might even have newer and more advanced techniques. But for now, I think we’ve probably done about all that we can do.”

“What are we going to do with this hole? This tent is pretty flimsy and won’t protect it forever. Furthermore, we’ve already had some problems with people trying to visit at night and do their own little digging or stealing artifacts.”

“I’ve talked to the Mennea Foundation and they are willing to give a 10,000 dhanay grant towards a museum building. That’s probably about half what we need, but I think the city council could be persuaded to provide the rest. We’ll also need a full-time employee here. I think we might be able to persuade the palace to provide that.”

“A professional archaeologist?” asked Bɛlkordu excitedly.

“Indeed,” replied Thornton. “That person wouldn’t have to sleep here; the building will lock up tightly, which should be sufficient to protect the site. I think we can probably install a glass floor so that people can walk above the actual excavation, and we could add display cases and exhibits as well. Are you interested in the archaeological job?”

“Of course!” replied Bɛlkordu.

“I was hoping you’d say that! You don’t have a degree in the field, but it’s still a very young field, and a lot of participants don’t have a degree in it. You’d have time to take additional courses and acquire a kwétɛryɛri in archaeology. In fact, while you’re working on your kwétɛryɛri, you could probably teach archaeology courses at the génadɛma here. And of course you could continue the excavation of the old temple complex here in the city.”

“That would be absolutely ideal! I love this work! It’s absolutely fascinating that we can recover what our ancestors were doing here, tens of thousands of years ago!”

“The All-Génadɛma conference is coming up in a few weeks and we’re going to have an afternoon session on archaeology. We need a presentation about this site and I think you’re the one to deliver it.”

“Me? Why don’t you do it!”

“You’re the one who did all the work, so you’re the one who knows all the details. You’re the logical person to give the presentation.”

“They’ll have a terrible time understanding me with my western shore accent!”

“There’s nothing wrong with your western shore accent. It’s as good an accent as any in this world. I’ve seen the reports that you’ve been writing about this site and you know what you’re talking about. Sometimes the grammar in the sentence structure isn’t the best, but we can get that edited. I think you’ll have no trouble at all putting together a presentation and delivering it.”

“How long?”

“Twenty minutes plus ten 10 minutes for questions.”

“With some sort of display or posters?”

“I suggest you prepare 4 to 6 large posters to put up on the wall in front of the room and then you speak from those points. If there are any artifacts that we can safely bring to the conference, also, that would enrich the presentation.”

Bɛlkordu thought about that. “There are some chert ax points that seem pretty representative of the craftsmanship here at the site that I could bring. It might also be helpful because the tools that were made from locally excavated chert may resemble tools found elsewhere. The obsidian tools utilized a source of obsidian we haven’t identified. It may be possible to determine where the obsidian came from if we see a lot of obsidian tools. And it is possible the other archaeological sites have similar chert tools.”

“There are obsidian and chert tools, both at the Anartu site and at the lower Majakwés site,” noted Thornton. “So it’s a good idea to bring some tools along to show people. We can transport them in a secure briefcase and obtain a glass case to put them in for the presentation.”

“So do you think this is the beginning of an increase of interest in archaeology?”

“I think it might be. Mɛdha in the Long Valley is getting a much bigger budget and they’re spending more money at Anartu.”

“Do you know what I think would help a lot? If the aliens have recorded Papadam and his band it would be very helpful for us to have access to it. I don’t think we’re going to get much more information from the archaeology, so perhaps this is a good time to seek a different source of information.”

“Of course, as soon as we start to do that, we will no longer be able to really discover anything new about this band. We’ll just simply read about it from the aliens’ ancient records.”

“That’s true.” Bɛlkordu thought about that for a minute. “But there are some things that we could never recover from archaeology that the aliens might have. For example, do they have recordings of Papadam and his people speaking to each other? Do they have recordings of their singing or any video of them doing ceremonies? Do they have pictures of what this site looked like when Papadam and his people lived here? Those are things we could never recover ourselves, but they’d enrich the story immensely.”

Thornton, nodded. “You’re right. We have talked about asking them for exactly that kind of information. Let me think about that more and talk to some other people about it. It may seem a simple addition to the work here, but it has huge implications for our work elsewhere on this world.”

Bɛlkordu nodded. “I didn’t think of that. You’re right, it could raise a lot of issues. But on the other hand, if you want to increase interest in archaeology, I think it would be hard to beat creating a museum that not only has the excavation under people’s feet, but has a movie of Papadam and his people singing or performing a ritual. That would be absolutely incredible.”

“I think you’re right about that. We have no idea whether any of the people on this world today are descended from Papadam and his band. We know the Shell Mound people were mostly wiped out when the Eryan and Sumis arrived. But there must’ve been

some intermarriage, and if there was, then all the people on this world today would be descended from Papadam and his people."

Exactly!" said Bɛlkordu. "It's very important for us to understand our heritage here. I think it will excite a lot of people to be able to see a museum with exhibits like that."

"I think you're right about that, Bɛlkordu," agreed Thornton.

The All-Génadɛma conference three weeks later was a very large gathering of 500 professors, graduate students, undergraduate students, and anyone curious about anything that the génadɛmas were studying. The three-day conference had many simultaneous sessions covering just about every subject. The archaeology session was on the third afternoon of the conference and over 100 people packed the hall to hear the various presentations. Bɛlkordu was indeed quite nervous, but he had six posters outlining the facts he wanted to present that were posted to the front of the hall in large print and a case full of artifacts for people to examine. He modulated his western shore accent with Eastern shore words and pronunciations, starting with a joke about it to make everybody relax. When he was done, he received a standing ovation, partly because of his well-organized and thorough presentation and partly because everyone realized that the nervous young man had completed his first public talk.

He was followed by a very brief presentation by Ɛndrokordu the forester, who spoke about some of the ancient oak trees on Géndonɛ land. He and Thornton had noted of line of ancient oaks running across a hillside along an old stone wall some 7 kilometers inland from the Géndonatroba and way beyond the area the villagers pastured animals,

farmed, and cut trees. Using pneumatic saws, three of the very large oaks on the stone wall had been cut down for timber and ɛndrokordu had counted the tree rings. All three of the trees had started to grow about 100 years after the great flood had displaced the population of the Long Valley and collapsed civilization in the area.

ɛndrokordu's presentation was followed by a presentation about the sword of Majékwɛs. The room was absolutely packed with an extra hundred people and for at least 15 minutes there was no possibility of speaking about the sword because so many people crowded around it to see it in the glass case. Finally, Marku was able to talk about the excavation of the tomb. They had found the bones of Majékwɛs himself and other burial objects. The sword had been placed on top of the body and Marku inferred that it had been added to the tomb later. But the most important piece of information had to do with the composition of the bronze. A small piece of the sword had fallen off by the hilt, and rather than attempting to stick it back onto the sword they had subjected it to careful chemical analysis by the engineering department at Mɛlwika Génadɛma. The bronze had levels of arsenic in it that were much higher than any bronze objects that had been manufactured on Era previously. Bronze normally consists of copper and tin and there are only two locations on Era with tin deposits, neither of which had substantial arsenic impurities in the ore. But some Sumerian bronzes often were made from tin or arsenic ores from Anatolia that had a higher arsenic content. Marku concluded that the great sword of Majékwɛs was in fact manufactured on the earth in Sumeria, not on Era, and therefore represented an item that the original inhabitants had brought with them when they had been deposited by the aliens at Ghordha.

The conclusion elicited gasps from the audience. A presentation summarizing the work excavating Mɛdha followed and the hall more than half emptied out. A presentation about reading clay tablets at Lilalara followed then Skandu gave a summary of progress to date of excavating Era's ancient history.

Thornton had arranged for all of the presenters to come to dinner at their house that evening. They walked over together and sat to a sumptuous feast of stuffed turkey and potatoes.

"I mentioned this idea to Thornton a few weeks ago, and I briefly mentioned it in my presentation today, but I'd like to repeat it again," said Bɛlkordu. "I think we should ask the aliens for information about our archaeological sites, that we can't obtain through archaeology itself. For example, I'd like to know what the people who lived at my site sounded like; what they said to each other, what songs they sang, what their religious beliefs were, what they ate, etc. We can probably figure out what they ate eventually but we can't ever recover their songs or their language or their culture. Only the aliens can give that to us."

"No, no, no," replied Marku. "I don't want to know those things and I don't want my archaeology to be distracted by them. There's a lot of work we still must do to recover the past and we must do our best to do so. We don't need to know what language they spoke or what they believed."

"I don't agree, Marku," said Skandu. "I'd very much like to know what the Shell People of Sumilara's culture was like. Eventually, I'd like help in recovering the ancient Sumi culture as well. Clay tablets can tell us only so much. It'd be fascinating to be able to watch an ancient ritual that my ancestors performed. I suspect in many ways, it could

be very different from the rituals that are performed today, but the similarities would also be fascinating, and they would confirm that we have carefully preserved our beliefs for over 4,000 years."

"I wonder if they have any recordings of the school of Mitrodaro," said Gɛlékwu. "We've excavated the entire area around the building under the overhang. We've reconstructed the outbuildings and the various parts of the compound. We even have a Sumi translation of one of his treatises. The vast majority of his learning has been lost forever. We could never recover it because the texts don't exist. What I'd give to watch one of his lectures and to hear the arguments that he made!"

"That would be truly amazing," agreed Bɛlkordu.

"Well, I don't want any help to reconstruct the settlement history of the Géndonɛ area," said ɛndrokordu. "There's a huge amount of work to do to figure out the history of settlement of that area. A lot of that is what I guess you call field archaeology; the study of the archaeology of an entire area, as opposed to digging in a particular spot. I think we have years' worth of work to do to figure all of that out."

"But don't you think you could figure it out more quickly if you had some information from the aliens?" asked Bɛlkordu.

"No, no, no!" said Marku. "Let's not get any hints! No cheating! This is our field, and we have to do the work ourselves for it to be legitimate!"

"I think there's a very important distinction to be made between information we can recover ourselves such as through archaeology and field archaeology, and information we can't recover ourselves such as the language, songs, and rituals of Papadam and his people," said Thornton. "There's a gray area such as the ancient Sumi

rituals, which we may eventually be able to read about on clay tablets or in the bark leaf books. It seems to be that we can triage historical questions into things we're sure we could figure out, things we might be able to figure out, and things we definitely cannot figure out on our own."

"And why not ask the aliens to help us with the things we definitely cannot figure out on our own?" said Bɛlkordu. "That's information that complements archaeology rather than replacing it! Imagine a museum where you could go see the sword of Majékwɛs accompanied a picture of him and a recording of his voice! That's an incredibly rich context for appreciating the sword!"

"Rich is a good choice of words also because I suspect it will greatly increase the funding for archaeology!" said Skandu.

That comment startled Marku. He hadn't thought of the budgetary implications.

"So, do you really have any objection to us requesting the image or voice of Papadam and his people?" Bɛlkordu.

Marku shook his head. "No, that's all right."

Bɛlkordu turned to Thornton. "Can we call the aliens and ask them right now?"

Thornton was surprised by that. "Oh… I don't know. I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why is that?" asked Marku. "You've been telling us about these aliens for years, and all we ever hear about them is your description of your conversations with them. Maybe it's time for all of us to be involved in this conversation since it affects our field."

"Well… I see what you're saying, but I've got a think through the implications."

“Make the call right now,” replied Chris. The rest of the family had been sitting at the table listening to the archaeologists without commenting.

“Really?”

Chris nodded. “I think it’s time.”

“Alright.” Thornton pulled out his cell phone. His hands were shaking slightly as he punched in the number to talk to Philos. “Most of the time I have to leave him a message,” apologized Thornton.

He turned on the conference feature so everyone could listen. They heard the phone ring once, twice, three times.

There was a click as the phone connected. “Hello Thornton?” It was Philos’s voice, which sounded artificial and had a funny accent.

“Hello Philos! This is Thornton. I am sitting in my house in Mɛlwika at a dinner table with a large crowd of people who are all listening in on our conversation. The crowd includes my family and six archaeologists. We just had an archaeology session at the All-Génadɛma conference this afternoon. It went extremely well; we had between 100 and 200 people at the different presentations. Afterward, this group of senior archaeologists began to discuss whether we should ask you for more historical information about this world’s past. Ultimately, we felt that the kind of information from you would fall into three categories: information we could never recover here through archaeology, and other means, such as the images and voices of the people of the past; information we can recover through archaeology and related techniques, such as the houses, the food and other material aspects of the culture; and information that we may or may not be able to recover, such as rituals or philosophical arguments, which you may

have captured in your records but which may also exist in written materials we haven't yet found. We all agreed that the first category--that is, information we can never recover by ourselves--is information we would like to request from you. Specifically, now that we have completed the excavation of Papadam's campsite, we would like to know whether you have images of the people and their structures and material items, and whether you have audio recordings of their voice, their language, songs, etc.. Those are the items we would like to ask you about right now."

There was a long pause before Philos answered. "Did you say that this request is the consensus of the archaeologists present with you right now?"

"Correct. All six of us agreed to the request."

"And do the six of you represent the main group of people doing archaeology on Era at the moment?"

"Correct, the six of us are in charge of the major archaeological excavations."

There was another long pause. "This is a very important moment in the history of your world. It represents the first time a group of experts have had a serious and complete deliberation about your history and about what contributions we can make to it. It is precisely a gathering like this that we have been hoping would be convened. So you make us very happy. And we're even more happy that the request was very specific and narrow: information about Papadam and his band. Yes, we have extensive recordings about Papadam and the 33 members of his band, both video and audio. We placed small sensors on many of them and on their shelters and the trees around them, and we recorded thousands of hours of their socializing, their rituals, and the way they live their lives together. There is so much information it actually may be difficult for us to provide

it all to you. You would need several experts, devoting their entire careers to analyzing all that information. However, we have summary reports that were generated by artificial intelligence from that period of time. Those reports sometimes include audio and video recordings. We could easily send some of those to you. And once you examine them, you would be in a position to ask additional questions and request additional information about Papadam and his band."

There were smiles all around the table, A feeling of excitement was palpable. "Would we understand their language?" asked Bɛlkordu. "Do you have translations of their language?"

Philos heard the question. "You will not understand a word of their language. It is totally different from any language spoken on either Era or earth today. It even uses sounds you will have difficulty recognizing. It is a fairly primitive language; it only had 700 or 800 words. Its grammar was also fairly simple and ambiguous. But we do have automated translations of some of their speech and we can send that to you as well. I suspect with that tool available to you, you can do a considerable amount of translation on your own. But it will take time and human resources to develop an understanding of their language and culture."

"I want to know about the sword of Majékwɛs," exclaimed Marku. Everyone at the table looked at him puzzled, because he was the one who previously voiced no interest in the information of the aliens at all. "An analysis of the metal making up sword suggests that it was manufactured in Mesopotamia. The bronze had an arsenic content that does not exist in other bronze items manufactured here because the tin and copper ore available here do not have arsenic. Using the internet you have provided, we found

information about the bronze alloys manufactured in Sumeria, and they did indeed have arsenic in them."

"This is a new question about a new subject," said Philos. "Is there a consensus among you present that I should answer this question?"

Thornton looked around the room. Everyone was nodding. "Yes, Philos, everyone here agrees with the question."

"Very well. Your information is correct. The sword was manufactured in the city of Ur in approximately 2523 BC, purchased by Mitridatos to give to his father Mégékwos and brought home as a gift to him. When Mégékwos died, his older son became King Andamékwos, and he claimed the sword. But when he died, Mitridatos became king and he put the sword in his father's grave, which is where he wanted it to go in the first place."

Those are the names of the first three kings of Ghordha," explained Marku. "But we thought Mitridatu was the grandson."

"No; he was the younger son of Mégékwos. I'm not sure I should've shared that information with you because it probably falls in the second category, that is, information you might be able to find out through inscriptions and other sources yourself."

"Nevertheless, I'm very grateful," replied Marku.

"What about the philosophical school of Mitrodato?" asked Gɛlékwu. "Do you have any audio recordings or videos of that school? We know there's one manuscript of Mitridato that has survived in Sumi translation, but there are no Eryan texts available for that period."

That was a pause. "Yes, I believe we have some information about the school."

“Thank you!”

“I can send information to Thornton’s email about Papadam and his band. But I think his other questions require your additional consultation. I’d rather not share too much information right away; I think you all need to think very carefully about what you want to request and why.”

“That’s very wise, Philos,” agreed Thornton. “We’ll get back to you in a few days about the matter.”

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Handling the Consequences

mid Kaiménu/ early July 26/644

Thornton parked his pickup truck near the entrance to the tunnel with Sajékwu, the chief engineer of the Mégɛndrɛs tribe. “As you can see, we’re starting out with a very narrow tunnel on this side; just a little over a meter wide instead of 4 meters, and only 2 meters high instead of 5. The reason for that is because the tunnel on the other side starts 75 meters higher than it is on this side and there’s water in the rocks that has to drain out. So we’re going to start out making as long and thin a tunnel as possible from this end so that as the tunnel advances in its full width from the other side, the water will run out in this direction and we don’t have to do any pumping.”

There’s going to be an extra excavation under the floor of this tunnel for a gas pipeline, right?”

Sajékwu nodded. “Correct, we’ll dig a special ditch 1 meter wide and 1 meter deep. An electric line will run along the ceiling and will supply power to light bulbs as well.”

They walked up a ramp to the tunnel entrance, which was 25 meters above the base of the ridge. When they got to the top, Thornton stared into the darkness. He could see that the tunnel sloped upward fairly steeply. At the far end there was a distant light where men were working. He could hear the sound of pneumatic drills and the clattering of rocks. “How fast is the tunnel advancing?”

"About 2 meters a day right now, but we think we can get it up to four or even 5 meters a day once we have experienced excavators. At that point, we'll be able to do two or three shifts a day. We had better get out of the way because I think I hear a trailer coming with loose rock they've excavated from the face."

Thornton nodded. They stepped back from the tunnel and a minute later, a trailer loaded with rocks was pulled out using a cable attached to an engine mounted on a platform nearby. The trailer passed them and turned 90 degrees when it reached the edge of the slope. Two men tipped it over and a huge quantity of rock rolled down the slope to the base of the ridge, clattering to a stop at the bottom. Then the empty trailer was turned upright and the cable pulled it back into the tunnel.

"Very efficient. I take it you don't have any equipment that burns fuel in the tunnel?"

"That's correct; we don't have an easy way to move oxygen into the tunnel yet. We're going to be installing a fan eventually. Right now the pneumatic rock hammers are powered by a pump out here and the air pressure goes in on that hose." Sajékwu pointed to a pneumatic hose that snaked along the roof of the tunnel. "And of course they are using electric lights."

"What's happening at the other end of the tunnel?"

"At the other end, they're excavating the tunnel to the full 4 meters of width and the 5 meters of height in the center. The work is going much more slowly because there's so much more rock to remove, and since the tunnel is sloped downward, pretty soon there's going to be a problem with water accumulating at the far end. We'll be able to

pump it out for a while, but it will be much more efficient to drain the water out through the smaller tunnel we're digging from this end."

"How are you going to handle two way traffic?"

"Initially, we will have someone at each end of the tunnel opening and closing the access to the tunnel so that there's always just one-way traffic through it. But the Mɛlwika School of Engineering says that they can design a system with a gate and a stoplight remotely controlled. Once we have that, we could station one person at one end of the tunnel 24 hours a day to control the direction of the traffic. Once we're sure the automated controls are working, we'll be able to set up an automated system instead."

"And when do you want to build the second tunnel?"

"Two or three years. Let's see how the first tunnel works out first," said Sajékwu with a smile.

Thornton nodded. They could hear that the work excavating rock had resumed at the far end of the tunnel, now that the trailer had arrived. They watched for a minute or two, then turned away and walked back down the approach ramp to the pickup. "I suppose you're tired of hearing this question, but how are the dams and wells going for the wildlife in the Central Grasslands Park?"

Sajékwu nodded. "I'm glad to say that the work is coming along pretty well now. Lord Walékwɛs. has finally freed up the funds so that we could build the dams on the dry creeks, excavate wells, and install windmills to provide water in the most arid areas. We should have completed all the promised environmental improvements by next spring. The hunters are already reporting an increase in wildlife, thanks to the additional water supplies and the vegetation along the banks of the artificial creeks."

“That’s exactly what we were hoping would happen. We’ve taken away from the wildlife on this planet a substantial portion of their environment. By improving the part that they still have, we hope to bring the quantity of wildlife back to where it was a few years ago.”

“Of course, back before the Long Valley drained and the Sea returned, there was very little wildlife, because half this planet was desert.”

Thornton nodded. “Very true. But now there’s a lot more demand for meat and recreational hunting and a lot more pressure on the wild animal populations. We have to do more to protect and maintain them for the future.”

“I suppose that’s true; it’s the Seventh Developmental Priority,” said Sajékwu. “I’ve never been a hunter, and certainly many of these species either compete with our cattle for grass or prey on them.”

“That’s true, but we have to figure out a way for them to live with us nevertheless,” replied Thornton.

He sent steam to the cylinders and backed up the pickup. He turned it towards the road and they headed back to Ghordha. He stopped at the tribal headquarters to drop off Sajékwu and then continued up the road a short distance to the new Ghordha Historical Museum. It was built into the side of the mountain where they had found the tomb of Majékwɛs. He parked and hurried inside.

The others were waiting for him at the display of the sword of Majékwɛs. Lord Walékwɛs. was there as well, and was anxious to get started. Marku sensed Walékwɛs.’s impatience and immediately started to introduce the video. “As I’ve already said, two weeks ago the aliens agreed to give us audio and video footage from Ghordha’s first few

days and weeks when our ancestors were first put here. What we have here is a recording of a conversation the great chief had with his two sons as he lay dying. We're still reconstructing what happened, but we gather that Majékwɛs was badly wounded by an arrow when he and his warriors attacked a nearby village back on Gɛdhéma in retaliation for their attacks on his village. In the process, he got badly wounded, and because of the danger to the Redheaded Clan, as they called themselves, the aliens decided to pick up Majékwɛs and his entire tribe and bring them here. But not all was good, because they discovered there were already people on this world, the ones we call the Shell Mound people. Anyway, I'll play the recording. The translation is very rough, but I think you'll get the general point of it."

Marku looked at Lord Walékwɛs., who nodded. Marku pressed the start button on the recording.

An injured middle aged man with a very infected shoulder appeared on the screen with two sons sitting on both sides of his head. The scene was dimly lit; the microsensor's camera was set about two meters above the ground level and two meters from them. His voice was weak and sometimes difficult to hear; a few of the words were recognizable from the vocabulary of old poetry and songs, but most of it was incomprehensible. At the bottom of the screen flowed a written translation, but it had a few blanks in it because some words were either inaudible or not understood. The king was telling his older and more impetuous son to always include the younger son, who had better judgment, in his decisions. All decisions about the tribe should be made by both of them together. The two sons appeared to be about 23 and about 20 years of age. They promised to do as their father commanded them.

The entire scene lasted only two or three minutes. When it was finished, Lord Walékwɛs. shook his head. “I imagined him so much more majestic and powerful.”

Marku nodded. “That’s the way we usually picture the past; so much greater than the present. So much more heroic and magnificent. But here we have a dying father instructing his two sons how to keep the tribe together. Perhaps it’s not heroic, but it is touching.”

Walékwɛs. nodded. “That’s correct, but should our museum destroy the imagination of our people?”

“We may be destroying our imagination, but we’re making it more real. If we think everything was better in the past, we can only conclude that everything is going downhill! When we see that our ancestors were human beings, just like us, dealing with the same kinds of problems, it gives us encouragement that we can do better as well.”

“I suppose,” agreed Walékwɛs.. “This will take me some time to get used to. It will take some time for the people to get used to it as well. How did the aliens record this?”

“They had tiny recording devices,” replied Thornton. “They could fly and looked like a fly or bug. They would land somewhere in the room next to the Walékwɛs. and turn towards the scene that was occurring. They broadcast the conversation back to a mother computer in the sky, the same way our cell phones work.”

That startled Lord Walékwɛs. to no end. “You mean they might be listening to us using our phones?”

“They could, but they have pledged to me that they won’t use these devices that way. Now that they’re in touch with us directly as individuals, they have agreed to

respect our privacy. But when they were doing anthropology on the human species, they were not interacting with specific individuals; they did not know specific individuals or speak to specific individuals. Under those circumstances, they felt free to record the events of everyday life because they were more interested in what all humans do on average than what any particular human being is doing."

That didn't seem to calm Lord Walékwɛs. at all. "How dare they do that! That's terrible! And how do we know for certain that they're not doing that to us now?"

"All we could do is take them at their word," replied Thornton.

"And for what purpose do they study us?" asked the lord.

"Eventually, humanity will be sufficiently advanced to leave Gɛdhéma and explore the stars, and when they do, they will meet this race of aliens, and other races as well. Apparently there's an entire community of intelligent species in the skies above us. When that happens, this particular race of aliens wants us to serve as a bridge between Gɛdhémɛs and the rest of this community of intelligent species. They may ask people from Era to help them."

"Does that mean some of us might go to Gɛdhéma?" asked Walékwɛs..

"It might be that some people from Era will go to Gɛdhéma, but that might be another century or two. The people on Gɛdhéma are still too immature. They fight terrible, terrible wars and mistrust each other deeply."

"It sounds like Era," replied Walékwɛs.. "Here's what I think. We can't tie up the tribe's computer in the museum showing this video. But we probably could make a recording of the conversation, perhaps, including a translation. Why don't you start with that? I think the video may be too shocking to people. If they're afraid that we're being

watched and listened to, the video recording will frighten many, many people. It could have very serious consequences. I think you have to start very small and cautiously with something like this."

Thornton wasn't sure whether he was disappointed or relieved. "I think that's a wise decision, Lord Walékwɛs.," he finally said. "We should see what the reaction to the audio recording is before we release the video anyway. Once they're both released, we can't take one of them back, after all, so we might as well take our time and see what happens."

"What about a picture of Majékwɛs?" asked Marku. "It would be very easy to take a picture from this video."

Walékwɛs. shook his head. "No, not yet. Perhaps the time for it will come. Perhaps the time for the video will come as well. But we don't need to be in a hurry."

The conversation in the Ghordha museum worried Thornton quite a bit. Three days later he had to go to Pértatranisér to see the progress on the museum there and he raised the issue with the family at suppertime. In addition to Amos and May, Chris and Liz were there because they were accompanying the Queen on her annual trip around the Sea. Budhéstu and his wife Kalémé were also there.

The conversation started out by focusing on other matters. "Did you hear that Budhéstu's life of Widumaj has been published?" May said to Thornton. "It's available in both the old syllabary form and the new alphabet so that it can reach everyone. Lébé and I went over the whole thing, but we really didn't have very many things to add to it because it's so good."

Budhéstu smiled. “You’re very kind, May. Some of your approach to scholarship has definitely rubbed off on me, as should be obvious when you read the footnotes. We never had anything like footnotes before your family arrived; we had to place our explanation of things within the text itself. Footnotes really help to keep the historical material and the interpretations separate and I really appreciate that aspect of them.”

“In a subject like Widumaj, it is so difficult to use a neutral tone,” agreed May. “Indeed, you could argue that a neutral tone is not only impossible, but inappropriate; he is Widumaj after all! How can you examine him in a neutral way? But nevertheless, creating a manuscript that lets the audience interpret the material themselves and doesn’t lead them is very important.”

Budhéstu nodded. “Yes, I completely agree with you. I think the story tells itself quite well. They don’t need my voice to tell the story to them. But I do need to explain where I’m coming from and where I get my information. Footnotes allow me to do that.”

“I glanced at the book very briefly before dinner and I was surprised that on many pages more space is devoted to footnotes than the text itself,” Thornton said. “That’s quite an amazing achievement.”

“I think we’ll publish a version of the book without the footnotes, too,” said Kalémé. “The people who need the footnotes are the scholars, but for the average person they’re just a distraction. We want them to read the story and not focus on the sources and the interpretations.”

“That makes sense,” agreed Thornton.

“Budhéstu is going to teach a course at the génadɛma this fall about his book,” continued May. “And I think we’ll probably schedule him to do the same in Mɛlwika over the winter.”

“That’s very kind of you, but I’m not really sure I’m up to it.”

“Oh, I’m quite sure you are,” replied May. “The students in the génadɛmas need to be able to take a course like this. Some of them are becoming very skeptical about religion, and we need to reinforce the importance of Widumaj.”

“As long as the course does that and doesn’t distract them with all the questions in the footnotes,” replied Budhéstu. “This is always the problem with something intellectual; it raises more questions than it answers, and can lead to skepticism.”

“That’s true,” agreed Chris. “But such people are natural skeptics anyway. A certain amount of skepticism is healthy and good and needs to be encouraged; otherwise people become fanatics. It’s hard to get skepticism right.” He glanced at May, whose skeptical nature had always worried him.

She nodded. “You’re right, dad.”

There was a pause in the conversation. Then Thornton said, “A few days ago I was in Gordha and we watched a three-minute video of Majékwɛs instructing his sons how to work together after he died. It was very touching and showed a side of Majékwɛs we never knew about. It’s a side we never could’ve found out about, either, because there’s nothing in writing about him from his lifetime. But Lord Walékwɛs. was immediately concerned because he realized it meant the aliens had recorded the encounter and he wondered whether they were still recording us now. It greatly disturbed him.”

"That's interesting," said Budhéstu. "Yesterday I went to see the recording of Papadam with May and Amos and a few other people. Of course, we really weren't sure what he and his people were doing. They were singing and carrying out some kind of ritual, but the translation was very poor. There were captions under the picture, but about half the words were blank. I was aware of the fact that the aliens had recorded the whole thing, but it never occurred to me that they might still be recording us."

"That's good to know," replied Thornton.

"When the aliens provided us with phones and tablets, they assured us that they wouldn't turn on the camera or microphone without telling us they were on," said Chris. "Whenever we send a text or an email or make a call, that data has to be routed to another device via the aliens' communications system, and we understand that they might keep recordings of that material for their own scientific research. Their research, of course, is not about specific people and their lives, but about human beings in general and their societies, so we had no objection. Besides, it seemed like a reasonable price to pay to have an efficient and fast mechanism of communication. One reason the Queen wanted automatic dialing machinery was so that the palace would be able to send communications through our telephone system without having to use the aliens' satellites, so the aliens wouldn't be able to intercept those messages."

"I'm not sure I have ever used one of your cellular phones before," said Budhéstu.

"Perhaps you haven't, but you've received communications from people who have," replied Andranu. "Most of the time when I call you, I'm using Skandé's cell phone."

Budhéstu's eyebrows went up. "Oh."

“And your manuscript was emailed to Lébé in Mɛlwika, and her comments were emailed back to me, so it went through the aliens’ system as well,” noted May. “But I don’t see any reason why we should object to that. Let the aliens know about Widumaj!”

“I suppose,” replied Budhéstu. “But even so, it’s rather disconcerting.”

“It is,” agreed Kalémé.

“I think this is an important conversation,” said Chris. “I can understand Lord Walékwɛs.’s concern, and I’m sure many people will be similarly disturbed. Some of them might be very, very disturbed. I think we might want to get ahead of this story, because once these recordings become public, people will put two and two together, and some people might get very concerned. They might even start to spread dangerous rumors that will cause a lot of trouble for everyone.”

“How would we do that?” asked Liz. “Use the radio?”

Chris nodded. “I think so. Thornton, do you know whether your conversation with Philos was recorded?”

“I can ask.”

“But I wouldn’t do this without asking the Queen first,” exclaimed Budhéstu. He sounded alarmed.

“I agree,” said Chris. “In fact, it might be a good idea for the Queen to participate in a broadcast like this. Her voice could calm a lot of people.”

“It could also cause a lot of people to mistrust her,” said May. “There may be some people who will see a conspiracy between the Queen and the aliens.”

“That might be an argument against making these recordings available in the museums,” said Amos. “But that would be a real shame. It’s such a privilege actually to have the voice and video of these ancient figures. Nothing like that is possible on Earth.”

“Not until the aliens release all their recordings of ancient peoples on Earth,” replied Thornton. “That’s the thing to remember. They have thousands of times more recordings and data on the evolution of human beings on Earth than they have of human beings on Era. We are just a dress rehearsal for the big day when humanity’s entire ancient record will be made available to it.”

“I wonder whether making some of that record available to us first might help,” exclaimed Liz. “It may be less intrusive to see what the aliens have on Earth people than on people on Era.”

Thorton smiled and nodded. “That’s a fantastic idea. I can ask Philos what they have.”

“And it sounds like they must have quite a lot,” said May. “They must have records of the people they later brought to Era as well as of people they never transported here.”

“That’s worth considering,” said Budhéstu. “But it will still raise the same issues, and it may not help at all.”

Thornton nodded. “But it is an option,” he said. “Meanwhile, I think we better not show these recordings to the public.”

“I agree,” said both Chris and May.

Arranging a time to speak to the Queen was never easy. Now that Chris was no longer an essential member of her entourage, it was even harder. Most of the work interacting with tomis was being done by Yusdu instead. But Her Majesty still enjoyed talking to Liz and finding out about how the women's gabrulis were doing, so four days after the meeting in Pértatranisér, when the queen was in Tripola, Liz was able to approach her and request a time for a meeting. It occurred right after the Queen laid the cornerstone for Soru's third school for the deaf and blind in Tripola next to the High School, which would take care of the children on the South Shore and some of the children in the western tribes. After the very dignified and uplifting ceremony ended, Liz, Chris, and Thornton came to the palace to meet with the Queen, Lord Kandékwɛs, and Prince Mégékwɛs. Thornton was pleased to see that the Prince was being involved in important matters; it showed that the Queen had confidence in his maturing abilities. Thornton began by playing a three minute video of Majékwɛs telling his sons to work together, followed by a three minute clip of Papadam and his people praying. The Queen was absolutely fascinated. "This is amazing!" she said "To have such historical material is an incredible privilege. It makes the distant past so much more alive."

"Exactly," agreed Thornton. "And that's why we want to make recordings like this available to the public eventually. Apparently the aliens have thousands of hours of audio and video that we can use. We still don't know what time the recordings cover, but they probably have some recordings of events that are only a few hundred years old."

"That recently?" asked the Queen.

"Do they have any recordings of great grandfather?" asked Mégékwɛs. "That would help greatly with my dissertation."

“Or recordings of us,” said Kandékwɛs. “Have they been recording us?”

“Now you’re getting to the issue,” said Thornton. “We don’t know what they’ve recorded and what they haven’t. They have assured us that they haven’t been using our phones to listen to us or watch us without our permission. But until our family arrived here, they were dropping microscopic sensors all over the place to pick up sound and video and we don’t know what they’ve recorded.”

“That’s a problem,” exclaimed the Queen, looking agitated. “I think we need more information from them.”

“What sort of information?” asked Thornton. “Such as, how recently were they keeping records?”

The queen nodded. “I think they owe us a detailed description of what they have recorded.”

“Did you say all the archaeologists talked to this alien?” asked Kandékwɛs.

Thornton nodded. “I made a conference call. All of them could talk to Philos and he could hear all of them.”

“Then perhaps we should put together a group to talk about this,” said the Queen. “I’d invite General Pɛrku and Prime Minister Mɛndhru… and we probably should involve some priests, since they are the ones most likely to criticize this.”

Chris nodded. “ I’d invite Budhéstu and maybe Lukolubu. Budhéstu just produced a new biography of Widumaj which is excellent and has been well received. He’s involved in the prayer hall in Pértatranisér that has been supporting positive change in the realm. And of course Lukolubu has been a priest in Mɛlwika and now he’s Chief Priest in Isurdhuna.”

“Budhéstu… he was exiled to Anartu, right?”

Chris nodded. “Yes, but two of his children are married to two of my grandchildren. He’s really come around. He’s chief priest in Pértatranisér.”

“And it’s worth also noting that his daughter has been trained under Wɛrétrakɛstɛr and is something of a prophet,” added Thornton.

The queen nodded. “I’ve heard of her. If anything, she’s been a difficulty, but I suppose her father can help modulate her opinions. We’ll invite him and Lukolubu.”

“If I may suggest, Your Majesty, I think it’s time for you to be part of the conversation with these aliens,” said Kandékwɛs. “This is your world, not Thornton’s, and not the aliens’s.”

Chris nodded. “I agree. I think the time has come for the communication to move beyond our family to the palace itself, and to people appointed by the palace.”

“Very well,” said the Queen. “Thornton, you tell Philos that we want to talk to him at this time tomorrow. Let’s plan on bringing together this group to consult a few hours before then, and all of us will participate in the discussion with Philos.”

“ Very well,” replied Thornton.

The meeting with Philos totally upset the Queen’s schedule. She had planned to leave Tripola for the Wuronɛ tribe, where the Provincial Assembly was meeting. That trip was postponed by at least a day. General Pɛrku and Prime Minister Mɛndhru had to drop everything and come to Tripola, as did Budhéstu and Lukolubu. Chris asked that May and Amos also be invited, because they had also been involved in communications with Philos.

The twelve of them gathered the next morning for breakfast, and for two hours Thornton told the story of the family's connection with the aliens. He started with that fateful day in 2005 when they saw, a small flying saucer crash in the desert in Botswana, and they hurried over to help the injured pilot. He summarized the agreement they made with the aliens that they would provide anthropological data about Era in return for technological assistance. As a result, they were able to arrive on Era with tools and other equipment that they never would have had otherwise, and that made it possible for Mɛlwika to become the planet's industrial center. In return, they provided additional data, primarily in the form of interviews and reports; it did not include surveillance of the palace or any particular person or office. The aliens themselves had become convinced that in the past, they had not treated the people of Era ethically, and therefore they were willing to provide additional tools and medicines to help Eran society advance. They also agreed that the flooding of the Long Valley, and the consequent desertification of the planet, was an ecological disaster that they could reverse without destroying the city of Ora, and so they had drained the Long Valley and brought back the sea.

The queen and her party asked many questions. Can we trust the aliens? What is their true motivation? Do they intend us any harm? Do they want to exploit us or pressure us in any way? Thornton replied that eventually the aliens would want our help to contact the people on Earth because it's easier for the contact to occur between two members of the same species than between two different species. But the situation on earth was such that it would be another century before the Eran's help would be needed.

The discussion then turned to the problem of informing the public about the contact with the aliens. Everyone agreed that an angry and ignorant reaction, fueled by

individuals who wanted to exploit the situation, was a serious danger. The only way to avoid such a result would be to be extremely careful about release of the information. Others argued that it was probably better to put everything out on Kɛkanu's World Table radio program all at once to let everyone know about what had been happening for the last twenty-five years and how the relationship with the aliens has changed. Most people knew that the Menneas had brought technology with them, and most people working in the health field knew that new supplies of medications were being provided on a regular basis to them. But even so, everyone was afraid of an extreme reaction. "It's hard to know what to do," concluded the Queen. "There are so many variables and so many things that could go wrong that just about anything we do, including nothing, could produce a disaster. After all, some people already know about the recordings we have of Papadam and of Majékwɛs. That's going to leak out in a matter of days or weeks."

"I agree, we can't do nothing," said Mɛndhru. "And I don't think this information should be released by someone at a lower level of authority than the Queen herself, or someone very close to her. This is too important and too sensitive."

Kandékwɛs nodded. "I agree. This has to be released very carefully at a very high-level by someone who's integrity is respected by everyone."

"Wɛrétrakɛstɛr," suggested Thornton.

"No, it has to be the Queen herself," said Mɛndhru.

"I am willing to do that, but I think it would be better if there were several of us involved," said the Queen. "I think Chris or Thornton should also be part of the release of the information, and I think Budhéstu or Wɛrétrakɛstɛr should be involved."

“I don’t think we have to make a decision about this right now,” said Liz. “Perhaps we should ask Philos what his people have done in the past. They are familiar with this problem as well.”

The Queen nodded. “That’s a good idea. Let’s take a break, say some prayers, and contact Philos.”

They took a break, drank some more coffee, and then it was time to call Philos. Thornton made the call, pushed the phone’s conference button, and set it down in the middle of the table.

“Good afternoon Thornton. Is everyone with you?”

Hello, Philos. We have quite a crowd here today. Let me go around the table and tell you who is here.” Thornton introduced the other eleven people who were present and concluded with, “Finally allow me to introduce Her Majesty Queen Estoibidhé, who will lead our discussion today.”

“I am greatly honored, Your Majesty, that you are present in this meeting. I am accompanied today by two of my coworkers, Lover-of-Fate and Good-Destiny. The three of us are very anxious to hear from all of you and to discuss how to inform the public of your world about us.”

“This is precisely the dilemma we face,” said the Queen. “I don’t know how it is with your species, but among our species, there are always individuals who are suspicious and distrustful, and some of them want to stir doubt and mistrust in order to gain power and position. This constrains us in the way we might publicize our contact with you.”

"Of course, our species is very much like yours that way: individuals have free will, and because they have free will they can be constrained by custom and morals only so much. We are in touch with 25 sentient species in our galaxy, and all of them are the same. And among all of them, love and cooperation are the key to successful societal advancement and individual fulfillment. That is a law of nature, you might say. It is as certain and reliable as the law of gravity. But there are always individuals who wish to test the limits and mistake prestige and attention for love and affection."

"Very well put," exclaimed Kandékwɛs, who then quickly added, "And I am Kandékwɛs, husband of the Queen. It sounds like our people are very much like your people."

"While all sentient species have different kinds of bodies, different numbers of limbs, different kinds of eyes, and they even reproduce in different ways, but they all recognize the law of love and cooperation. But the way they have managed the first contact with us, or with other species, has varied widely. Some have proceeded with great wisdom and had very positive results. Some proceeded with great wisdom and had disasters. Some proceeded with very little wisdom and they were more likely to have disasters, but sometimes the situation worked out anyway. I suppose it all boils down to whether you want to announce everything all at once or take a more gradual approach. Both of them have pitfalls. In a way, it is impossible to take the whole-thing-at-once approach, because your audience cannot assimilate and understand it all. You can only go as fast as your audience can handle the information."

"Thank you, that is good advice," said the Queen. "Perhaps we should start by talking about the oldest people who are on this planet first, the ones who looked like us

the least. Its cultures and languages were the most different. But the inevitable question that will arise is, are you still recording us? Do we have any sense of privacy at all? This has already been raised by the Lord of Gordha, who was fascinated to learn about his ancestor Majékwɛs but immediately wondered whether similar recordings of him existed."

"No matter what we say about that, there will always be doubts by some of your people. But there are ways that doubt can be mitigated. For example, you may recall when you first got cell phone communication from us that the first time the phone or tablet was turned on, there was a privacy notice that specified that all communications going through our system could be used by us for scientific purposes, but that the information would not be shared regarding specific individuals, only as anonymized information. The notice has been repeated every year or so. Whenever anybody created an account for email or texting, the message came up. I suspect many of the users of your system have never seen the notice because so many people use each phone and tablet. One thing you can do is print that message in your newspapers and broadcast it over your radio stations to remind people of our commitment to your privacy.

"As for monitoring your people using remote microsensors, the last time we did that was when John Miller was brought to this world some 57 years ago. That was the first time we had come here for any purpose for two decades. When we brought Miller to Bolériplúdha, we also deposited microsensors on his property and flew microsensors to various houses and public buildings in the area. That included the old palace. Those sensors transmitted data for about 10 years and then ceased to function. So we have recordings, both audio and video, from the period of time when Miller arrived until about

10 years later. When the Menneas came to Era, because we agreed to let them use their cell phones, we did not introduce microsensors. We did that for a very simple and clear reason: we knew that we were getting close to the time when we would need to interact with your people in order to create a community able to meet the people on Earth and establish contact with them. At that point, your people went from subjects of anthropological inquiry to people we could interact with and therefore obtain consent from. We have proceeded along those ethical lines ever since. We do not have recordings from microsensors from the time of the arrival of the Menneas."

"And what do you have from the time that Miller arrived until 10 years after," asked Prince Mégékwɛs.

"We have thousands of hours of audio and video recordings. We have done some artificial intelligence sorting and reviewing of them, but we have not had any researchers examining them in detail. If the palace wishes, it can appoint a committee of scholars to examine the recordings and classify them as either public, available to scholars, or private, and we will make them all available to you."

"And is that true of earlier recordings as well?" asked the Prince.

"Correct. We have brought people to this world every 50 to 100 years for the last 4500 years and we always dispersed microsensors, so we have recordings throughout that time. The information is spotty, of course, but certainly it's better than nothing. With recordings from the more distant past, however, we already have ethics guidelines proposed by your archaeologists. We suggest that those guidelines be followed until such time that they should be modified."

“Do you have recordings of me? Of my parents and grandparents?” asked the Queen.

“Indeed we do, of many years ago. Our microsensors caught a lot of personal interactions in the palace. We also have recordings of the discussion that occurred when your grandfather died and your mother became queen. No doubt they will be useful supplements to the existing written records and memories.”

“I see,” replied the Queen. She seemed quite concerned by the information.

“Let us return to the subject at hand,” said Kandékwɛs. “That is, what do we tell the public, when, and how. I think that a group of us should go on the World Table program and talk about this meeting but focus only on the recordings of the Shell Mound people and Majékwɛs.”

“What about our ongoing contact over the last 25 years?” asked Thornton. “People know we’ve been receiving medicines and machine tools from them, for example.”

“We will need to say something about that,” agreed the Queen. “But perhaps that should be a second broadcast. Let’s keep the first broadcast simple and focused on the distant past. We can certainly say that we will have more to say about our contact with the aliens, but I think the information needs to be spread out over time.”

“As long as we are transparent,” said Prime Minister Mɛndhru. “We have to be very careful not to sound like we are hiding something or misleading the public. This is a subject that is very sensitive.”

The queen nodded. “That is very clear,” she said with a nod. “We definitely should go on the World Table and talk about this. By we, I mean Thornton and myself, and perhaps others.”

539.

The World Table

early Dhonménu/ late July 26/644

"We have a very unusual program today," began Kɛkanu. "Our program features two guests: the first, Her Majesty Queen Estoibidhé, and the second, someone familiar to many people, but who has never appeared on this program before Dhoru Doma-Ménnai. The topic they are going to introduce today is also very unusual: detailed information about our ancestors that's never been available to us before and it's information that our various historians and archaeologists cannot recover. Her Majesty will explain. Welcome, Your Majesty, to the show. We're delighted to have you back."

"Thank you, Kɛkanu. The subject that I'm going to introduce to you is a very unusual one and one that we very rarely speak about, except in whispered tongues. I refer to the fact that all of us originally came from another world, which we call Gɛdhéma, and that, periodically, new human beings have been introduced to this world from there. The Mennea family is the most recent group. Before that, there was John Miller, and before him, there was Elena, a young woman who was taken to Isurdhuna. There's a long history of these arrivals from Gɛdhéma, and they always bring us new information about the place. Certainly, the most recent examples of historical significance are Pablu and Azizu, who came about 400 years ago and who debated religion fiercely in the palace of my ancestors.

"We had always called the creatures who brought us these new arrivals énsɛs, spirits. The Mennea family prefers to call them aliénɛs because they are real creatures

with bodies and tongues like us, not disembodied spirits. These aliens have been studying humanity for some 2 million years. Their goal has been to provide humanity with a detailed record of its development, once humanity achieves the ability to fly between the stars. That particular ability is important because the aliens live on a world orbiting a star far from here and far from Gɛdhéma. The great distances between the stars make contact between intelligent creatures very slow and difficult, so achievement of starflight is a major accomplishment, and usually represents a level of maturity in that society. But in their immaturity, many species destroy themselves before they achieve starflight. To prevent that fate from overcoming humanity, 72,000 years ago the aliens brought some people to this world so that they could be fruitful and multiply and spread out across the surface of Era. The aliens did not return here again until about 4,500 years ago, when they introduced the ancestors of the Eryan and the Sumis. Because these two groups of people were more advanced culturally and technologically they eventually displaced and largely wiped out the Shell Mound people, about whom we have only begun to learn. I will let Thornton pick up the story at this point."

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Some 27 years ago my family was driving across the desert in a country called Botswana when we saw an object fall from the sky and crash into the ground several hundred meters from us. Because my sister Lua is a physician, we feared that the pilot would be gravely injured, so we drove over to the crash. We found an aliénɛ crawling out of the broken capsule profusely bleeding from one of his arms. Lua applied a tourniquet to the wound. Then a much larger alien ship showed up. It is the policy of the aliénɛs that if anyone sees them, they must be removed from Gɛdhéma because the aliénɛs don't want knowledge of them to disturb humanity's progress.

Consequently, the aliénɛs took my entire family and our two vehicles into their mother ship and brought us here.

"We will talk more about that experience in another program on the World Table, so I won't elaborate about it right now. Needless to say, we were terrified. But the aliénɛs were kind. They offered us a kind of bargain; if we told them about our lives and the lives of our friends and neighbors, and how people lived on Gɛdhéma, they would give us tools and medicines. The questions they asked were the sort of questions that people doing polls ask or anthropologists and sociologists ask. They weren't asking for any terrible, deep, secrets of any sort.so we agreed to be interviewed by them and when we arrived here on Era we had tools that we used to survive, build the university and hospital, and make life better for everyone.

"The aliénɛs told us that they had information about the people who first came to Era; recordings of their voices and videos of them talking, and working together, doing rituals, etc. But until about a year ago, we never requested the information, nor did they offer it to us. That changed last fall, when I was having a telephone conversation with Philos, the head of their base on Skanda, who happens to be my age; in fact, his parents ran the base when my family and I were captured and brought here. We have known each other for 27 years.

"He told us that the very first Shell Mound people who were brought here were settled about 2 kilometers west of Pértatranisér and their head man was a man named Papadam. Philos even showed us exactly where their first camp was, so I organized a local group of archaeologists, and we excavated at that spot starting in the winter last year. We dug up Papadam's camp and learned a lot of basic information about him and

his band: That they did not know how to build houses, only shelters of brush; they did not have any domesticated animals or bows and arrows; that they made stone tools out of obsidian and flint; and that they ate whatever wild foods they could find or kill.

"A presentation about Papadam's camp was given at the all-génadɛma conference about a month ago and afterward the lead archaeologists met over dinner. The consensus of the discussion was that we needed to ask the aliénɛs for the recordings of Papadam and his people. The archaeologists in Gordha had just found a great sword in the tomb they suspected was Majékwɛs's, so we asked the aliens about that. They confirmed that it was indeed his tomb and that the sword was indeed his and that it had been made on Gɛdhéma. They agreed to give us recordings of Majakwés, the founder of one of the two original Eryan settlements on Era. So we now have audio and video recordings of both Majékwɛs and his Eryan clan and Papadam and the first Shell Mound people. With your permission, Kɛkanu, I'd like to play those recordings right now."

Kɛkanu nodded. "That would be incredible! Of course we'd love to hear them."

"First I'm going to play Papadam's recording. His language is completely incomprehensible to us, so we do not have a translation of it, but we do have a short summary of it that the aliénɛs put together. We are hoping to be able to learn the language and translate the entire recording at some point in the future. The second recording is of Majékwɛs. People on the eastern shore will understand perhaps a quarter of it. Some of the tribal people will understand a third or even half of it. But we will provide a sentence by sentence translation as well. Here are the recordings."

Thornton turned to his cell phone and tapped on an icon, which contained the two recordings with their summary or translation. He pressed start and Papadam's voice came

out of the speaker. Kɛkanu looked at the audio needles and nodded; the sound was going out over the radio. After the three minutes of chanting, a mechanical voice offered a brief summary that they were requesting assistance from the forces of nature for bountiful rains and plentiful game.

It was followed by the recording of Majékwɛs urging his two sons to listen to each other, respect each other, and work together to protect the village. Many of the words were familiar but the grammar was different, which made it difficult to understand. Many of the endings of the nouns and verbs were different and some of the vocabulary was unfamiliar, but over the last two weeks the archaeologists and linguists had worked together to reconstruct the exact words and the context, so they were fairly confident of the meaning of the recording.

When it ended, for a minute Kɛkanu was completely speechless. "How long ago was that?"

"The one of Majékwɛs was approximately 4,500 years ago," replied Thornton. "On earth, the Red-Headed Clan had had an extremely cold and snowy winter. They had lost many cattle. They were running low on food; the spring planting was delayed. So they moved their cattle down the slopes close to the lake where the snow had melted and the cattle could get better food. But the people living along the lake were upset. In an ensuing battle the Red-Headed clan was forced to abandon their village and retreat up into the mountains. The aliénɛs, who had been studying the Red-Headed clan, realized that the entire community was in danger of death, so one night the aliénɛs put them to sleep, picked them all up, brought them to Era, and put them down at the site of the city of Gordha. The Red-Headed clan woke up there and were terribly shocked and upset that

they were no longer in their homeland, but they were also relieved that they were in a place with abundant game, plentiful grass, and good soil for their farms. Over the next century their population grew from 300 to 2,000 and they spread out across the Eastern Shore. Meanwhile, the Sumis were brought from a village that was about to be attacked by the army of a nearby city. They had to flee their village and the aliénɛs, who were studying them as well, picked them up and brought them to the site of Lilalara. After a century, they also grew to number 2,000 or so. Both people got along very well for centuries until they spread out over the surface of Era and began to compete for land.

"A third group of people who are also Eryan were brought to the Long Valley and built their village there. They also numbered around 200 or 400 when they arrived and they multiplied so that in a century they were also around 2000 people. The two Eryan groups had great difficulty understanding each other because their languages were different, but over time their dialects merged and became the Eryan we speak today."

Kɛkanu shook his head in amazement. "This is truly an incredible development. Do we know what sort of records the aliens have?"

"We have asked them and they are in the process of making all of their audio and video recordings available to us. However, the archaeologists and historians want to recover our history using their own techniques before we explore the alien records, so we won't be requesting all of the records for quite some time."

"Allow me to add something," said the Queen. "I very much appreciate Thornton's summary of what happened. I want to emphasize that the decision to contact the aliénɛs about Papadam was made by all of the archaeologists together in consensus, because they wanted to be able to continue working together on our world history. My

concern is making sure that our kingdom is safe and that our privacy is respected. The aliénɛs have assured us that they are not currently eavesdropping on us, except for the calls and data we send to each other through their communications network. There is a privacy notice about this which is on all our cell phones and tablet computers. That notice has been on those devices since the beginning and is displayed once every month or two. The aliénɛs put it up on our devices again earlier today. They are not using other kinds of sensors to record us. They have assured us of that and we see no reason to doubt their word."

"What is the motivation of aliénɛs to study us?" asked Kɛkanu.

"The aliénɛs await the day when Gɛdhéma develops star travel," replied Thornton. "When that happens, the gɛdhémɛs will not only discover the aliénɛs, but also all the other intelligent species that live around other stars, and they will probably find us eventually as well. The discovery that your species is not alone in the universe is a very shocking one. The aliénɛs have helped 25 different species manage the transition from being alone in the universe to being part of a community of other intelligent creatures. The easiest way for them to manage that transition is to have humans help them. We are the logical people to help them because we have already been exposed to them. So at some point, perhaps 50 or 100 years from now, the aliénɛs will ask us to come to Gɛdhéma with them and help establish contact with our long lost cousins."

Kɛkanu's jaw dropped. "What an amazing story! What an awesome responsibility!"

"Perhaps we'll start by playing your chants to them," replied Thornton with a smile. "There is no doubt that they would love your music and would immediately

understand the feel of it. Who knows how that contact will be established. Who knows when it will happen. But it calls upon us as a people on Era to continue to develop our civilization, to continue building a world of justice and prosperity for all and of inclusion of all kinds of people. It needs to be a mature 'adult' civilization, unlike the crazy, chaotic civilization dominating Gɛdhéma today. It truly is an amazing responsibility that our grandchildren will face."

"That is, assuming that we agree to participate in that grand adventure," said the queen. "It will be up to us. Era will remain our world forever. But at some point in the future, we will also have contact with our distant cousins on the world that gave us birth. We will learn from them and they will learn from us. Perhaps it will be an amazing partnership. But it's premature to speculate about the shape that partnership might take."

"All we need to do now is continue our seven-year development plan," added Thornton. "These were priorities that were developed by the palace in consultation with a very large number of people on Era and they appear to be making very positive contributions to the progress of our realm. The creation of a society that is striving for justice, prosperity for all, and equal participation for all groups of people is precisely the sort of mature civilization that Gɛdhéma is also moving toward."

"So, let's get back to the story of Papadam and Majékwɛs," said Kɛkanu. "What more do we know about them? When will we inform the public about them?"

"We have a plan to do exactly that," replied the queen. "First, we plan to release not only the audio that you just heard, but the video as well. The aliénɛs had tiny sensors with cameras where Majékwɛs was talking to his sons. The museum in Pértatranisér and the museum in Gordha will be getting special tablets with large screens so that people can

watch the videos in those two places. Furthermore, we have now made them accessible in such a way that anyone with access to a cell phone or a tablet will be able to watch them. We want to encourage the various towns and cities to schedule times when the public can come watch these videos. Beyond that, we have access to many more videos about these two men and their groups of people, and we plan to review them, provide translations, and make them available as well. Ideally, we will have a new video every few weeks for people to watch. We think this will be a very exciting and enriching way to learn about our ancient history."

"That's immensely exciting," said Kɛkanu. "To actually see the faces and hear the voices of people from the distant past is a true gift that the aliénɛs have blessed us with. I think we can be immensely grateful to them for it. If I may, allow me to express my gratitude by chanting the Hymn of the King."

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Kɛkanu let the program run long and took some random telephone calls from the audience. Some were fascinated and some were frightened. They asked a wide range of questions. Clearly, many did not trust the Menneas and even some didn't trust the Queen herself, which surprised her. Many of the questions were poorly thought through; people were trying to grasp what they heard. When Kɛkanu closed by promising that several Menneas would return to talk about their experiences the next day, he guaranteed high ratings to that program.

"I don't know whether this program went well or poorly," commented Estobidhé. "It was . . . confusing. No one knew what to think or say."

"And some were in shock, I'd say," added Thornton.

The studio phone rang again. Kɛkanu pointed. “It’s going to ring all day and my staff will talk to the callers and find out what they are thinking. That’ll give us some idea of the reaction.”

“You’re going to run a program at noon at the shopping center, right?” asked Chris, who had sat silent in the studio during the broadcast. “That’s two hours away. Maybe we’ll get more of a sense then.”

“I don’t think any of you should go to the shopping center, though,” said Andranu. “There are enough people who will recognize you that you might not be safe. But Saré and I are unknown. We’ll go.”

“Can I come?” asked Kalé. “No one here knows me.”

Thornton nodded. “Sure.”

“Thanks, dad!” exclaimed Kalé. She turned to Andranu and Saré and they headed out of the studio. She was extremely excited to be going to the marketplace with her sister-in-law and cousin-in-law. It was a chance to get to know them and have a bit of an adventure at one of the world’s most exciting places.

The three of them walked over to the riverwalk, which ran along the Atranisér and under Route 2, and then up the stairs to the marketplace. Because it was Suksdiu and many people had the day off, the market place was packed. They headed to the central plaza and there Andranu ran into a business associate. “Hail, Andanu!” He said, and the men shook hands quickly.

“Hail Vékdusu!” he replied. “It’s busy here today!”

“You should’ve seen this place a little while ago. They always broadcast the World Table over the loudspeakers here in the central plaza, and usually very few people

sit to listen. But this time everybody came out of the stores and stayed to listen to the interview with the queen and Dhoru Doma-Mɛnnéai. Incredible!"

"What did you think?"

"Well, I don't know what to think." Vékdusu paused for a moment. "It's all so new and unexpected that I can't wrap my head around it. I always knew the gɛdhémɛ were getting medicines and the tablets and cell phones that we use in business and génadɛma, so I knew they were in contact with these creatures… But I never really worried about it!"

"What do you think we should worry about?" asked Saré.

Vékdusu looked at her and Kalé as if he realized that they were there for the first time. "I… I'm not sure. I guess if they wanted to conquer us, they would've done it 5,000 years ago. Instead, they put us here and ran a big experiment on us and our ancestors. That's rather disconcerting. And now they might want to start getting something from us in return for all the stuff they've been giving us, but what would they want?"

"It sounds like they're going to want volunteers in about a century," replied Kalé. They've been watching Gɛdhéma develop for 2 million years and have been recording humanity's progress, for human posterity and for their own research. If in another century or so, Gɛdhéma will be getting to the point where they can send people to nearby stars and the planets orbiting them, then pretty soon they'll discover there's intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. The aliénɛs are going to want our help, as humans, to serve as ambassadors and introduced Gɛdhéma to the other intelligent species in the universe."

Vékdusu looked at her, puzzled. "Who are you?"

“She’s a friend of mine from génadɛma,” exclaimed Saré quickly. “But she knows something about astronomy, and she wants to major in sociology.”

“Oh. Interesting.” Vékdusu turned back to Andranu. “So, what do you think?”

“We listened to the entire broadcast. It was fascinating,” replied Andranu. “I agree with you, it’s hard to know what to make of all of this. I think the queen was very clear about what is going on, however. The aliénɛs plan to give Gɛdhéma the entire history of human evolution in another century or so. They want to practice on us by giving us our history, which apparently goes back 72,000 years with the Shell Mound people. If they just give us all the information they have at once, our archaeologists would stop excavating and would just write up their work based on the aliénɛs’ records. The ideal situation would be for our scholars to continue their work, figuring out the history of the people here on Era, and receive supplemental information from the aliénɛs. The aliénɛs would provide them with information that they otherwise could never recover archaeologically, such as the names of the Shell Mound peoples, their languages and rituals.”

Vékdusu pondered that for a moment. “But why should we care?”

Kalé smiled. “Spoken like a businessman! History may not be of any interest to you, but it’s very interesting to a lot of other people. It has implications for the present and future. I think that’s why it’s important.”

“I see.” Vékdusu thought for a moment “If that’s the only implication other than them needing volunteers from our great grandchildren, I suppose it’s fine. But I’m still not sure that it’s all that important.”

“Think of it this way,” said Andranu. “For our great grandchildren to be ready to volunteer to help these aliénɛs contact Gɛdhéma, our entire society and culture will need to advance and change. Maybe that means they’ll give us a lot more of their technology. It may mean that everyone on this world will be ten times richer than they are now.”

“And it also may mean that we have to build a more spiritual civilization,” pressed Kalé. “A society and culture that are more honest, more trusting, more inclusive, more peaceful… That sort of thing.”

Vékdusu looked at her. “It sounds like you’re a Baha’i.”

“No, I don’t think that’s fair,” replied Andranu. “The hymns call us to the same world as Bahá'u'lláh.”

Vékdusu looked at Andranu a bit surprised; Kalé was surprised as well. “I see what you mean,” Vékdusu said, but he didn’t sound convinced.

“If I may, may I add something?” said a dark haired woman standing nearby. “Excuse me for overhearing your conversation, but it was quite interesting! I heard the entire World Table interview right here on the plaza. It was absolutely packed. I wasn’t frightened by anything I heard, but I was disturbed by the fact that we heard about the Shell Mound people and about the first Eryan people, but we never heard anything about the Sumis.” It was clear from her slight accent that she was herself Sumi.

“I think I heard that the archaeologists studying Sumilara and Sumi archaeological sites wanted to continue their work without asking for information,” said Kalé. “I’m sure there is information about the first Sumis on this planet as well.”

“That’s good,” the woman looked at her closely. “How do you know that?”

“I guess you could say we have insider information,” replied Andranu. “Saré and I are both married into the family.”

The woman nodded. “Of course. By the way, my name is Inanna. I am a friend of your wife’s sister Marié. We’re both students here at the Pértatranisér Institute for the Arts.”

Andranu smiled. “Oh, good! Then I may see you around town sometime. I’ll say hello to Marié for you.”

“Thank you. I’m very impressed by Marié’s painting and drawing. I’m not very good at those particular arts. My thing is music; singing, playing traditional Sumi instruments, and playing the piano. I’ve also picked up a certain flair as a stand-up comic too!”

They all laughed at that. “That’s very new! I didn’t know the Center for the Arts taught that!” said Kalé.

Inanna shook her head. “No, they don’t teach it, but we have fun once a week in our Suksdiu evening coffeehouse. We all take turns performing. We do some pretty crazy things!”

“We’ll have to go sometime, then,” said Saré. They waved goodbye to Vékdusu and Inanna and headed across the marketplace.

In another hour, Kɛkanu and his team showed up to set up for the noon concert in the central plaza. More buses were arriving from around the western shore to bring people to the marketplace at that time; the crowd was always biggest right before, during, and after the daily concert. About half an hour before the concert began, Kɛkanu finished

talking to the various performers and making sure everything was lined up and ready to go when he saw Andrunu, Saré, and Kalé nearby. He waved them over.

"So, what have you heard?"

"We've run into quite a few friends," replied Andranu "Most people really don't know what to think. No one seems particularly frightened because they don't use tablets or cell phones. They don't feel like their privacy might be compromised. Two friends of mine who work at the bank, however, had remembered seeing the privacy statement appear on the tablet that the bank had, and wondering what to make of it. They clicked on "accept" without really knowing what they were accepting and now they worry."

"They were assenting to the privacy rules," said Kɛkanu, "And those rules were reasonable." Andranu nodded. I know, but people are still worried."

Kékanu nodded. "I understand."

Marié came forward from the back of the stage where she has been helping with the set up. Kalé saw her cousin and waved, so Marié came right up to Kɛkanu. "Did you have fun walking around the marketplace?" she asked.

Kalé nodded. "This is a fascinating place. I always enjoy walking around the market here. It's just about as big as both Mɛlwika and Mɛddoakwés. And the concert makes it so much more exciting than those places!"

"The daily concerts really do make this place," agreed Kɛkanu. "We have quite a synergy going here; the concert brings people to the marketplace; the marketplace is a huge commercial operation that makes a good profit; the profit helps expand businesses, including the radio station and the recording studio; the concert is broadcast live every day over channel one that also helps boost record sales and visibility."

“It really is quite something,” agreed Andranu.

“Oh, by the way, we saw your friend Inanna here in the marketplace,” said Kalé. “She said she was very impressed by your painting and sketch work.”

Marié smiled. “She’s an incredible singer; you should hear her sing and play the piano at the same time! And she can sing in both Eryan and Sumi! I’ve even heard her sing a song that went back-and-forth between the two languages!”

Kɛkanu’s ears perked up. “Really? That’s quite a talent!”

“Yes, she’s really impressive. She’s another of those Sumilara army brats with an Eryan father and a Sumi mother. She’s been here at the women’s génadɛma two years and is majoring in music.”

“Really?” said Kɛkanu. “I’d like to meet her sometime. I’ve been looking for Sumi talent.”

“Alright,” said Marié. She began to scan the growing crowd because she knew that Inanna attended many of the concerts. Andranu, Kalé, and Saré began to do the same.

“There she is!” said Saré, discreetly pointing to the back of the crowd.

“I see her,” agreed Marié. She jumped off the stage and hurried over to her friend, whom she brought back to the stage with her. “I’d like to introduce you to Kɛkanu,” said Marié. “Kalé was telling me about running into you and we were talking about how fantastic your singing and musical performance is.”

“Oh, thank you,” replied Inanna. “I’m still an amateur!”

“Everyone starts out as an amateur, “replied Kɛkanu. “Marié says you’re singing a bilingual song in Sumi and Eryan while playing the piano. I think I may have heard of

you. Is Bɛlbloré your piano teacher? She was telling me about a brilliant piano student she had who is already playing pretty advanced tunes after barely two years of study."

"Yes, she is my piano teacher, but she might very well be talking about someone else."

How many brilliant piano students are there who part Sumi and part Eryan?" asked Kɛkanu with a smile.

Inanna nodded. "I'm the only one."

"You should hear her song about the girl from Sumilara," said Marié. "She sings it in both Eryan and Sumi, back-and-forth, and it's quite funny!"

"Really?" said Kɛkanu. He pointed to the piano on stage. "I'd love to hear it!"

"Oh no, no no," replied Inanna, embarrassed. "I'm not ready for that!"

"It'll just be a little private affair," replied Kɛkanu. "The microphone is off and the crowd won't hear you. I know it's spontaneous so I'm not going to expect perfection!"

Inanna smiled again, but the embarrassment on her face was converting into a sense of challenge. "All right," she replied. She hesitated for a moment, and then jumped up on the stage and walked over to the piano. She motioned the others to stand between her and the crowd so that she couldn't see them. Kɛkanu had a devilish smile on his face; he loved to challenge young people. It was one of his ways of finding talent.

Inanna began to play the piano, introducing the tune of the song. She had no sheet music in front of her; clearly she was very comfortable with the instrument and the music was in her head. Then she began to sing. The pace of the music picked up and became quite rousing as she talked about a young Sumi girl leaving the island, heading towards

the mainland and struggling to make sense of the new world around her. When she switched to Sumi, Andranu and Saré listened very closely, amused by the words. When she finished, they all applauded. So did several dozen members of the audience, who came closer to the stage to be able to hear her.

Fantastic!" said Kɛkanu. "Would you like to play today in the concert?"

Inanna looks slightly horrified. "Oh, no, I never could do that! Too scary!"

"Well, think about it," said Kɛkanu. "There's always tomorrow. I do this five days a week, after all."

"Thank you so much. I aspire to be able to perform in this concert. Just give me a few days to think about it. What I really would like to do is become a professional musician and broadcaster."

"Broadcaster?" said Kɛkanu. "Do you know that we're expanding our operation? We're about to build a brand new studio for radio broadcasting and recording. We want to increase the number of hours of programming we produce from 6 to 8 and eventually to 12. And we want to be able to broadcast in Sumi. So your interest is well timed."

"Thank you, you're very kind. I'd love to get involved in broadcasting in Sumi. It seems to me that it's badly needed. The only Sumi radio programs that are produced right now really aren't very good."

"That's my impression as well, but I don't know the language," replied Kɛkanu. "We definitely need to talk some more."

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Two days passed before the World Table returned to the subject of the aliens. Thornton, Chris, Liz, and Jordan appeared on the show to talk about their experiences when they

were captured. Jordan's story as a six year-old was filled with the most amount of fright; Thornton's, because he immediately started to build a relationship with Philos, what is the most inquisitive. Kɛkanu was absolutely fascinated and often interrupted them to ask questions. The Menneas spoke about how they agreed to be interviewed by the aliens in return for supplies and agreed to share their observations about Eryan society in return for additional supplies, but they didn't get into very many details. The subject of the emptying of Long Lake came up as well, and they described the ethical concerns they conveyed to the aliens before the lake began to drain, because they were afraid that the dam holding the lake back would suddenly break and Ora would be completely destroyed. The dam was already weakening, and the flood had reached nearly to its top; and it was a matter of time before the dam would wash away and quickly reestablish the sea.

After they met Inanna at the concert, Kalé had conveyed her comment that they had obtained recordings of the Eryan and the Shell Mound people but not of the Sumis. Thornton passed that observation on to Philos and within 12 hours they had a recording of the headman of the first Sumi village meeting with Mitridatos, the son of Mégékwɛs. In the recording he was giving Mitrodatos permission to marry his daughter. It was a fitting choice because it brought the two people together in a very amicable fashion. The big problem was the grave difficulty understanding the Sumerian of 4,500 years ago. Kɛkanu brought Randu from the island to help make sense of the recording, and Inanna assisted. The two of them were able to understand and translate parts of the text into Eryan, and they repeated their translation in modern Sumi as well. For the rest of the show, Randu and Inanna began to stream a live translation of the World Table over

channel 3, which was the one over which Sumi broadcasts were done in the evenings. It was the first time the World Table had been made available in the Sumi language, and while no one had been informed ahead of time, a fair number of people on the island who knew a little bit of Eryan switched channels and listened intently.

After the show ended, Kɛkanu looked at the others, pleased. “This may be the most dramatic program we’ve ever done on the World Table,” he said. “In some ways it’s more dramatic than the show of two days ago.”

“The show of two days ago was shocking and even a bit frightening, but it wasn’t as dramatic,” observed Chris. “It’s very interesting to see what sort of reaction has occurred. So far, no one is accusing my family of being aliens in disguise, and no one seems to want to attack us or even severely criticize us.”

“But that may change,” said Jordan. “We’ll have to keep a close eye on the silk screened posters going up around town. That’s usually where you first see extreme reactions.”

“I haven’t seen any of them yet,” exclaimed Kɛkanu. “But it may be early. And I do wonder whether I’ll be criticized or condemned as well.”

“I think the most controversial issue will be the great flood and the destruction of half of Ora,” said Thornton. “Fortunately, only a handful of people died, but the largest city on the western shore was almost completely swept away over a six-month period of time and thousands of peoples’ lives were badly disrupted. And the Lord took a vantage of the situation to gain control over a larger fraction of the population.”

“That was Lord Mitru,” said Kɛkanu dismissively. “I was living in the palace there most of the time. He really saw the flood as a big opportunity, not only to rebuild

his city, but to centralize as much of the province as he could. He was a greedy, self-centered man."

"I'm so glad you were able to get that recording of Sisigal giving permission for Mitridatos to marry his daughter," said Inanna. "It really brings the two people on this world together. It shows our entire history wasn't a history of wars and domination."

Thornton nodded. "I agree. It was really perfect."

"I was very impressed by your simultaneous translation," Randu said to Inanna. "There were some Eryan terms I really wasn't sure what to do with, but you translated them very quickly!"

Inanna smiled shyly. "Thank you very much. It was a real pleasure."

"I wonder whether we can try this more often," said Kɛkanu. "If you're willing, I'd love to try a regular translation of the World Table on channel 3. And when I sing, you can even sing!"

Inanna's eyes brightened. "I'd love to try that!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Kɛkanu. "I know you still want to continue your education, and I think that's essential for your future, but I think you could probably do this for about two hours a day. We do have some prepared notes ahead of time, but they're not very easy to read."

"Some of those notes could be typed up ahead of time," observed Dɛrɛsé, Kɛkanu's wife. "We have the staff to do it."

"There may be some days I can't be available, but I probably could translate four days out of five," said Inanna. "The biggest problem I see is that some of the courses I've

been taking start during the eclipse. But generally, the World Table is over before morning classes start. The big problem for me would be getting to bed earlier!"

Kɛkanu laughed at that. "That's our big problem as well. We're often up 90 minutes before sunrise to make sure we have everything ready to go when the eclipse begins at 7:15 am." We also do a lot of preparatory work in the afternoon for the next day's show."

"I could probably come in in the afternoons as well," said Inanna.

Kɛkanu nodded. "Then we have a plan. We will start to broadcast the World Table in Sumi as well."

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Kostɛkhéma

late Abɛlménu/mid Sept. 26/644

Thornton had never seen Kostɛkhéma looking so good. The main street, which had been paved several years earlier when Route 1 was paved right through town, now had concrete sidewalks. The more rundown buildings have either been fixed up or torn down and replaced by grass. Some buildings even had flowerpots. The restaurant and hotel, which used to be the home of Mɛdhkordé and her whores, was now a respectable tourist gathering place, though the ownership had not changed. Thornton was surprised to see young couples strolling the streets and walking into stores that sold fur coats, hats, and beautiful Tutanɛ rugs.

He parked his pickup around the corner from the hotel because there were no parking spaces in front of the building and walked in the main door. Ɛndrokordu was waiting for him in the hotel lounge.

"You made it!" he said. "And you're early."

"With a wide paved road and fairly little traffic, I made good time," replied Thornton. "I got here from Mɛlwika in a bit less than three hours."

"That's pretty good. I got here from getting Géndonɛtroba in less than two. By the way, Route 97 has now been cleared and paved all the way down the escarpment from Géndonatroba to the floor of the Long Valley and the army is beginning to pave the road across the valley to route 92. Route 99 is coming along pretty well, also. The army thinks they'll have it paved from Gérpola to the bottom of the escarpment before winter."

"What about uphill towards the mountains?"

"The tribe has cleared the routes for both roads all the way up to the timberline. Some paving will probably start before the first frost, but most of the work will be done next year. I understand Routes 97 and 99 on the western side of the Spine have also been cleared all the way up to the tree line and some paving work has begun."

"That's what I've heard as well. Maybe when I leave here, I'll detour south to Gimutroba and Wurontroba and see how much work has been done on those roads. But there's still no agreement to complete them over the passes and connect the eastern and western ends together."

"No, the tribal council is still holding out, but I think if we can resolve questions about the use of the forest along both sides of the Spine, they'll agree to the completion of both 97 and 99."

"Really? That'd be great. That makes this meeting even more important."

"Exactly." ɛndrokordu nodded. "Let me show you where we're meeting." He led Thornton down the hall to a large meeting room with a very large table and a dozen chairs arranged around it. Thornton nodded. "This is perfect," he said. He put down his satchel and pulled out a map, which he proceeded to unfold. By the time he was finished, it was 2 meters long and a meter and a half wide and covered the table almost perfectly like a tablecloth.

ɛndrokordu looked at it admiringly. "I had no idea we had such a perfect map of the Spine Mountains."

“This is brand new. The one we had last year has been updated extensively using aerial photos. The altitude lines are much more accurate.”

“But there are no tribal boundaries marked on it.”

“Correct. There are no official boundaries. Presumably, everyone will agree that the crest line of the Spine is the border between the tribes on the eastern and western flanks. The border between the Ghéslonɛ and the Géndonɛ is disputed. The boundary between the Géndonɛ and the Kaitɛrɛ should be very simple since they only contact each other along the crest line of the Spine. But the border between the Kaitɛrɛ and the Késtonɛ has not been settled and it’s not clear which tribe claims the western flanks of the Spine Mountains north of Route 1. Even the Mégɛndɛrɛs have made noises that some of it belongs to them, even if Gorda is 85 km away.”

“But don’t you have borders to propose?”

“Yes, but they are on a sheet of cellophane that I can roll over the map later.”

“I see. We’ve got about an hour before everyone is scheduled to arrive, so I suggest we get some food. For you, a late supper; for me, breakfast.”

Thornton nodded and the men headed back to the lobby and into the restaurant, where they ordered meals. The Kostɛkhéma hotel restaurant did something Thornton had never seen before: it offered breakfast, lunch, and dinner 24 hours a day and even had menus in Sumi. When he pointed that out to ɛndrokordu, the man nodded. “Believe it or not, Kostɛkhéma now has a Sumiwika! It’s only a half dozen families. They’re here because more and more Sumi lords and tourists are coming here to see the snow or to go hunting.”

“What about Mɛdhkordé and her prostitutes? I know she spends most of her time now in Ora, but doesn’t she still own this place?”

“I believe she does, but it’s a legitimate business. I gather the prostitutes have moved to a discreet place on a side street.”

“I wondered whether it was something like that. I did see a lot of young men walking around.”

“They’re not just here for her prostitutes.” ɛndrokordu leaned close. “This is also becoming a place for men to visit who want to make love with other men.”

“Ha. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. That’s true in the resort towns on Gɛdhéma as well, I am told.”

They finished supper--or breakfast--and returned to the meeting room, where the Géndonɛ and Kaitɛrɛ representatives had already arrived. They each sat on the side of the map closest to their own territory. A few minutes later, the mayor of Kostɛkhéma and two members of the town council joined them, and immediately after that, the chief of the Ghéslonɛ and their development officer arrived. Coffee, tea, and lemonade arrived with some little pastries, and by the time they had finished enjoying them, the representatives of the Késtonɛ, the Mégɛndɛrɛs, and the Mémɛnɛghonɛ arrived as well. They had to move more chairs into the room to fit everyone around the table.

“Welcome everyone,” said Thornton. “Her Majesty has asked ɛndrokordu and me to convene this meeting to resolve tribal boundaries in the Spine area. Our goal is to resolve them before Her Majesty arrives here in two days. She has asked the consultative assemblies of the eastern, northern, and southern tribes to meet here so that they can all

get to know each other. Each of the three provinces' assemblies will also have their own separate meetings to conduct their usual business and Her Majesty will meet with all three of them, both individually and together. I should add that two days ago while she was in Isurdhuna, Her Majesty announced that ɛndrokordu has been appointed the first Director of the Royal Department of Forests. The department will develop policies and strategies for protecting and maintaining our world's forests. It will be able to enforce those policies in the Eryan and Sumi parts of the world, but the enforcement of the policies in the tribal jurisdictions will fall on the tribes themselves."

"As an incentive, the crown will pay the tribes to hire their own people to serve as forest rangers and will pay for their education and training," added ɛndrokordu. "The crown will also pay their salaries as long as the tribes agree to enforce the forestry regulations."

"So we're going to be bribed into accepting the crown's regulations?" said Mɛnɛgékwɛs, the Kaitɛrɛ chief.

"We need to have reasonable, rational, and protective policies so that our forests will continue to thrive and support our children and grandchildren. That will be the goal of the crown's forestry regulations. That is best accomplished by one set of regulations for the whole kingdom. But if the tribe feels that a different set of regulations would work better on their land, they can be discussed."

"And we still will receive the salary for the forest rangers?"

ɛndrokordu nodded. “Indeed. We’re talking about one forester for every hundred square kilometers. Your tribes have up to two or three thousand square kilometers of forest, so that’s a substantial number of forestry agents.”

“But that means we have to agree on the boundaries first,” said Ornkordu, the Ghésɛlonɛ chief. “We have no boundary between our land and Géndona. They want to draw the boundary along Route 1. But Route 1 goes straight from Kostɛkhéma to Moruagras and follows the Kostisér river valley. We’ve hunted in that valley for centuries on both sides of the river and we have a village on its northern bank. So we can’t agree to Route 1 as the boundary between the two tribes.”

Thornton nodded. “ɛndrokordu and I have been discussing that already. He’s Géndonɛ so he certainly is in favor of maximizing his tribe’s land. But we both have agreed that the fairest thing to do is to run the boundary between the two tribes along the watershed line between the Kostisér and Ténsisér rivers. The Kostisér flows off the Spine to Moruagras; the Ténsisér flows off the Spine to Géndonɛtroba. The logical border is right between the two of them. For generations, hunters have followed trails up those rivers to the hunting grounds and then followed the trails back down to their home villages.”

“But for the last few decades, many have considered Route 1 to be the boundary,” said ɛjnokordu, the Géndonɛ chief.

“But you must admit that hunters from my tribe drive up Route 1, park, and hunt both northward and southward from the road,” replied Ornkordu. “Route 1 clearly is in our territory. It’s not the boundary of our territory.”

ɛjnokordu nodded reluctantly.

There was a moment of silence as Thornton observed both men carefully. “I gather that resolves that particular issue. Another major issue is the boundary between Kostɛkhéma and the Késtonɛ tribe. The two villages are only 20 kilometers apart. The logical thing to do would be to divide the border exactly between the two of them, 10 kilometers from each village, and then extend that to the north and south.”

“But you can’t extend it too far north, because that will get into the territory of my tribe,” said Ekwanu, the chief of the Mémɛnɛgonɛ tribe.

“We were thinking the logical border between your tribe and the Késtonɛ is Route 1,” said ɛndrokordu, changing the subject. “Your villages are on opposite sides of the route and about the same distance from it.”

“But what about all this land up here?” said Duke Walékwɛs of the Mégɛndɛrɛs. “The Mémɛnɛgonɛ are the logical ones to claim the northern shoulders of the Spine on the west side because they are the ones closest to it, but they’re also an extremely small tribe. It makes no sense for them to have a thousand square kilometers of forest when they can’t use it. It makes more sense to extend the claim of the Mégɛndɛrɛs around their claim and all the way up to the top of the Spine.”

Ekwanu scoffed. “We’re the only ones who have ever hunted up there, and so the land is ours! Your people have never hunted that high up. You always stayed much closer to Gordha. You already have the northern mountains all the way up to their crest. You don’t need to go all the way east to the Spine!”

“We’re inclined to agree,” said ɛndrokordu. “The Mémɛnɛgonɛ have a legitimate claim to that area because they do hunt there occasionally, and no one else does. If they can’t utilize all those resources, we can leave the land alone as wilderness so the animals have a safe refuge. Or the Mémɛnɛgonɛ could contract out the work there to other companies or even other tribes as long as they’re still in control over it.”

“That’s ridiculous!” said Duke Walékwɛs.

“Regardless, I think you’d agree that if you made a claim to that huge area, it wouldn’t hold up in court,” replied Thornton. “It clearly belongs to the tribe that’s closest to it, and whose land clearly blocks anyone else’s claim to the upper slopes. The Mémɛnɛgonɛ live in a river valley that extends quite far north, and their claim to their valley obviously is quite legitimate. It cuts off any claim that the Mégɛndɛrɛs can make.”

Walékwɛs glared at Thornton, whom he considered a friend, shook his head, disgusted, but said nothing.

“The other easy border to settle is the one between the Géndonɛ and the Kaitɛrɛ,” said ɛndrokordu. “They’re on opposite sides of the Spine, so the watershed line of the Spine is the logical border between them.”

“Until you get close to Kostɛkhéma,” said Mayor Mitrubbéru. “I’m still waiting to hear what you propose for us.”

“We propose a block of land 20 kilometers wide and 20 kilometers long for Kostɛkhéma,” replied ɛndrokordu. “It would run 10 kilometers east of the Spine and 10 kilometers west of the Spine, 10 kilometers south of Kostɛkhéma and 10 kilometers north of it.”

“But that’s really not very much land for us,” replied Mitrubbéru. “Admittedly, our village has only been around for a century or so, so it never had a natural claim to any territory. But we have been here for at least a century and our hunters hunt over a much larger area than that. Now that we have tourists coming, we need to have a large area where we can hunt.”

“Give them more land to the north,” replied Duke Walékwɛs. “The Mémɛnɛgonɛ really don’t hunt in that area anyway.”

Ekwanu scowled; Walékwɛs was getting a bit of revenge. But he saw some advantage to placating Walékwɛs. “I think it’s legitimate to give them a bit more land to the north, but I wouldn’t make it too much. If their land extended 30 km north of Kostɛkhéma, for example, that’s about a two day hunting expedition to get to the far end and a day or two to get back to Kostakhéma. That’s a pretty good-sized area.”

“Thank you, that’s generous,” replied ɛndrokordu.

“Of course, they’ll probably want more land to the north as soon as they clear a dirt track so they can get in and out more quickly,” complained Modobéru, the chief of the Késtonɛ.

“It really doesn’t give us enough land to the south of Kostɛkhéma, either,” complained Modobéru. “Our hunters often travel southward as much as 30 or 40 kilometers. There’s excellent big game 40 or 50 kilometers to the south.”

“There’s a solution for that,” replied ɛndrokordu. “The area to the south otherwise belongs to the Géndonɛ and the Kaitɛrɛ. It might be possible to negotiate with both of those tribes for a certain number of annual hunting permits for hunters coming out of

Kostɛkhéma. We all agree that the number of animals taken has to be managed. The hunters are already reporting a decline in the game throughout this area."

"That's true," agreed ɛjnokordu. "You said we'd get one forest ranger for every 100 square kilometers. Does that apply to our entire tribal territory?"

"No," replied ɛndrokordu. "It would only apply to the land that you declare part of the Spine Forest Park. If you declared half of your land part of it, you would get forest rangers for that portion of your land."

"And what can we do inside the park boundaries?" asked Ménɛghuɛs, the Kaitɛrɛ chief.

"Within the park boundaries, hunting would be possible but would be restricted to certain areas only. Farming and pasturage of domestic animals would be forbidden. The cutting of timber would be permitted but would be carefully managed."

The tribal representatives considered that for a minute. Then Thornton said, "The tribes that created the Central Grassland Park and the North and South Forest Parks generally placed about half their land into the parks and kept about half of it out. The half of the land that was outside the park was more than enough for their needs and for future growth of the tribe. The parklands can still be used but the priority is the animals and plants, not the people. If the animals don't have some land that is primarily theirs, they'll be wiped out."

"That makes sense," said Mayor Mitrubbéru. "But one thing that concerns me is the fact that the land our town will get is the highest land in the world. It has almost no

usable forests for timber. Could we also get some land at a lower altitude where we would be able to run a timber company?"

Thornton turned to ɛndrokordu. "We're not inclined to support that idea unless you can convince the Méménɛgonɛ or the Késtonɛ to give you some of the land along Route 1," replied ɛndrokordu. "Not every village or city on this world has suitable timber. Many of them have to import it. Besides, none of the timber that's anywhere near you would be good for furniture and relatively little of it would be good for construction. And you probably won't need firewood in another five or 10 years because a gas pipeline will be built along Route 1 and you'll have access to gas."

"I hope that's true," replied Mitrubbéru.

The various tribal representatives eyed each other nervously. Finally, Modobéru of the Késtonɛ said, "Let's put some lines on this map and finalize the boundaries."

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Once those assembled agreed on an outline of the approach to set the boundaries for the different tribes, it was then time to settle the details. They met another few hours to pour over maps and discuss what was practical. The next morning they looked at all the maps again and finished refining the boundaries. Rather than simple straight-line boundaries for the town of Kostɛkhéma, they came up with a set of boundaries that accommodated the town's needs better.

The next day, the queen and her entourage arrived in Kostɛkhéma and buses brought the representatives of the various tribes. The focus of attention shifted to the old fortress, where there was much more space, though the accommodations weren't as good.

The consultative assemblies of the northern, southern, and eastern provinces met together as a single big body for the morning, and the queen met with them to discuss the advancement of the Tutanɛ tribes in general. She made sure that all the tribes were involved; she even asked representatives of the Mɛghɛndrɛs and the Kwolonɛ to attend as observers. A fairly careful agenda was maintained to keep everyone focused on a set of issues, and that avoided haggling and disputation. One subject that did come up spontaneously was the beautification of the sacred springs. The issue of who had jurisdiction over them was not resolved, but it was agreed that a corporation with representatives from all the tribes would be responsible for it and tribes pledged various sums of money to the corporation to get started repairing the facilities there. Thornton even volunteered 1,000 dhanay from the Mennea family as a gift to the corporation, which was received well.

That afternoon began with a long banquet for all the attendees, then the three provincial consultative assemblies met separately in different rooms in the fort. They also had agendas proposed by each province's development officer but approved by the palace in order to keep them focused. They met that evening and all the next day, and then the queen brought the three consultative assemblies together for one last common meeting, where she praised them highly and pledged continued support from the palace, so that the tribes could continue to advance.

The final common meeting went fairly late. When it was over, Duke Kandékwɛs went to find Thornton, who had been permitted to sit in the back as an observer. "Have you time to meet with Her Majesty now? She'd like a few minutes."

“Of course, but isn’t Her Majesty exhausted? This has been a very very busy few days!”

“We’re all exhausted, but that doesn’t matter, she just would like you to join us for a few minutes.”

“Of course, I’d be honored.” Kandékwɛs pointed down the hallway and Thornton followed the Duke to the royal quarters.

He was impressed that part of the fortress had been fixed up quite nicely. Most of it was pretty primitive and he was glad that he had stayed in the hotel in town.

Her Majesty was relaxing in a chair with Prince Majékwɛs and Princess Ninlilé. When Thornton entered, the three of them actually rose for him, much to his surprise. He immediately stopped. “How may I be of assistance to you, Your Majesty?”

“You have been of great assistance to me over the last few days, Lord Thornton,” she replied. “The most difficult issues to resolve in this world usually involve land. You and ɛndrokordu managed to get the tribes to agree on common boundaries! You even managed to get them to agree to give Kostɛkhéma a reasonable piece of territory! And I understand, speaking to many of the tribesmen, that most of the tribes plan to designate half or more of their territories as part of the Spine Forest Park.”

“Indeed, Your Majesty, that appears to be the case. ɛndrokordu and I made a great team. Most of the boundaries were fairly easy to set, so we started with the easy ones to build some trust amongst the attendees. Once that was done, the more difficult boundaries were set, then all the boundaries were modified based on the actual lay of the land. In the process, the tribes became quite positive about designating large portions of

their land as part of the park, mainly because we pledged that they could all employ forest rangers from among their tribal members to manage their parklands based on the formula of one ranger per hundred square kilometers."

Her Majesty nodded. "That's rather generous, but I suppose that's what we agreed to do. It could very well be that most of the Mémɛnɛgonɛ men will have to be hired as foresters!"

"They'll need about 10 forest rangers, because they agreed to give up about a quarter of their land to Kostɛkhéma. The other good result of this discussion is the agreement to complete Routes 97 and 99 over the Spine. Because both tribes will have forest rangers on their own side and they will be trained to follow the same rules and paid the same amount of money, the tribes feel that they're able to trust each other and respect each other's territory. And because Kostɛkhéma is the third party bordering their territories, and because Kostɛkhéma will probably have a fair number of hunting parties, there will be a system of hunting licenses given out to regulate how many game are taken. That should assure the continued protection of the large game occupying the Spine meadowlands."

"Excellent. What areas are left to designate parks?"

Thornton smiled. "Perhaps the most difficult area of all; the Snowy Mountains between the western shore and the Long Valley. It's heavily utilized for hunting and lumbering, and there are many jurisdictions that will have to be satisfied."

"Perhaps that's something you could turn to next year."

Thornton nodded. “As you wish, Your Majesty. I think ɛndrokordu will do an excellent job, but I will be glad to assist him. It seems like a good job for both the Royal Forestry Department and the Royal Geological Survey.”

“Thank you, Lord, I’m deeply grateful.”

“Lord, how do you do all these things? How is it your family can do so much?” asked the Duke.

“I don’t think there’s a simple answer to that question. Some of it is my father and mother’s personalities and their utter devotion to serving others. Some of it is the way they encouraged and raised us. Some of it is our love of God, Bahá'u'lláh, and human beings. And some of it is simply a love of doing the things that we’re doing. I love the natural sciences! So it’s been quite easy for me to become passionately involved in geology, oceanography, forestry, and ecology.”

“You forgot archaeology,” said Mégékwɛs.”The work that you’ve been doing with the archaeological site in Pértatranisér has been fascinating, and you’ve been quite an ambassador for us with the aliens.”

“The aliens are quite interesting in that their primary concern isn’t treating us humanely, but studying us, so they can learn something universal about intelligent life. And frankly, that’s a problem. As important as it is to learn about the universal qualities of sentient beings, you still have an ethical obligation when the river by the planet’s largest city is blocked temporarily by a landslide, and when that landslide washes away, the city will be destroyed. The more I think about that, the more shocked I am by their attitude. It seems to me that if you’re interested in studying the characteristics of intelligent life, you have to recognize that love and sympathy and care are universal

qualities of them all. I'm not saying the aliens aren't equipped with those qualities because clearly they are, just like we are. But I would've thought that they would recognize that what they did was an ethical lapse. A universal ethical lapse."

"That's fascinating," exclaimed the queen. "So what you're saying is that they are fallible beings just like us."

Thornton nodded. "Certainly."

"So how much can we trust them?" asked Duke Kandékwɛs.

"I don't think it's a question of whether we can trust them or not. I think it's a question of how much we can argue with them. If there is one thing my family learned from the great flood, it's that the aliens have a well-tuned ethical consciousness and if they violate their ethics, you can bring them to account. And I think that's extremely important. So far, that has always been our experience."

"That's very comforting," said the queen.

"But what if we think something is ethical that really isn't, and what if they think something is ethical that isn't?" asked the prince.

"We're talking about two parties who are both intelligent, trying to arrive at a universal ethical position," replied Thornton. "Sometimes they'll be right and sometimes we'll be right. We're going to have to be patient with each other. But I think the Bahá'í principles of consultation have proved quite effective in resolving issues with them to date."

"In other words, give-and-take between the two parties," said the Duke.

"Yes, something like that," agreed Thornton.

“So far, the populace really doesn’t know what to think about contact with the aliens,” said the queen. “It’s now been over a month since the three radio broadcasts occurred, and there’s still no resentment or outpouring of anger, or even of panic and worry. So far, it appears the reactions have been muted.”

“I agree. It’s been a wait and see response,” said Thornton.

The duke nodded. “Well put.”

This gets to another matter. I wanted to talk to you about tonight,” said the queen. “I want to establish a committee to oversee all communications with them. I’m thinking that the committee should consist of you, the Duke, the Prince, and your father. Any decisions to ask the aliens questions or provide them with information should be cleared by the committee ahead of time. Since it’s a small committee, it should be able to work pretty quickly. I think it’s wise for the sake of the kingdom to coordinate the communications with them from now on.”

Thornton nodded. “I agree, and that’s also something that my father suggested a few weeks ago, so I know he agrees as well.”

The queen nodded. “Good. We’ll draw up a proclamation in the morning. And Lord, I hope when this is over, you will take a vacation with your wife and get away for a few days!”

“She has been asking for exactly that, Your Majesty, and we still have a few weeks before the fall semester begins. I’ll suggest that to her right away.”

“Please tell her it is a command of her sovereign,” replied the queen, with a smile.

The next day, Thornton slept late and then headed west to Mɛlwika. Because he was going to gain seven hours that day, he took his time. He drove all the way to the southern end of the Kaiterɛ country on Route 82 and ascended Route 99 eastward into the Spine Highlands. He followed it as far as he could; only a few kilometers had one lane paved, and the rest of it was gravel and dirt. When he reached the end, near the tree line, he drove back down and turned right onto Route 97, which similarly took him up to the tree line close to the equator. Satisfied, he drove back down to Route 82 and then south and west on Route 69 to Wurontroba, and then up Route 78 to Awswika and Sértroba. After he passed Sértroba he saw a new inn nestled against the Gordha ridge next to a hot spring. It was new; he had never seen it before.

He continued north to Gordha, but stopped when he got to the excavation of the tunnel through the ridge. His timing couldn't have been better; they had broken through with a very narrow tunnel the night before. He was invited to join the engineers on a quick 2 kilometer hike with torches through the narrow, wet tunnel. It was barely a meter wide and less than 2 meter high; sometimes they had to bend over to get through. There was a constant trickle of water along the floor because the tunnel broke through many different aquifers in the ridge. But they joyfully completed the trek and were the first humans to walk through the depths of the ridge from west to east.

From there, he headed straight home, arriving a bit before sunset. He went to find Lébé right away. "The queen has given us a command," he said, as he concluded his summary of the last few days at Kostɛkhéma. "She has ordered us to go on vacation!"

"What?" said Lébé. "But I have huge amounts of work to do in the next couple of weeks before the fall semester begins!"

“Well, it is an order from our monarch,” replied Thornton, with a smile. “I just noticed that a new inn has opened east of Sertroba where there are hot springs at the base of the ridge. I was thinking that you and I and the kids could go there for three or four days. We could always go visit our friends in Sértroba some of that time, but we could also do a little hiking, and we could certainly do a lot of soaking in the hot springs.

Lébé thought about that. “Three days. I could manage that. Jonkrisu would be thrilled; he’s been taking engineering courses all summer and is tired of it. I’m not sure whether Kalé can do it, but we could ask. As for Jalalu, I know he is available, but Saré has tasks at Mɛddoakwés Hospital for some of that time.”

“She could always join us a day or two late. I think it would be nice for the five of us to be together one more time. It may never happen again.”

“Actually, I’m not sure it ever has happened,” replied Lébé. “We’ve always either been in this house or another house with almost the entire household or we’ve been traveling with some kids and not others. It will be strange!”

Thornton chuckled at that. “Yes it would be a little strange, but it would also be nice. And I think you and I should try to get together for a day or two at a time as well. The queen is right; we really are working too hard. I’m not sure it’s been good for our kids.”

Lébé shrugged. “Maybe. This household is pretty traditional in one sense; it’s not a nuclear family, but a huge extended family with three generations and lots of cousins around all the time. That’s the way the Eryan have always lived.”

“I suspect that’s the way human beings have almost always lived,” agreed Thornton. “If you talk to Kalé, I’ll talk to Jalalu. If they can do it, I’ll make a reservation for us at that inn.”

Lébé nodded. “Good.”

They talked a while more and then Thornton went down to the dining area. Chris and Liz were there. Thornton summarized the three days of meetings at Kostɛkhéma for them.

“It sounds like the tribes are pulling together very well,” said Chris. “That’s really excellent.”

“And the sacred springs; I’m so glad they finally agreed on how they’ll fix them up,” said Liz. “I know that’s been a real test for Patékwu and ɛndranu. They tried their best as Lords to forge agreement, but their tribes were too small and they didn’t have enough clout.”

“I pledged 1000 dhanay from us but I think we probably should contribute more. Altogether, the tribes only pledged 30,000 and I suspect the kind of work they want to do will cost several times that much.”

Chris nodded. “I’m sure we can contribute five or 10,000, if they want us to.”

“Your conversation about the aliens with the queen is quite interesting,” said Liz. “Have you gotten an email from the queen appointing you to the alien communications committee?”

“I haven’t checked my email yet.”

“It’s a very interesting email,” said Chris. “For now, they want all communication to be done by email and copied to all members of the committee. I don’t know what they think of video mail communication. They didn’t specify that.”

“It sounds rather restrictive.”

“Maybe not, they appointed you as secretary of the committee and the one in charge of communicating with the aliens.”

Thornton’s expression brightened. “That’s better. It’ll make it easier to send archaeological requests to the aliens.”

“Yes, but they want even the archaeological communications vetted by the committee first. There’s already some discussion and controversy about the alien recordings. It’s a sensitive subject.”

“One concern I have is that the committee appointed only has men on it,” said Liz.

Chris smiled at that. “When I mentioned that to Her Majesty an hour ago, she replied “Not true, I am on the committee as well. I may not attend all the meetings, but I do have veto power!”

Liz smiled at that. “Indeed she does.”

“We’re planning the first committee meeting in two weeks,” said Chris. “Her Majesty is about to head to Lɛwéspa to open the new town of Laksisérwika.”

Thornton nodded. It’s the last township in Lɛwéspa to open. It’s right on the border with South Shore province.”

“Exactly. I’m not sure why she didn’t open it when she was there a month or so ago. I suppose there were too many other things on her agenda at the time, and besides,

she can now get to the other side of the planet in four or five hours anyway. Everyone in Lɛwéspa was very excited about this new township, which will not have a Lord. Her Majesty is planning to appoint a committee of five people who will move to the town and serve as the Town Council until elections in another year and a half. It's a new way to open a town."

"A very encouraging way, too," said Thornton. "Lébé and I have decided to take a four day vacation next weekend. We're hoping the three kids can come along and we plan to go to a hot spring near Sértroba. But we'll be back in plenty of time."

Chris smiled. "Good idea. We invested in that place, by the way. I can give you the telephone information. But please insist that you will pay the full price. I'm sure they're struggling right now and can use every dhanay they can get."

"And let us know how the place is doing," added Liz. "Sounds like a nice place for us to get away, too."

"Just be sure to be back by mid-week. I've asked Amos and May to come here as well so that we could all discuss the new committee for communicating with the aliens. I think we need to have a family summit meeting about it."

541.

Reorganization

early Brénménu/late Sept. 26/644

The Southwest Cape of Sumilara was a remote jungle-covered place. The new dirt road cut through the tall trees to a small harbor next to a jutting peninsula of ancient lava. Around the harbor stood a dozen new houses and clearings for several dozen more; the island was receiving a new town, Sumalu, named for the village the Sumis had originally come from, according to the alien records. On the lava peninsula, facing out into the strong winds of the South Sea, stood a 50 meter tall wind turbine, its blades still.
Amos arrived with a dozen island leaders to observe the work on the turbine. They drove around the curve of the bay and out onto the peninsula, stopping at the base of the turbine. They got out and looked up.

"So when will this thing start to make power?" asked Dumugal, the editor of the Sumi Herald.

"It's probably ready today," replied Gilsu, the head of the Sumilara Electric Company.

"I agree," said Amos. "Everything is set up at the top of the tower, so it's just a matter of connecting it to the electric line and testing it. That's what they're doing right now."

"How much did it cost to build this thing?" asked Dumugal.

"Came in just a little over budget," replied Amos. "We projected that it would cost 30,000. It was just a little bit over 31,000. But we think additional turbines could be made for less, and the larger the order, the cheaper each one will be."

"How cheap could they become?" persisted Dumugal.

Amos thought about the question for a minute. "Between 20 and 25,000."

"That's a lot of money for just 100 kilowatts!" exclaimed Dumugal.

Amos nodded. "They'll be much cheaper to make per kilowatt if they're much much larger. A 100 meter tower with blades three times as long could make 1,000 kW easily, but they'll cost 100,000 or 150,000 to manufacture at least. Wind turbines can be a very, very inexpensive way to make electricity, but only if you build huge ones and you build a large number of them. Right now, hydroelectricity is much cheaper."

"And presumably geothermal will be cheaper as well, won't it?" asked Gilsu.

"Probably, but we have no design for a geothermal power plant at the moment. It would be quite a feat of engineering to design one because we don't have related expertise or experience. It could easily cost us 100,000 or 200,000 to build even a small hydrothermal plant. And we probably have to build it by Agpa because Evudingiru is so active. It might get destroyed during an eruption."

"I'm not sure Agpa is that much safer," replied Dingiramarru, governor of the island. "We'd probably be better off going to the Hot Springs down in the southeastern corner of the island and build the hydrothermal plant there. We know there's a lot of hot water there and the geologists tell us there have been no eruptions there for several thousand years."

"Of course, if there haven't been eruptions there for a few thousand years, that just might mean there will be one soon," said Dumugal with a laugh. "There's no part of this island that hasn't seen an eruption at some point in the last 10,000 years or so."

"That's part of Sumilara's charm," said Dingiramarru with a smile.

Dumugal looked around the rocky peninsula, the beautiful jungle, the ridge north of them that formed the western boundary of the island and rose to the Vermilion Cliffs a few kilometers to the north, and the sea stretching out to the south and west. "Did you really have to put the wind turbine way out here in the middle of nowhere? It seems like a deliberate attempt to downplay a solution to Sumilara's energy independence."

"We've gone over all of this before, but I'll go over it again," replied Dingiramarru. "While there are many places on the island with strong and steady winds, everyone agrees that this is the windiest point. This is the place where the current heading southward along our western coast turns and runs eastward across the Sea to the eastern shore. It's an area of strong northerly winds clashing with strong easterlies. The only places with stronger winds are the tops of the volcanoes, and we doubt that it would be a good idea to put wind turbines up there. As for energy independence, the cheapest way for the island to get its power is to participate in the hydroelectricity generated on the mainland that arrives here on the cables from the eastern and western shores. We could achieve energy independence, but at an extremely high price that's not worth paying economically speaking. And it won't bring about the island's political independence because the island is too dependent on the mainland for everything else. The mainland in turn is partially dependent upon us, so we are in a good position to continue bargaining with our Eryan neighbors for mutually beneficial, economic development."

“That’s a good summary of the government line,” replied Dumugal, scribbling.

Amos walked over to the base of the tower where several engineers and electricians were busy. He looked at the electrical wires and equipment inside the base of the tower. He saw a line of three lightbulbs, one dark and two light. “Oh? Are we ready to flip the switch?”

“We were waiting for all of you to arrive,” said the lead engineer, Le’u, in accented Eryan. “You’re late.”

“It took us longer to get here than we thought. The road is pretty bad,” said Amos.

“Really bad,” agreed Le’u. “But if they start to expand this town, I’m sure it’ll get better. shall I flip the switch?”

“Wait.” Amos walked back over to the others. “They’re ready. Come gather around.”

The other men nodded and walked over to the base of the turbine tower. Le’u watched them approach and form a close packed line so they could all look inside the tower through the open door. He glanced again at Amos, who nodded. Le’u pushed the button that released the turbine blades and they began to turn. In the noon sunshine, they could see the shadows going round and round on the ground near them. In about 30 seconds blades had reached their maximum speed based on the easterly wind and Le’u threw another switch, feeding the power into the electric line. The three lightbulbs flickered momentarily, then returned to their arrangement of two bulbs on, and one bulb off, which indicated that the alternating current that the turbine was producing was in sync with the island’s electrical current. Le’u nodded, pleased. “It’s done,” he explained.

“That’s it?” ask Dumugal, disappointed.

“That’s it,” agreed Dingiramarru.

“This would’ve been much more impressive if you’d hauled in a couple hundred people and a band and made a bunch of speeches!” exclaimed Dumugal.

“That would’ve been much easier to do if we set this thing up in Anartu harbor,” replied Dingiramarru. “But we didn’t. We went with the place with the strongest wind.”

“And the most remote location,” scolded Dumugal. “You can be sure my newspaper article will highlight that fact!”

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“How was your vacation?” asked Chris and Liz as Thornton and Lébé returned to the house about ten days later.

“It was very nice,” replied Thornton. “We had two days with just the five of us. Every morning we went for a hike or a drive or both, had a relaxing lunch—the couple who run the inn are excellent cooks—then we soaked in the hot springs for part of the afternoon and took a siesta. In the evening we gathered in a big common room to play games and talk. Then Saré was able to get away from the hospital and join us for two more days and the six of us did the same. It really was very nice.”

“We all loved it,” agreed Lébé. “The dynamics were a bit different when Saré arrived, but Kalé and Jonkrisu adapted pretty well, and the four young people had a good time together.”

I hope once Jonkrisu and Kalé find someone and get married, we can all go together on vacation sometime,” said Thornton.

Thornton and Lébé sat at the table and had coffee with Chris and Liz. Just before the World Table started, Amos and May arrived with Andranu, Skandé, and Marié.

Rostamu and Sɛlané arrived not long after. Then about halfway through the show, Jordanu came in from the office as well and shortly thereafter Tiamaté and the two little kids joined them. The topic of the World Table that day was rather boring for Jordan: horse racing. So he nudged Rostamu and Andranu. “Do you have some time? I’d like to talk to both of you about something.”

“Sure,” said Rostamu right away, curious to find out what his big brother wanted to talk about. Andranu nodded a bit reluctantly, since he occasionally went to the Luktrudɛma horse racing track, so he was rather interested in the subject. Jordanu led them to his apartment and the three of them sat in the little living room.

“I’ve been talking to grandpa about re-organization of the Mennea Tomi,” he began. “In the last two years, we’ve grown twenty percent, partly because of service to village councils and partly because of other expansion, such as the surveying business and continued growth of security services. Part of it also has just been a huge expansion of the economy; a lot of the business management contracts have come our way. Grandpa is now in his 80s and needs to step back from the business even further. He has a lot of energy left, but he wants to turn it to other areas such as a senior advisory position for just about everyone and everything. That doesn’t leave him a lot of time for day-to-day operational decisions, which have mostly fallen on me. Furthermore, Dɛkané hasn’t worked out as a Vice President, not because she isn’t capable, but because she’s interested in so many other things, principally the development of local government. So, in talking to Chris, I have proposed to establish two new Vice Presidents: one for Western Shore services, because centralizing everything here was not anywhere nearly as practical as we thought. People want to be able to visit face-to-face with people authorized to make

decisions. The other is Vice President for Eastern Shore activities. And I'd like to offer those two positions to the two of you."

Rostamu and Andranu were both startled by that. "You know I can't do that and still spend a substantial amount of time in Wurontroba," said Rostamu.

"It depends on what you mean by substantial amount of time. You can still go there on the weekends. And Sɛlané has been spending a huge fraction of her time here at the medical school anyway. I understand there's now a doctor in Gimutroba, so the Kaitɛrɛ no longer need her services. And I suspect you're getting rather frustrated because the South Tutanɛ province now has a development officer, Déodatu, who is a good friend of ours and a Baha'i. I think it's time that you come back here and help me with the family business."

Rostamu thought about that for a moment, and then nodded. "That resolves one problem. You're quite right that I am beginning to get rather frustrated in Wurontroba because they really don't need my advice as much anymore and they don't need Sɛlané every day. But I don't know whether I'm capable of doing the job."

"I'm confident that you are. You have an immense amount of experience with development and that's probably the most important skill that we need. We have accountants to keep track of the cash flow. We need people able to analyze proposals and judge their viability. That's especially true of the development bank aspect of the Tomi."

"And what would the Western Shore branch do?" asked Andranu.

"The same things the Eastern Shore branch does; investment consulting, business management services, accounting, and auditing. These are all things you know very well, and I'm confident that you would do a great job. We are in the position now where we

have to expand our offices in Pértatranisér. There's no room in the house any longer for expansion. We need to build a proper western shore office building and expand the workforce to as much as 200 eventually. The current arrangement with 50 people stuffed into little offices in the house and in rented space across town isn't working."

"And I haven't been particularly impressed by the office manager," added Andranu delicately.

Jordanu nodded. "He's a good man, but over his head. If you take the job, I'll leave it up to you to decide whether he should play a role there in the western shore office or whether we should offer him a position elsewhere."

Andranu nodded. "This is very exciting, Jordanu, and very, very tempting. I'm certainly inclined to take the offer. I've begun to get a bit bored as the number three in a plastics manufacturing company. This is a much more interesting opportunity."

"It certainly is, and you are a member of the family, so I want to include you in the family business."

"What sort of salary are we talking about?" asked Rostamu.

"Fifteen thousand starting salary going up to twenty thousand over a few years based on performance and experience."

That startled Rostamu. As an officer of the Mennea Development Consultancy, working part time, he was only paid around 3000, which was a bit less than the average pay of a worker in Mɛlwika. Now he was going to receive five times as much!

"Oh… Are you sure I'm worthy of this promotion?"

Jordanu nodded. "Like I said, I think you'll do a great job."

Rostamu nodded. "All right. I'll talk to Sɛlané."

"And I'll talk to Skandé. But I think she'll agree."

"Great!" said Jordanu.

"So, if I may ask… Why has business grown 20% in the last two years?" asked Andranu. "The reasons you mentioned aren't enough. I thought vehicle production here in Mɛlwika has plateaued."

"Vehicle production has plateaued, at least temporarily," agreed Jordanu. "Whether this reflects market saturation, or a temporary lull, we don't know. Right now there's something like 20,000 vehicles on the roads. But the thing that has caused our business to continue to grow has been development, especially in the tribal areas and in Rudhisér. The crown has pumped almost 1,000,000 dhanay into the basin in the last year. That's on top of over half 1 million that's gone to Néfa and the eastern towns, and close to a half million of investment in businesses in Pértatranisér. So that's 2 million dhanay that's going into the provincial economy. It has stimulated an immense expansion in small businesses. In almost every village now there's someone who can install plumbing and electrical wiring and knows how to repair cars and trucks. As you know, the Pértatranisér School of Engineering has been running weeklong classes on plumbing installation, electrical installation, and vehicle repair, and several hundred people have gone through those certificate programs. We also help them write a grant proposal to establish a small business, and many of them have received grants of 1000 dhanay to get set up with an inventory of stuff and a place to work. I should add that half of those men were from outside Rudhisér province; we've had students from as far away as Gordha. Most of them already knew something about repairing vehicles because of their experience working for granges."

"I understand the Development Ministry has been going crazy trying to keep up with all of the applications for household improvement," said Andranu. "Now I understand why."

"Exactly. This year thousands of houses will be getting electricity and plumbing. It's actually a strain on the electric company. The pipe manufacturing operation here in town has trouble keeping up with the demand, and the primitive sewage systems many villages have are in danger of being overwhelmed by the increased volume of water. But those are growing pains; everything will smooth out eventually."

"My impression is that the gabrulis have been expanding a lot as well," said Rostamu.

"That's been pretty amazing as well," agreed Jordanu. "The Central Gabruli Council hasn't been able to keep up with the demand on its services. In the last year, something like 50 more gabrulis have formed. Most villages are served either directly or indirectly by one and many neighborhoods in the big cities have their own. And all these gabrulis have been ordering prefabs for their operations. The prefab factory will set up a prefab with built-in washing machines or stoves if requested! And of course, all this is driving an increase in rural income. The prefab factory has had to turn out 2500 units in the last year which is fifty percent more than they've ever had to produce before! About half of those units are going to be used by small businesses and other half are for housing. This year has really seen an amazing rural revolution."

"It's about time," said Rostamu.

The three men rose and walked back to the main room. The entire family was now sitting in a big circle of chairs and couches near the dining table, drinking tea and talking.

Jordanu looked at Chris, smiled and nodded. Chris smiled back, delighted that Andranu and Rostamu had agreed.

"So, Jonkrisu, how has your engineering study been going?" asked Amos.

"Thanks for asking, Uncle Amos. I spent only the first half of the summer taking engineering courses, and I managed to take two in that time, one on electrical engineering and one on mechanical engineering. Then I went to Géndonatroba where I was a youth volunteer last year, and I worked on clearing Route 97 from the village center for several weeks, then I got training as a basic welder and helped weld together the hydroelectric pipes!"

"Really? That's pretty impressive. Welding is very precise work. You must've picked it up pretty fast."

"I guess so. I enjoy the work, but I don't want to make my living as a welder! In fact, Uncle Amos, I was wondering whether I could come to Pértatranisér this fall to study at your school of engineering."

Amos smiled. "Of course, but our education really isn't as good as the Mɛlwika School of Engineering's. There are just two of us in Pértatranisér who teach most of the courses. Mɛlwika has over a dozen engineers teaching."

"I know that, but I think I need a change of scene as well and I'm sure there are courses you teach that will work very well in my engineering degree."

Amos noted. "Definitely."

When there was a lull in the conversation, Jordan said, "Amos, how was your visit to Sumilara?"

"I was just telling people about it. The new wind turbine is working quite well and generating a bit more power than anticipated, which is certainly good news. But the governor's effort to reduce the island's interest in it backfired; the newspapers all criticized him for doing so little to publicize the event."

"When I heard what he had done, it did strike me as unfortunate," said Chris. "But I gather Inanna covered it in a pretty neutral fashion."

Amos nodded. "She kind of has to because Kɛkanu will be upset if she comes off as pro-independence. I think it's safe to assume that Inanna is pro autonomy, and I'd say that's true of most of the population of the island. So there's some tension there. She has proved to be an absolutely amazing find; she's witty, she's an excellent interviewer, she has a natural personality as a host, and she can sing as well! Kɛkanu is pleased and has agreed that in a few months she can have her own show, probably early in the morning Sumilara time. Right now she essentially has half of a show because she's translating Kɛkanu's interviews into Sumi and whenever he sings, she sings!"

They all chuckled at that. "She's really a great role model for Sumi women," said Liz.

"Any impressions about what people are thinking about the aliens and our relationship to them?" asked Thornton to Amos.

"Pértatranisér is not representative of the entire kingdom," replied Amos. "When the only thing people had were the audio recordings, people were fascinated, puzzled, and a bit suspicious, especially of our relationship with the aliens. When they got the video recordings, however, that changed. The Eryan and Sumis were fascinated to recognize themselves in their ancestors. When people in Pértatranisér saw Papadam and his clan

and realized they were black like me, they went from being surprised to being rather pleased! Their view of us changed quite radically. People ask us whether we are Shell Mound people! So we explain to them that the Shell Mound people came from Africa just like me, and the people of Africa have black skins because of the extreme heat and sunlight. So it's been quite an educational experience."

"You wouldn't believe how many people have asked me about Papadam and whether he was an ancestor of ours," said Skandé. "But it's all been very positive."

I'm glad to hear that," said Liz.

Just then, dinner was served. Everyone headed to the dining room table to eat a meal of venison with potatoes, vegetables, and bread, with a big apple pie for dessert. Afterward, the various couples retreated to their quarters to finish unpacking, and then everyone returned to the main room. Jordanu and Chris conferred briefly and then Chris asked for everyone's attention. "I have a big announcement to make. Jordanu and I have been discussing the next step in reorganizing the Mennea Tomi, and we've decided that I would go into complete retirement, except for providing occasional consulting advice, and that we would appoint two additional vice presidents to strengthen our organization. Those two vice presidents have accepted the positions and they are as follows: Rostamu Doma-Menneai as the new vice president for Eastern Shore operations, and Andranu Doma-Widumigi as Vice President of Western Shore operations. We plan to make a major expansion on the Western Shore and build a second tomi headquarters in Pértatranisér capable of holding up to 200 staff. I'm extremely grateful to Rostamu and Andranu for agreeing to take up this challenge. It means that I can leave this family's

business in good hands for the future and have a bit more time to serve Her Majesty in a general consulting way."

"What fantastic news!" said Liz, who had already known about the plan beforehand. Thornton began to applaud, and everyone joined in. Andranu had tears in his eyes and hugged Skandé. Rostamu hugged Sɛlané as well, but then said, with a twinkle in his eye, "So where will my office be?"

Chris smiled. "You're getting my office! I'll be doing all my work in the office I have here in the house from now on. If anything, that'll make my life easier because I won't be storing papers in two different places."

"And I hope you'll slow down a bit and take a little more time for yourself," added Liz.

Chris nodded. "Yes, dear, I want to spend more time with you and the family. And I want to spend more time praying and reading the writings. My life has been too busy up until now to do as much study of the sacred texts as I would like, so now I will devote more time to them."

"I think most of you heard that Her Majesty told me to take more time for my family," said Thornton. "And I think that's good advice. Perhaps we need to balance work and family better. I think I'll try to do that, anyway."

"Here, here!" said Lébé.

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Liz (78): Gabrulis, growth of the Faith, spiritualization

Chris (80): Focuses on sustainable development. Wants hydroelectric potential of Long Valley developed. Talks to John about sustainable development

May (53) is focusing on developing doctoral programs and linguistics; Amos (55) is focusing on engineering; Lua (58) is busy with a rapidly expanding health system; Behruz (62) is working on the Institute; Thornton (43) is busy running Mɛlwika; Lébé (43).

The children: Rostamu Shirazi (25, summer; Sɛlané); Skandé Keino (24, 2 Dhébɛlménu/April 22; Andranu); Jalalu Mennea (23, c. 15 April, Saré); Kalé Mennea (22, June); Marié Keino (same); Jonkrisu (18, Aug.)

Tiamaté (31-32) Jordan (31-32) Andru (8 on 9 Dhébɛlménu). Lubaté (6 in very early Blorménu 26/644): continue with development, raise a baby

Prince Mégékwɛs and Ninlilé: 23 years old in ɛjnaménu (24 later in the spring? Andranu, too?)

Tomasu and Sulokwé is raising their baby, born in mid-late Bɛlménu 17/635

Primanu and Gramé Miller: have baby

Budhéstu and Blorakwé (30) start psychiatric facility in Isurdhuna, add one in Meddoakwes (winter?);

Mɛlitané and Moléstu:

Soru, Kanawé, Blorané (19-20), Isuru (15):

Rébu:

Pɛrku and Sharé: kids Mitrubu (32) and Avásé (27) (palynologist)

Queen Awstɛr/Estoibidhé: With computers and cellphones, she stays overnight in only 5 places and travels with a smaller entourage. Prime Minister flies in for consultations once per week.

Prince Mégékwɛs (23, late April)

Ideas for Vol. 31:

Dendrochronology and palynology are started; forestry and preserves developed; archaeology develops further

Aliens tell Thornton where Papadam and his people were first put

Continued work on Mɛdha and Lilalara

Lébé interacts a lot with the priest Budhéstu, they become scholarly friends;

Skande becomes an assistant to Duchess Albɛsé (Génménu); Chris goes to Sullɛndha to talk about the Forestry company and the géndha there

Thornton takes Marku to the Atranisér and they find a stone axe. Gas pipeline reaches Gordha (Prusménu) and plans are made for a tunnel through Gordhamonta and blue water gas plants in Gordha and Kaitɛra. Visit and talk to the Kaitɛrɛ about their needs. They complain the army won't build 97 and 99 without the Géndonɛ; Thornton says, go talk to them.

Dɛkané and Yusdu visit Pértatranisér, talk to Skandé about villages in the Basin, industrial development with Andranu, meet the Duchess (Prusménu). Excavations start

Start training Pɛnkakwés foresters with pneumatic saws; Visit Basin villages periodically; declare five Basin administrative districts of about 6 villages and 4,000

people each (Bɛlménu); Néfa Yoros and Génadɛma are renamed Rudhisér Yoros and Génadɛma.

Estodhéru dies and everyone goes to Mɛddwoglubas; Lébé convinces the members of the Research Department to pursue doctorates in language and literature, Bahá'í history; Behrouz helps (Plowménu)

Kwolonɛ adopt Bahá'í principles in their governance (Plowménu)

Budhéstu and wife want to accommodate Bahá'í ideas in their Widumajism, as does Wɛrétrakɛstɛr, but their daughter opposes and starts a charismatic movement. Andru, Saré continue to sympathize with Bahá'í ideas. Plowménu?

Extend the Grand Canal to Sorakwés; Thornton completes negotiations for Eastern Grasslands Park/Preserve (ɛjnaménu)

Eastern Grasslands Park is inaugurated by Queen, and Spine Park, and Northern Forest Park, and Southern Forest Park (all linked together) (Bolérɛnmenu)

Soru's new school in Tɛrskua opens (Bolérɛnménu); construction on a small school begins in Tripola (Bolérɛnménu); Estoiluku (age 23) gets his kwétɛryɛri and helps raise the quality of teaching at Soru's school for the blind in Pértatranisér

Géndonɛ hydroelectric facility starts, late spring (Dhébɛlménu) and they agree to extending Route 97 or 99 over the mountain after conversations with the Kaitɛrɛ. Blue water gas plant in Géndonatroba is 135 kilometers from Ora! A 15 km line from Moruagras to Réjéivika could connect to it in 30 km; another 50 km could connect to Isurdhuna. Géndonatroba is on the equator and has better tree growth.

Announce more Regional Councils (Dhébɛlménu)

Construction of new Soru school begins in Bɛllɛdha when the Queen visits (Dhonménu). Does Chris go on the Queen's tour? Ninlilé's children's book appears. Budhéstu is asked to teach his new book at the Néfa Génadɛma.; a large group of volunteers clean and begin to repair the sacred springs.

The Queen opens Laksisérwika in Lɛwéspa as a new town without a lord at all (Aug/ Abɛlménu)

What are Dɛkané and Yimu doing? Duchess Albɛsé?

Expansion of medical system is urgent; keeps Lua, Jalalu, Saré busy.

Sept: Conference in Moruagras to resolve tribal boundaries; progress on pipeline to Moruagras and on Gendone hydro

Oct: Wind turbine set up in SW Sumilara; Inanna starts broadcasting in Sumi; tunnel breakthrough

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Dhébɛlménu: April 21-May 20 (month of planting)

1/21

7/27

13/May 3

19/9 Mɛlwika spring term 1 ends

25/15 Mɛlwika vacation

Blorménu: May 21-June 20 (month of flowers)

1/21 Consultative Assembly (next 4-6 weeks, ending at Grand Court); Mɛlwika spring short term 1 begins

7/27

13/June 3

19/9

25/15 Mɛlwika spring short term 1 ends

Kaiménu: June 21-July 20 (hot month)

1/21 Mɛddoakwés: Harvest; Graduation, All-Génadɛma Council and Conference; Thornton heads for Mɛdhpéla

7/27 Grand Court and Harvest Festival

13/July 3 Mɛddoakwés: second planting; Mɛlwika summer short term 1 begins

19/9

25/15

Dhonménu: July 21-August 20 (month of grain)

1/21 Queen visits Morana, Lɛpawsona

7/27 Queen visits Bɛllɛdha;

13/Aug. 3 Queen visits Jérnstisér (from Bɛllɛdha), Rudhisér (from Ora); Mɛlwika summer short term 2 begins

19/9 Queen visits Rudhisér (from Ora), visits Isurdhuna

22/12 Widumaj cycle culminates, ends at Isurdhuna

25/15 Queen visits Isurdhuna

Abɛlménu: August 21-September 20 (month of apples)

1/21 Queen visits Long Valley (from Ora), Ora

7/27 Queen visits Ora, Lɛwéspa (from Ora)

13/Sep. 3 Queen visits Tripola, Wurontroba for one day; Mɛlwika summer short term 3 begins

19/9 Queen visits ɛndraidha, Kwolona, Kwétékwona (from ɛndraidha)

25/15 Queen visits “Northern Tribes” at Gordha, then home

Brénménu: September 21-October 20 (month of browning)

1/21 Fall Consultative Assembly (if held)

7/26 Fall Consultative Assembly

13/Oct. 1 Mɛddoakwés: Second harvest; Mɛlwika vacation week

19/6 Mɛlwika Harvest Festival; Mɛlwika fall term 1 starts

25/11

31/16

Génménu: October 21-November 20 (month of hunting)

1/21

7/26

13/Nov. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16 Mɛlwika fall term 1 ends

Prusménu: November 21-December 20 (month of frosts)

1/21 Mɛlwika (short) fall term 2 starts

13/Dec. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16

Bɛlménu: December 21-January 20 (white month)

1/21 Mɛlwika short winter term 1 starts

7/26

13/Jan. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16

Plowménu: January 21-February 20 (rainy month)

1/21 Mɛlwika short winter term 2 starts

7/26

13/Feb. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16

ɛjnaménu: February 21 -March 20 (30-day month) (month of sacrifice)

1/21 Mɛlwika school vacation (all month)

7/27

13/Mar. 3

19/9

25/15 Primdiu: world and Mɛlwika election (odd years)

Bolérɛnménu: Mar. 21-April 20 (month of greening)

1/21 Mɛddoakwés: planting; Mɛlwika spring term 1 starts

7/27

13/Apr. 3

19/9

25/15

Vol. 29 Started 10 Feb. 2020; vol. 30 finished Dec. 26, 2020.

Prime Minister Mɛndhru; Bidhu, Minister of the Statistics Department; Widéstu, Minister of Education; Aryéstu, the economist and President of Gésɛlékwɛs Dwo Génadɛma; Yusdu, Minister of the Industrial Relations Department; Dɛkané, head of the Village Consultancy; General Pɛrku; Prince Mégékwɛs; Dr. Stauréstu, head of the Ora and Lɛwéspa hospitals; Chandu Chartagrasi, head of the All-Grange Council; Mɛlitané, secretary of the All-Gabrulɛ Council; Modobéru, head of the Exchequer; Jordanu Doma-Menneai; and Count Kristobéru Doma-Menneai.

The Seven Developmental Priorities: (1) fostering the education of and maximizing the potential of every person; (2) improving health and extending life; (3) increasing prosperity and spreading it to every place in the kingdom; (4) reinforcing and strengthening the values of diversity, honesty, trustworthiness, service, and vocation; (5) the advancement of minorities and women; (6) strengthening small businesses and cooperatives; and (7) protecting nature and the environment.