

THE PIONEERS

Vol. 29

The People Awaken

Contents

494. Progress	2
495. Studying the Western Shore	14
496. The Way it Was	30
497. Plans and Plots	51
498. Regrets?	70
499. A Passing	86
500. Everything Comes Out	112
501. Regents and Elections	133
502. Sacred Spaces	149
503. Provincial Assembly	168
504. The Importance of Agriculture	185
505. Géndona	195
506. Graduations	215
507. Rural Prosperity	227
508. Village Sites	242
509. Healing	263
510. History	280
511. Changing of the Guard	302
512. Education Goals	316

Progress

Mid Génmènu /early Nov. 23/641

Thornton Mennea hurried into the house and slammed the door behind him. He shook the few scattered snowflakes off his coat, then hung it on a peg next to the front door. He walked into the warmth of the Mennea residence and was surprised to see his father, mother, and wife sitting at the dining room table, drinking hot cider, listening to the radio, and waiting for him.

“How did it go?” asked Chris.

“Did you stay up for me?”

“Yes, we did,” replied Liz. “For obvious reasons.”

“Have some hot cider,” suggested Lébé.

“Good idea. It’s really cold out there, for mid Génmènu; it’s even snowing a little bit! We had better have the plastic covers put over the dome tomorrow.” Thornton sat next to Lébé and sipped from the warm cider she poured for him. “It went pretty well, but the meeting took four hours. Whoever heard of that! I don’t think the city council has ever sat so long and patiently through a public hearing before.”

“That’s impressive,” agreed Chris. “Were there a lot of angry feelings that had to be expressed?”

“No, and that’s even more remarkable. The public meeting room was absolutely packed; I think there were 200 people there. And most of them stayed through to the end, and when the Development Plan passed, most of them cheered. It’s just that most of the

people wanted to say something. People understood that the city was going to continue to grow in population, so there was a debate about the merits of growing up versus out; a denser city population versus loss of farmland. The plan proposed some of both and that was fine, but the apartment buildings have to provide parking spaces; everyone wanted that. There was discussion of spending more on smoke stacks and decreasing air pollution versus spending more city money on reforestation, and everyone seemed to support the idea that the council had to pass stricter air pollution rules and enforce regulations designed to limit soil erosion. The grange said they'd implement more cross-slope plowing to reduce runoff from farmers' fields, and Yimu Miller said they'd look into replacing the main smokestacks with a taller one, so that was good. All the redevelopment of Temple Street had to be discussed because a lot of people didn't understand what the plans were. Mayor Kérdu explained that there would even be a three-story parking garage and people could not imagine the thing until we showed a picture. There was a lot of interest in the small business plan for North Hill and East Hill."

"So, a lot of support," said Liz.

"Yes, and there were some new ideas. One woman wanted a network of hiking trails in the northern mountains! Another asked us to improve the industrial waste disposal area. Everyone wants roundabouts installed and one way streets set up, so there's more on-street parking, and they want it soon. That has to be a high priority."

"That makes sense. We never designed most of this city for cars and trucks," said Chris.

“Ironical, since they’re made here and there are more per family here than anywhere else,” said Lébé.

“There was a lot of support for free bus service on the main streets, too,” said Thornton. “The estimate that it’ll cost 150,000 dhanay per year was taken in stride. Some people even said ‘that’s just 5 dhanay per person, raise taxes and do it!’”

“It really would help get people around,” said Lébé.

“What about the virtues-oriented school curriculum?” asked Liz.

“That was strongly supported by people. There was some discomfort that it included Sumi and Tutane material, but you could see that by the body language. No one spoke up against it.”

“Good. People are understanding the idea of diversity,” said Liz.

“I think we can credit the Spiritual Assembly there,” said Chris. “The deepening sessions they’ve been offering three times a week about the spiritual principles of planning have reached a lot of people, including a lot of people who have not declared as Bahá’ís.”

“Several people mentioned their deepening sessions,” agreed Thornton. “Mélwika is more Bahá’í than the membership figures would suggest!”

“I think the children’s classes, after ten years of development, are beginning to bear fruit,” said Lébé. “Half the kids attending are not Bahá’í and they’ve taken the values back home.”

“Yes, that’s one reason the number of people declaring as Bahá’ís has been so high, lately,” agreed Liz.

“Was there any reaction to the idea that the city needs to plan to grow to 50,000 people?” asked Chris.

Thornton shook his head. “No, people were excited by the idea! They were a bit shocked to hear we’d get there in about 7 years. They wanted to know how long before Melwika reached 100,000.”

“About 19 years,” said Chris. “But I hope we never get that big. First of all, I think a city gets less and less livable as it gets bigger. People are better off living in smaller places where they know their neighbors. Second, the world’s population would probably be pushing toward 1 million by then, and I’m not convinced that’s healthy for Éra.”

“The last time it got that big, there was a collapse,” said Lébé.

“Exactly,” agreed Chris. “We have better technology and organization this time around, but that also means more demand on the land in terms of natural resources. I’m not sure I’d want the waters of the Mégakwes diverted to irrigate all of Kwolona and convert all that prairie into farmland, or see all the western highlands cleared of trees. Would the sabertooths, mastodons, mammoths, and other megafauna survive?”

“That worries me as well,” said Thornton.

“The next kingdom-wide development plan is going to have to consider population planning,” said Liz. “What’s the overall population estimate now? Half a million?”

“I think so,” said Chris. “That’s double what it was when we arrived.”

“Her Majesty has about twenty new townships she can establish, and some of them already have unofficial settlers,” said Thornton. “They’ll fill up pretty fast, at the present rate of population growth.”

“Of course, a lot of people are settling in the towns, like Mēlwika,” said Tiamaté.
“That’s why we’re growing twice as fast as the world as a whole.”

“But people are better off in smaller towns, with fresh air and closeness to nature,” said Chris. “With good roads, that’s not a problem, either.”

“Even so, Mēlwika and Mēddoakwēs are going to grow, as will the area between them,” said Thornton. “The capital has 27,000 people, and Morituora, Boléripludha, Béranagrés, Nénaslua, South Mēnwika, Yimuaidha, Perkas, and Ekwēdhuna add 20,000 more. That’s almost 80,000 people in the Capital region. So the next step, I think, is regional planning.”

“It’s time to talk to Kandékwēs about a regional planning commission, I agree,” said Chris. “And I’ll help with that.”

“Let us all give Princess Ninlil a big round of applause!” urged the teacher, and her second graders broke out in intense clapping.

“Do you like being a princess?” asked one little girl when the applause ended.

“Yes, it’s fun, but it’s also a lot of work. I always have to look pretty, I always have to smile, and I have to say nice and encouraging things to people. Sometimes that’s hard!”

“Well, you were a beautiful example to my students,” said the teacher. “And we don’t get people to come into the school and read stories in Sumi very often! I love the way you described the battle with the dragon; so dramatic!”

“Well, your spontaneous translation from Eryan was really great! We need more children’s books in Sumi.”

“If we can get some of the Eryan ones translated, that would help. There aren’t many children’s books in Eryan either! I’ll have to see what I can do about that.” She looked at the children. “Thank you so much for listening to the stories! I had so much fun today.”

“Please come back again!” said a little boy.

“Oh, I will, and maybe with some new stories! Bye!” Ninlil waved and stepped out of the classroom. It was the top of the hour and Tiamaté said she would read to the 3 year olds until then. So Ninlil walked down the hall, past the first graders and kindergarteners to the preschool. Tiamaté was just finishing up another story, which was also in Eryan, but she was reading it in Sumi. It was easy for her to do because she had read it many times. When she finished, she thanked the kids and stepped out into the hallway.

“How did it go?” she asked.

“Oh, it was a lot of fun! Children this age are sweet and very accepting, There was no suspicion or sense of competition. It was truly a relaxing and enjoyable experience.”

“I’m glad, and as you can see, it’s needed. Melwika probably has the best Sumi elementary school on the mainland, but it doesn’t have enough teachers and there’s a grave shortage of books.”

“Why the book shortage? The city can afford to buy them, can’t it?”

“Yes, it can, but because demand is low, Sumi books are not produced much and are expensive. A lot of schools on Sumilara try to teach the kids using books suitable for teenagers or adults, on the grounds that children are just miniature adults. But they aren’t;

take a developmental psychology course at Melwika Génadema and you will see why that approach is flawed. But developmental psychology is not yet translated into Sumi, so that information is still missing in the education of teachers.” She shrugged, frustrated.

“I see. But the teachers don’t need developmental psych to understand the idea that kids need children’s literature. They need children’s books.”

“They do. But even children’s literature in Eryan is limited. Lebé edited some wive’s tales and we have those. On Gædhéma, hundreds of children’s books are published every year. If we could get two per year, that would be a breakthrough!”

“Two in Eryan and two in Sumi,” said Ninlil, considering. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“That would be really good, Your Majesty. A voice talking about it and perhaps a few grants to writers and publishers would make all the difference. I think 500 or 750 dhanay for writing a children’s story and 1,000 or 1,500 dhanay to subsidize printing would do it.”

Ninlil nodded. “You are right, it wouldn’t take much. The palace could afford it.”

“I suppose the problem is that it doesn’t fall under a development priority.”

“No, it does; education. But I think the development plan needs some modification. It lists the encouragement of minorities and women, but maybe it should include children as well.”

Tiamaté’s eyes lit up. “That’s a good idea! Education is only part of what kids need!”

“I think that’s right. I’ll have to talk to the Queen about that. She is concerned that we can’t add or subtract things from the developmental priorities too often, because then

people can't remember them all. But we're coming up on the end of the second year of a four year plan, and there are already so many caveats and reinterpretations that maybe we need a fresh list."

"Yes, one that's not too different, too. I have been really amazed, since Melwika started drafting its own spiritual development goals based on the Four Year Plan, how engaged everyone has become. It seems like the whole city has taken up development planning."

"Yes, I've noticed that, too," agreed the princess. "It's as if the idea of planning has become part of the city's culture. I hope it persists."

"I do, too. It may be that the city has acquired a critical mass of people who think about plans. I think it'll persist."

"It needs to spread to other places, too," quipped the princess.

The technician pointed at the screen. "There."

Dr. Staurestu Aywergui nodded and gazed at the growth at the head end of Lord Albanu's pancreas. He motioned to the technician to move the ultrasound wand, which he did, adjusting the return slightly.

"Two or three here," he said, as they viewed the lord's liver.

Stauréstu nodded grimly. He motioned to resume their scan. There were some small bright spots on the lung and one possible spot on the intestine.

"What are you seeing?" demanded Albanu, moved around under them. Stauréstu motioned him to hold still and moved the wand back up to the pancreas. Then he turned the screen of the tablet so the lord could see.

“This is your pancreas. It secretes bile, which is essential for the digestion of your food. This white spot is a growth interfering with your pancreas. That is why you have lost your appetite, feel nauseous, and your skin and eyes have a yellowish tint.”

Albanu started at the image. “How does this work, again? It’s a *gedhémē* thing?”

“The *aliénēs* made it for us, just like the pad you put your fingers on, so we could study your heart. You know how bats dart around at night and catch insects in the air? They emit a chirp and hear the echo off the bug—they have excellent hearing—so they chase it and eat it. This works similarly. It emits a sound that is too high for our ears to hear and it makes an image from the echo. The bright areas are hard and echo the sound very strongly, almost like a bone.” Stauréstu moved the wand. “Here is your liver. The growths have spread here, too. The original growth was probably the one on your pancreas.”

“What can you do? Can you remove them?”

Stauréstu looked as kindly and lovingly at the lord as he could, then shook his head.

“Is there nothing you can do? With all these *gedhémē* things?”

“I’m sorry, lord. They let us see things, but not fix them. What you have is *kanséri*.” He spoke the English word, borrowed into Eryan, slowly. “It happens when a cell in your body divides into two, but makes a mistake when it divides. All the cells in your body are formed by splitting from an earlier cell, and eventually they split again and eventually one of the new cells dies. Cells die, just like us. Your hair grows fast and that happens because of the splitting of cells.

“But if a mistake is made in the splitting, sometimes cells start to grow and split at a very rapid rate, and when they do that they form a useless mass that slowly grows, blocks your organs from functioning, makes your health decline, and results in death. If all of us lived long enough, it would happen to all of us eventually, but usually our heart stops working first, or something else goes wrong, or we catch a disease. You have lived 75 years and have now encountered this problem.”

Albanu stared at him, incredulous. “So there’s nothing you can do?”

“I’m afraid there is nothing we can do. For this particular kind of kansér there is no medicine. We can give you pills for the pain in your abdomen and pills to help you keep your food down. Eat small meals and avoid fatty food because without bile, you can’t digest it. That’s why your stools are light in color and your urine is dark in color.”

“How . . . long . . . do I have?”

“It’s difficult to say how fast the kansér will grow. Probably three to six months.”

Albanu nodded. He looked at the screen again, then motioned to get up. He sat up and the technician cleaned the gel off the lord’s chest, then he put on his shirt. “Thank you,” he said to Stauréstu, then he stepped out of the examining room before they could say anything. He headed down the hall on wobbly legs, walked through the waiting room, and out the front door of Ora Hospital where his driver was waiting. “Take me home.”

The driver was startled by Albanu’s demeanor. “Are you alright, Lord?”

“Just take me home.” He thought of busy Route 2 and all its prosperous villages, which were a contrast to most of the villages in the Néfa Basin. “Take me home on Route 51 instead.”

“Are you sure? That might be slow.”

“I am sure. Route 51.”

“Very well.” The driver put the limousine into gear and drove out of the circular drive in front of Ora Hospital, which was the largest and best on the western shore. He turned left and headed west on Crest Boulevard, which became Route 55 as soon as it left the city behind. It went up a slope for six kilometers, then down into a north-south valley, where they turned north onto Route 51. It was Véspe’s other major north-south road, but it was barely wide enough for two trucks to pass and passed through a long valley that had been essentially uninhabited until the sea had risen and returned to its bed, displacing a dozen villages. Those people had been settled in this valley under the lordship of friends of the Lord of Ora.

The first village, at the junction of Routes 55 and 51, was pleasant and clean. Electric lines snaked up the alleys, which were graveled. Albanu was a bit surprised it looked as neat and clean as it did. He was even more surprised when he saw that the second village was equally clean and reasonably prosperous.

Then they came to Mitranimela, where a friend had been lord until the queen had taken his privileges away. It was quite prosperous looking, with a new high school and several factories along the river. They were slowed by trucks coming and going from the industrial park, then they were stuck behind trucks hauling logs northward to the Bruagras cement plant. The villages north of Mitranimela were in fairly good shape as well; there were prefab houses with additions built onto them so that the growing family had room while enjoying the prefab’s flush toilet, hot water heater, shower, and gas stove. The farmland was beautifully maintained and the granges he saw at every village were spotless.

At the last village, Nuvika, Route 51 made an abrupt right turn to the east, but they could see there was road construction farther to the north. “What are they doing there?” asked Albanu.

“Route 51 is being extended northward to Route 2 at Bruagras. It’s going to be widened south of here, too, and a bridge will be built over the Glugluba to connect with the stretch of 51 south of it. In a few years, trucks will be able to come this way and avoid Pértatranisér and Ora completely.”

“I see.”

They turned right at the center of Nuvika and headed east along the river. They went over a low ridge and entered the coastal plain by Jathisérvika, which was quite a prosperous looking village, just six kilometers from Pértatranisér. Albanu pointed to a bypass. “Go that way. I don’t want to go through Pértatranisér.”

“Very well, Lord.” The driver turned onto the bypass, which went northeast and avoided Pértatranisér entirely.

“Take me through my estates on the western side of the Basin.”

“Very well, Lord.” The driver took Albanu back to Route 2 north of Pértatranisér and they passed Bruagras, with its big, smoky cement plant, its huge pile of logs for its furnaces, and its prefabs and new houses of brick. It, clearly, was doing well and he glanced at it only briefly, then looked away.

They headed north on Route 2, then turned left onto Route 42, which circled the Néfa Basin along its western side. Albanu relaxed and looked at his fields, which were greening with a type of winter wheat. But every time they passed briefly through a village—and they passed through seven of them—he was jolted by the contrast with the

villages in rural Véspe. Because he had evicted a thousand sharecroppers, half the houses were abandoned and falling down. Some remained in poverty, with small, run-down houses lacking electricity or running water. Others, employed by him, had modest and comfortable houses. At every old village there was a garage for his tractors and other equipment, and he was struck by how unkempt they looked, compared to the garages run by Véspe granges.

He loved his beautiful farmland; even the beautiful land of his friends who owned similar large estates. But his brush with mortality—and with the hospital's gedhème equipment—opened his eyes somewhat to the backwardness of his own province. As they drove into Néfa, past the High School built on land he had tried to claim was his in order to block it, past the city's small and inadequate hospital, passed its small, old marketplace, through an area of the city that had rioted and burned and had never been completely rebuilt, he was reminded again that progress had partly passed Néfa by.

He was the reason. It made him think, but he did not feel much regret.

495.

Studying the Western Shore

late Génmènu /mid Nov.. 23/641

“Honored Bidhu, I want to introduce Estodéu Tentruwèrgu,” said Chris, as they entered Bidhu’s office.

“I am honored.” Bidhu came out from behind his desk and shook hands with Estodéu and Chris. “Bidhu Doma-Agrasi, Ministry of Statistics and the Census. In this case in particular, of the census. Please be seated.” He pointed to two chairs and he sat in a third one.

“Thank you.” Estodéu sat. He looked a bit nervous.

Bidhu picked up Estodéu’s letter and proposal. “This is fascinating. You are quite right: we plan to hire school teachers to serve as census workers. We’ll do it during εjnomènu, of course, when the schools are closed. So the teachers who are working for you would be logical choices because of their experience.”

“And training. I’ve been training them.”

“Yes, the training: your description of their training sounds impressive. It’s probably twice as thorough as we would do.”

“I need to teach them the importance of random selection of people to interview. But you need them to interview everyone.”

“Correct, and I suspect our census form is longer than your surveys. It’s going to be two pages, maybe three.”

“We usually have one-page surveys, though we have done two pages before. But my surveyors usually do ten or at most twenty surveys. Multiply that by thirty villages and you have a statistically significant sample. You want them to survey everyone: two hundred fifty or more households.”

“They’d have an entire month, they could leave survey forms with households that can read and could pick them up later, and they could hire kids to help with the writing. So they wouldn’t have to fill out all of them, just oversee the results.”

“And the cities?”

“How many people do you have in Tripola and Mëddwoglubas?”

“Three in Tripola, Ora, and Pértatranisé, two in Mëddwoglubas. They’re very part time, but they might be willing to work full time. You’ll need a lot more, in those places.”

“We will. We have started to recruit census coordinators in each province and so far we have them on the eastern and northern shores. You happen to have people on the southern and western shore, and we’re getting a little worried that we have to run a census in three months and don’t have the coordinators we need.”

Estodéu was surprised. “Why . . . the delay?”

Bidhu hesitated. “We were ambitious this time; we wanted to do the biggest, best census ever. We kept asking ministries for questions they wanted us to ask and the form ended up being ten pages long! But that would require way too many census workers and we knew we would have trouble getting complete answers, so we began to eliminate questions, then got pressured to put them back. That’s taken all our time. Now we’re

getting very close to the time we need to run the census. We need a lot more people and a lot more management assistance.”

Estodéu nodded. “Well, I have a pretty good organization on the western and southern shores. I’ve been running surveys for almost a year; for the last three months Tentruwergu Surveying has been an affiliate of the Mennea Tomi, which allowed us to expand from South Shore province northward to Rudhisér. We did ten surveys before affiliation and six since, for Home Improvement and for Məlwika Marketing, which is also an affiliate of Mennea Tomi. You can ask Chris; everyone has been pleased by the quality of the work.”

Bidhu nodded. He turned to his desk and picked up a pile of papers. “I’ve read the four most recent ones, and I agree, they are well done. You did a good job. So, do you want to have a contract for the census work?”

“Yes, I do; what provinces?”

“South Shore, Ləwépa, Vésa, Rudhisér, Kərda, and Deɭongnédha.”

“I’m pretty thin in Ora and Rudhisér and I have no one in Kərda and Deɭongnédha.”

“Well, you have three months to be ready. We may need your help with the Ghéslone and Gédone as well. We have the North Shore, Arjakwés, and Swadnoma covered, and we should have Morana and Lepawsa covered in the next few weeks. If I don’t have to worry about the provinces you’re taking care of, I can focus on the other ones.”

“What about the Tutane?” asked Chris.

“We’re getting there. We will count them.”

“If you ask the lords of the tribes, they’ll find people,” said Chris. “You can be sure of that. They want to be counted accurately, so they can get their fair share of the development monies.”

“I’m planning to do just that. Most of the tribes have a development officer who can coordinate the work there. Ironically, the provinces along the sea don’t have anyone.”

“What about Sumilara?” asked Chris.

“Governor Dingiramarru said he’d find a census coordinator.”

“Good. I think you’ll be very pleased by Estodéu’s work. And I hope you won’t object if he asks you about how the coordinators and census workers did in the other provinces, because he needs to expand his operation to every province eventually. This census is an important opportunity for him.”

“I have no objection because by then the census will be over. In fact, if he can maintain a system in every province, we will be able to give him surveying contracts. The Statistics Ministry wants data every year; not a complete census, of course, but good, reliable data, which means a statistically significant sample from all the major provinces. A modern society needs reliable information.”

“It does indeed,” agreed Estodéu, and Chris nodded as well. “What questions are you planning to ask?”

“Basic questions about the family; names, births, places of birth, names of parents, including names of any children who died in the last ten years. Questions about literacy and current professions and whether people work in the village or commute. Questions about their house; number of rooms, whether they have running water, flush toilets, gas, electricity, telephone.”

“You can get some of that from the power and telephone companies.”

“Yes, but we don’t know whether the people with the electricity are also the people with the flush toilets, and we suspect the numbers look very different, village to village.” He looked at Chris. “There’s one very hot question and we haven’t decided whether to ask it or not. ‘What religion do you follow?’”

“You might ask that?” said Chris, surprised.

“We might, but we’re not sure what it would mean. Many people will indicate they follow Widumaj and Bahá'u'lláh at the same time, but are they Bahá'ís? Followers of Widumaj? Neither?”

“Ask people to choose only one,” said Estodéu.

“That’s another option, but we may be forcing people to choose for the first time, and otherwise they might not have done so.”

“The situation is fluid right now,” said Chris. “There are a lot of people who don’t know what they are.”

“That’s what I see. I get back to Agras every weekend; I’m a weekend lord. I meet with the village council Penkudius and oversee major village decisions. I’ve met with the local Spiritual Assembly several times, too; usually once or twice a year. Their children’s classes have had a big impact on the morality of the village. My youngest attended, and some of my grandkids attend classes here in Mæddoakwés. I bet half the village is Bahá'í to some extent, even if only a fifth of them have officially declared their faith. When Widulubu came through to organize a hymn hall a few years ago, nothing came of the effort. A few people go to a hymn hall in Domamitri, but not too many. No one seems to want a priest residing in the village, either.”

“That’s my impression, also,” agreed Estodéu. “The Bahá’í classes have had a big impact on Tripola. Honored Count, I assume the Bahá’ís don’t need information in the census about who has taken a Bahá’í class?”

“No, we have that information.”

“But that might be an interesting question to ask, and whether people attend a hymn hall or sacrifice at a temple,” said Bidhu. “That might be more useful, too.”

“Perhaps,” said Chris. “But it still won’t tell us who believes what.”

“But that’s alright; a lot of people don’t know what they believe, right now,” replied Bidhu. “We’ll have to think about that idea.”

Prince Mégekwes looked out the window of their bedroom in Ora’s new palace. “Good, a view of the cliff and the river.” He shook his head. “It’s hard to imagine that, twenty-two years ago, the river was a lazy little stream and the cliff didn’t exist; the city extended a few hundred meters farther south and it was a gradual slope down to the water, covered with stone streets and houses.”

“All washed away.” Ninlilé joined her husband at the window for a quick second. “The cliff is already covered by trees.”

“The flood ended thirteen years ago. The plain at its base is covered by new houses, as is the plain across the river. Ora is now almost three times larger than it was when the flood hit.”

She nodded while looking around the room. “I guess this will do.”

He turned away from the window. “What do you mean, this is a great space! Attractive, filled with light, lovely art on the walls, some gorgeous carpets, expensive furniture . . . don’t tell me you’re dissatisfied.”

“No, I said I was satisfied,” she replied, raising her voice.

“I hope so! This is my parent’s bedroom, after all.”

“Well, when you’re king, I’ll be sure it’s fixed up even better.”

He glared at her. She smiled. “I’m joking.”

“No, you are half joking.”

“Alright, I’m half joking. I like luxury, and if the king and queen can’t have it, who can?”

“Mother isn’t asking us to live like paupers, just to be reasonable. I’m more concerned about what you are going to do here, while I interview people about the impact of the flood on their lives.”

“I’m going to relax and be thankful we’ve escaped Mēddoakwēs before the blizzard hit.” She smiled at him impishly. “Don’t worry. I have the names of some elementary school teachers here, and I’ll contact them and go read stories to their kids. There’s even an elementary school here that has Sumi classrooms, so I’ll go there as well.”

“I hope you can get to the villages, too.”

“Sure, why not. I have nothing against villages, and this is a big province.”

“Good.” Mēgēkwēs turned to the armoire where his manservant had put all his clothes away. He flipped through them, pleased the man had preserved the same order as in his closet at home.

His phone rang; it was his mother, the queen. He pushed a button. “Hello mother. We arrived here in Ora safe and sound about half an hour ago.”

“Good. You and Ninlilé left just in time, the wind is picking up and we’re in for a really bad snow storm.”

“They say it’s going to be a bad winter.”

“I hope not. We just got a call from Lord Nénasandru of Nénaskaita, a village in Rudhisér. He asked to speak straight to me and told me some very sad news: Albanu has a terminal medical condition.”

“Terminal?”

“Yes, pancreatic cancer. Apparently he found out a few weeks ago and has told very few people.”

“How long does he have?”

“They don’t know; some months. Can the two of you go up and visit him, maybe tomorrow before you’ve started your work? I would appreciate it if you can make an official visit on my behalf to express my sadness and assure him we are praying for him.”

“Yes, of course. But . . . you don’t seem to like him.”

“I didn’t say I did. In fact, I think he’s an old-fashioned embarrassment. But he’s dying and he’s a cousin. We owe him support and prayers.”

“Alright, I can do that. Tomorrow would be difficult, but . . . alright, we’ll do it.”

“Thank you. I’ll send a gift for you to give him. This shouldn’t delay your research much.”

“No it won’t, that’s alright. We’ll drive up tomorrow morning.”

Ninlilé was delighted to be on an official royal visit; it meant she could spend 2 hours getting her hair and makeup done and getting dressed properly. It also meant, as far as she was concerned, that Prince Mégékwes would not be driving them in his car; rather, they borrowed Duke Aryu's limousine and driver. Since they heard Albanu was eating very little, they timed their trip to arrive after he would have eaten his lunch. He was surprised by their visit.

"You are so kind to visit an old man, Honored Cousin-Prince!" he said, struggling to get up from his chair, as the Prince and his consort entered the room.

"Please, Honored Cousin-Duke, stay seated." Mégékwes hurried over to the Duke—who was either a third or fourth cousin, he wasn't sure which—and kissed him on both cheeks, as was customary among family members.

"Thank you, thank you. Please, sit down. It's so nice to see you again, Princess Ninlilé. Your wedding was so beautiful!"

"Thank you, Honored Cousin-Duke. We were so happy you were able to attend and thank you, again, for the little bronze horse you gave us. It was such a beautiful art object that we put it in our house outside Mèddoakwés in a place of honor in our parlor."

"I'm so glad. What will you have? Wine?"

"Certainly, thank you," said Mégékwes.

"Excellent. It was a test; I wanted to be sure you weren't Bahá'ís!" Albanu laughed and called on a servant to bring them three glasses of wine and a bottle. "This is the best from my vineyards on the western basin slopes. It's a perfect spot for wine grapes."

"It sounds beautiful."

“Maybe someday I can take you.” He waited for the servant to pour them glasses and hand them out, then Albanu raised his glass “To health!”

“To health!” They all sipped; it was a funny subject for a toast. “So, Her Majesty has heard,” said Albanu.

“Yes, Lord, she heard the other day that your health was seriously compromised.”

“Compromised. A good way to put it, I guess. I have six months left at most.” He shrugged. “Pancreatic cancer.”

“Have you asked for a second opinion? Perhaps Dr. Lua?”

“No, I won’t go see her. I saw Stauréstu and everyone says he’s the best physician in the kingdom; even better than Dr. Lua. There are multiple growths, which means it has spread. If they could operate and remove the big growths, then the tiny ones would just grow and I’d be right back in the same situation. They gave me pain pills.” He raised his glass again. “And this actually helps the most.”

“Yes, especially if it comes from your own vineyard.”

“Exactly. I’m so proud of the work of my vintners. Of all my farmers, actually.”

“The Basin looks so green and beautiful, Lord! We admired it as we drove up. My mother, Her Majesty the Queen, has asked me to bring you this.” He opened a leather satchel he had carried into the room and pulled out a framed watercolor of a farm scene.

“Oh this is so beautiful!” Albanu put on his glasses to admire it. “These are my rice paddies, I think, with my vineyards on the hill slope behind!”

“Indeed, I believe it is. On the back it says ‘Albanu’s estate.’”

He turned it over. “Oh, so it does. What a precious gift. Please thank her for me. I will be sure to write her a note as well.”

“Excellent.” Mégékwes took another sip of his wine. “Are you still able to get out and inspect your farms?”

“Yes, I can if I take it easy. I go out every morning, then take a nap and eat a bit. I’m afraid my appetite is gone and I can’t eat any large meals, but soups work. I’m not going to let anyone take me away from my farms. They are my fields, orchards, and vineyards. This is the life of a gentleman, you know? To oversee his farms. Well, and to hunt, but I haven’t been able to do that for a year or two; I’m too old.”

“I’m sorry to hear you haven’t been able to hunt. My father isn’t as old as you, but he has completely given up hunting as well.”

“He’s a busy man and has many investments. I have a few, also. I own Néfa Beer; the most popular brand in the world, made from my own grain and hops!”

“And an excellent product, too.”

“So what are you doing? Are you really writing long articles, as a journalist?”

“Yes indeed, under the pen name of ‘Ornpitru.’ We just arrived in Ora the other day and we’re staying all winter. I’m going to write about the flood.”

“Oh, really? A good subject. It was a beautiful city until most of it washed away. Such a terrible thing. If only . . . they hadn’t arrived here. It upset everything.”

“Ora was rebuilt, and it is twice as magnificent now as it was then. I’ve seen the pictures; there are about 100 of them, taken before the flood. It was an impoverished place.”

“It had poor people, yes. Every place did and every place still has some. There will always be poor. But there was beauty in spite of that. It was . . . an *order*. That’s what it had. ”

“You mean, who was in charge?”

“Yes. Not the people themselves; Lord Mitru was a good leader for Ora, but his sons totally destroyed his legacy. The *system* was beautiful. You knew who was in charge. That’s what we have been able to preserve here in the Basin, at least partially.”

“But surely, cousin-Duke, there has been a cost? The Néfa Basin is green, but the city itself has been passed by just about every city in the realm, including Gordha and Medhpéla, not to mention Pértatranisér.”

“We have not grown as fast as I would like, but we have preserved the old system, and that’s what is important, Cousin-Prince. Don’t forget it. The world has changed, but not the way Widumaj would want. Someone needs to rally the forces protecting the old ways and restore them. I so hope you can do this, Cousin-Prince. I beg you to see reality.”

Mégékwes was surprised. “I’m not sure what to say, Lord. But if you want me to look into it, I will.”

“Please, please do! The prerogatives of the lords must be preserved; the assault on them has grown to an impossible level. I wish your mother would do more, but the forces are hard to resist, and now this new law requiring village councils has stripped many lords of their freedom, not to mention their wealth. We’ve been able to halt the law here in Rudhisér.”

“How have you managed to do that, Cousin-Duke?”

“How? Well—” Albanu paused, then realized he probably should not explain.

“It’s difficult to explain because this Basin has a unique organization. It always has, because the land doesn’t belong to the peasants, but mostly to the lords. And the courts protect property, so they protect our prerogatives. That’s the difference. The key is to

restore land ownership to the Old Houses. This folly of selling land to the peasants; that was the mistake, which was pushed by the Menneas.”

“But it has generated a lot of wealth and prosperity for the farmers, and it hasn’t hurt the Old Houses much. Most of them are wealthier than ever!”

“But they could have been even wealthier. It upset the system and removed the natural social distinctions. And mark my words, if it continues, it will result in complete social chaos. We can’t continue down this road.”

“I see, Lord. As you say, I’ll have to look into the matter.”

“I hope you do. Free your mind! You will be a great king someday, Mégékwes, just like Gésélékwes Maj was! That’s what this kingdom needs; a great, strong *man* to be in charge.”

“Well, thank you for your confidence in me. You look tired, Cousin-Duke; perhaps we should let you rest.” Mégékwes rose, startling Albanu a bit.

“You’re leaving already?”

“You do look tired, and we don’t want to strain your health.”

“I *am* tired, you are right about that. But perhaps you can return another day? Awskandu is at the génadema today, but he is home Tridius and Penkudius. I am sure he’ll be glad to see you. He can even take you hunting, if you’d like, in our private forest.”

“Thank you, I’d like that.” Mégékwes leaned over and kissed Albanu again. “It is good to see you. I’ll pass your loving greetings to Her Majesty.”

“Thank you, please do. Albanu gestured to Ninlilé to approach and she kissed him as well. Then they left the room. They thanked the butler and headed straight to the car.

“That was strange,” said Ninlilé, as they got into the limo.

“Yes, a throwback from the medieval period. I had no idea how conservative he is! And look at the result!” He pointed to the vacant field near the palace that had once been a neighborhood.

“This city is less prosperous than most Sumi places.”

“It is. Driver, can we drive through the Néfa Basin a bit before we head back to Ora?”

“Certainly, Your Majesty. What would you like to see?”

“Just some of the area; the fields and villages.”

“Certainly, we’ll take Route 1 west toward Isurdhua, then turn southward on Route 42. That’ll give you a good look.” The driver hesitated. “There are a lot of poor areas.”

“Why?”

“Because a handful of Lords and their friends own half the land and they kicked the farmers off of it when they purchased tractors and other equipment.”

“Yes, that’s why Pértatranisér came into existence.”

“Exactly. You were a young boy; that was the summer of 626, 13 years ago. A quarter of Néfa burned and the people fled south toward Vésa. Some wouldn’t leave even though they had no land and they earn a living as best they can. Others work for Albanu and the other lords, and they aren’t paid generously; it is adequate, but not generous. People are still leaving the villages.”

“Please show me. Now I have become very curious.”

“Of course, Your Majesty.”

Ninlilé looked at Mégékwes. “I have this feeling you have yet another story to work on.”

The Prince nodded. I think so.”

The Way it Was

Early Prusménu /early Dec.. 23/641

The next day, the Prince convinced Ninlilé to go visit the local elementary school where she had contacts; two teachers named Skandasteru and Puwé Dēdikēr who were friends of Tiamaté. He dropped her off not long after the school opened and drove out of town for a long drive.

He didn't have a map, but he didn't need one; he knew more or less where everything was. He headed south on Route 2 first, driving through each village slowly, exploring alleys and stopping to make notes. When he reached the border with Lēwēspa he crossed the river and drove around Lēwēspadema, which he had heard was settled by people displaced from Vēspa by the rising sea. A quick stop in the town store verified that, based on the accents and a few questions he asked. Then he drove back across the river and took Route 51, which paralleled Route 2 but ran through a beautiful valley 10 kilometers to the west. He returned to Ora, crossed the Delongisér—the planet's biggest river, which reached the sea at Ora—then drove west again to see the villages along the northern part of Route 51.

After passing through Pértatranisér, he began to explore the roads in Rudhisér province. Néfa meant “navel” and it was indeed in the center of the province, built on the low, battered remnants of the central peaks of a crater 20 kilometers in diameter. Roads either ran around inside or outside the rim or radiated spoke-like from Néfa. The new townships outside the Basin on the sea shore—Pértatranisér, Luktrudema, Oyapéla,

Bolérripura, and Lɛpawsdomas—were full of small, bustling farms, active factories, or tourist businesses and looked good. The old, decaying, half abandoned villages inside the Basin did not. The contrast struck him strongly. He drove back to the school to pick up Ninlilé, full of questions.

He timed it well; he reached the school just as it was ending for the day. Children were streaming out the front door as he pushed in to find his wife. She was sitting in the teacher's lounge talking to a few teachers, including Skandasteru and Puwé.

“How did it go?” he asked.

“Oh, it was fun,” she replied. “The children were darling.”

“They were excited to meet a princess,” replied Skandasteru. “So they were *very* well behaved.”

“I read stories to twelve classrooms out of twenty-four,” she added to Mégékwes. “So I guess I have to come back!”

“Good. Did you find out about the Sumi elementary school?”

“We gave her the contact information; we have friend who teach there,” said Skandasteru.

“Thank you.” Mégékwes looked at the couple, whom he judged to be about 40 years old. “Say, have you heard about my project to write up an account of the flood?”

“Yes, Ninlilé told us.”

“Were both of you here at the time?”

“I was,” said Skandasteru. “I was 17 when the flood began and was enrolled in the Mitrui Génadema, studying to be a teacher. My father worked in the palace as a minor official, which is how I got to attend. Our house was down on Second Street and we had

to abandon it on the fourth day of the Flood because the water was washing everything away. It started out kind of slow; we'd had pulses of water come down the Glugluba before. But within 24 hours it had become a roaring torrent—and I mean roaring, you could hear it all over the city—and it never subsided after that for 9 years.”

“What did you do?”

“Half the city moved in with relatives or camped in the orchards that dominated the north side of the hill. We stayed with my uncle. There are no orchards on the north side now, it's the heart of the new city. But at the time of the flood, Ora climbed the south side of the hill from the river to the crest, and that was it. We were quite frightened for months because we had no idea whether an even bigger flood would race down the glugluba and wash all of us away.”

“Did Lord Mitru consider evacuating the city?”

“To where? No, if he had, he would have lost everything, including the iron works and the génadema he had started to build with the help of the Menneas. If anything, he wanted people to move into the city once the flood began in order to make it bigger.”

“And many did, including my family,” added Puwé. “Our village was eight kilometers farther east, on rich land that was the former seabed. It was submerged about three months after the flood began because of rising sea level. Our lord was on the outs with Lord Mitru, so when his town was drowned, he lost his rank and privileges.”

“He didn't get a new town inland?”

Skandasteru shook his head. “Lord Mitru claimed the right to dole out the land in the western valley and the hills beyond, so he divided up the land there into seventeen townships over the next five years and assigned each one to a friend of his, some of

whom had been lords of the twelve villages that were drowned. Those twelve villages had about 15,000 people; a third of the province's population. They got no help to move, and if they went to the new towns they had to clear their own farmland, build their own house, and help set up the village and clear the roads. It was backbreaking work for many years. Many decided to move to Ora instead because it had jobs, and maybe half moved to Məlwika and the granges in the lower Arjakwés valley."

"This is one reason why Lord Mitru was hated by a lot of people," said Puwé. "And why, after he died, the city had severe riots over which son should succeed him. As a result, three of the four sons got exiled to Swadnoma."

"That was a terrible time," said Skandasteru. "You can ask Kekanu about it; he was staying in the palace during the troubles. He was there when the flood began and most of the time in between, too. In Lord Mitru's defense, it should be said that, at that time, no one expected the government to help in any significant way. The crown didn't help much either, except to rebuild Ora; that's another reason people moved here. And in those days, resources were much more limited anyway."

"I see your point," said Mégékwés. "So, there was help to rebuild Ora?"

"Yes, the crown dedicated all the local tax revenues to it," said Skandasteru. "I should add that the army built the roads and paved them, including Route 51 in the western valley, but that was partly to help move timber and iron ore to Ora, because the development of the iron works was a huge effort. And of course the first big triumph was the suspension bridge over the Glugluba, in spite of the flood; psychologically that was very, very significant. Not only did it reunite a province literally split in half by the flood, it gave us a sense that we could overcome the flood."

“Then less than a year after Mēlwika began to make steam engines, so did Ora, and it specialized in heavy trucks, steam shovels, bulldozers, and other heavy equipment. It made a very important contribution to the development of the economy. But it cost a lot of money. A lot of people were injured or killed, too.”

“But it also created a lot of highly skilled jobs and forced the spread of literacy,” noted Puwé. “That’s why Ora retained its central importance on the western shore and remains the second largest metropolitan area, after Mēddoakwés-Mēlwika.”

“Yes, it is quite a contrast to Néfa. Why the difference, do you think?”

“A couple of things,” replied Skandasteru. “Néfa had no drowned villages because the area east of it was hilly—relatively poor farmland—and because before Sumilara was conquered, the land had been a no-man’s land and fought over. So Néfa didn’t have a displaced population from rising sea level. It also had no uninhabited western valley to settle; the mountains rise pretty quickly as you go west from the basin. The north and south shore provinces also had no drowned villages because when the sea had slowly dried up, the villages along the old shoreline simply extended their claims over the old seabed. That was also true of Sumilara; maybe one village was drowned there, though many people had to move to higher ground in their township or to other townships. As for Arjakwés, before the sea was restored, its lower valley was arid and sparsely populated. So only Vésa had a huge displacement of people.”

“Of course, Néfa had a big displacement later,” noted the prince.

“Yes, but that was greed,” replied Puwé. “Lord Albanu and four or five other lords own about half the farmland in the Basin. Because of intermarriage with other lordly families, they came to own land in many different townships, not just the one in

which they were lord. Once tractors were reliable and had a lot of attachments for plowing and harvesting grain, they began to kick farmers off the land they had been sharecropping for decades so that they could farm large areas mechanically. The courts upheld their right to determine how they would use their property. Those farmers were treated very poorly. Many moved to Mēlwika or the lower Arjakwés granges, and then when there was a revolt and half of Néfa burned, even more fled to the good land just outside the Basin to the north, east, and south. The Arjakwés granges helped them establish their own granges and now the province's prosperity comes from those new lands, particularly from Pértatranisér."

"Yes, so I have seen. I just drove around Vésa and Rudhisér. The Rudhisér villages are full of abandoned and run-down houses. The Vésa villages in the western valley look much better, though admittedly they are small compared to the villages along Route 2. Now I understand why; most of the people displaced by the flood moved here or to Arjakwés."

"Exactly," said Skandasteru. "I think by now, most people have forgiven Lord Mitru for his decisions because he made this a great city, made Vésa a prosperous province, and when he ruled no one expected the government to solve big problems like the flood. There was only so much that could be done. But that is in sharp contrast to the situation in Rudhisér. The crisis there was caused by the Duke himself and not by nature, it is continuing to this day, and the parts of the province that are prospering do so in spite of him instead of because of him."

Mégékwes nodded. "I think that is true. Thank you so much for your wisdom. It is more than I would have expected from an elementary school teacher!"

“Well, I am also a Bahá'í Auxiliary, which means I travel a lot more than most people. I have been in all the shoreline provinces, Sumilara, and to four Tutane tribes, and I've talked to a lot of people. It's been quite an education!”

“Yes, I suppose it is.” He looked at Ninlilé. “We should go, but I'd like to come back and ask you more questions at a time I can take notes. If you can refer me to people who lived through the flood and the troubles afterward, that'd be very helpful for the article I am working on.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty.” They all rose and shook hands, then Mégékwes and Ninlilé walked out of the school.

“So, you want to do this more?” he said, as he got in the car and started the engine.

“Yes, definitely. Once you get to the point where you can go to a village for the day, or half a day, I'll plan to come along and visit the school.”

“When will you go to the Sumi school?”

“It isn't an entire school, just part of a school. Maybe tomorrow.”

For the next few days, the Prince formally interviewed people about the flood; not just its start, but its entire nine-year duration and the dislocations that resulted. He started at the school Ninlilé went the next morning and was surprised to learn that there had been virtually no Sumis in Ora during that period of time; they had been informally banned from the city until ten years earlier ostensibly to protect the city's industrial secrets, with the result that Ora's Sumiwika only had a few hundred inhabitants. He then tried to interview people at the palace, but the bureaucrats were too nervous to speak to him

about that time. He made a mental note that he'd save for last a conversation with Duke Aryu and Lord Mitrudatu, the nephew and youngest son of the infamous Lord Mitru.

The next day, a slow walk through Ora's marketplace was much more fruitful. Almost no one recognized him, and by wearing the simple clothes of a workman—which he had trouble obtaining—the few who did shrugged off the resemblance as a mere coincidence. He ended up having tea with a bunch of old men at lunchtime, when their stalls selling herbs and spices were briefly closed, and they told him their stories of fear, loss, and struggle. They introduced him to friends and sons, and he stood with them at their stalls while they transacted business and told him their stories. It took him several hours that night to type up his notes and convert short phrases into full sentences. It was clear that the marketplace would be a nearly inexhaustible source of accounts, so he went back for the next three days.

The next day was Primdiu and Ninlilé had no school to go to, and she wanted to shop, so they drove to Pértatranisé, which had by far the best stores on the western shore. Because there was a noon concert at the shopping area, the place was packed, with buses constantly coming and going and a full parking lot. The prince managed to find a spot for his car and they went into the open central plaza in time to listen to the concert. Ninlilé was not impressed by the folk songs; Këkanu sponsored the weekly event, broadcast it live over Channel 1, awarded prizes for the best music, and recorded everything for replay on the radio and for sale of the recordings. She did, however, enjoy his closing number where he sang a new, very moving song as he played the piano. "We need this on Sumilara," she said to Mégékwés as the concert ended. "The island has a rich musical history and no one is encouraging it."

“We need to find someone like Kekanu who can create a radio show out of it. He was the most famous singer in the land before the radio came along, and his daily *World Table* show during the eclipse has made him known by absolutely everyone.”

“Yes, some people even listen to him on Sumilara. But there needs to be financial backing for it to succeed.”

Mégékwes raised an eyebrow; it was the first time he’d heard Ninlilé comment about the way business worked. “Yes, of course. Kekanu had Lord Amosu’s backing; he fled here from Ora when Lord Mitru died and there were riots in the city, and the radio was just beginning to be used.”

“Maybe they can give advice, if we can find someone.”

“I’m sure. We can go ask right now. Even Lord Amosu is up there.” He pointed to the stage and Ninlilé nodded, so they walked over. As they approached, Andranu said, “Hey, Ornpitru!” using the Prince’s pen name.

Mégékwes turned and saw Andranu and Skandé. “Hey, Good day! How nice to run into the two of you here! How are you doing?”

“Quite well! Really busy with the job, but we’re enjoying it!”

“And we’re working together, which has been fun, too,” added Skandé. “How are you both doing?”

“And what brings you here?” added Andranu.

“We’re staying in Ora for the next three months; the weather on the western shore is warm and dry while it’s cold and snowy in Mèddoakwés. I’m researching a writing project; a retrospective on the flood.”

“Really? Fascinating!” said Skandé.

“Kekanu was talking about it just the other day,” said Andranu. “He was in Ora when it began, and most of the time afterward. He went to Mèddoakwés every summer, but was here the rest of the year.”

“Yes, I’d like to interview him some time. We were hoping to ask him about something else, though.”

“He’s still up on stage. This way.” Andranu pointed to the back and they followed him. Kekanu, his wife Derésé, their 22-year old daughter Kanésté, Amos, May, and Marié were all there.

“Your Majesties!” said Kekanu and Amos at the same time, surprised to see them.

“It’s good to see all of you,” replied Mégékwés. “It was a fantastic concert, Kekanu. We really enjoyed it, especially your closing piano number.”

“Thank you so much! Erduktér has written a novel about Eradéumaj and Kérdu is converting it into a musical play, and I’m writing the music! This is one of the songs.”

“It captures the triumph and tragedy of his life very well. To conquer the entire world and have all your sons die in different ways; I have often wondered how I would react. Princess Ninlilé and I were talking after the concert ended about how marvelous it would be if we could find a Sumi singer to sponsor similar concerts at Anartu and broadcast them over Channel 3.”

“We’ve tried,” said Kekanu. “So far, no one has had the right combination of musical, radio, and business talent.”

“We’ve even met with two possibilities,” added Amos. “If you can ask around, perhaps we can find the right person.”

“I’m glad to hear that you have tried,” said Ninlilé. “A concert and radio show like this would greatly strengthen Sumi culture.”

“Absolutely,” said Amos. “It’s a Bahá’í principle to strengthen culture and help it advance. Besides, establishment of a recording industry is very good for the artists; it allows them to make some money. The last group that played, the Yimanu Brothers, have produced two records through us and they’ve sold about 20,000 copies at 10 dontay each. Their share is 1.5 dontay per sale, so they’ve made 1,500 dhanay!”

“And so have we,” said Kekanu, with a smile.

“I’ll ask around,” promised Ninlilé. “Perhaps you need to find a young artist and train them.”

“That’s a possibility,” agreed Kekanu.

“I have another question for you,” said Mégékwes. “I am researching the flood in order to produce a series of articles about it, probably for *Melwika Nues*. I understand you were in Ora most of the time.”

I was indeed.” Kekanu shook his head sadly. “That was a very difficult time for everyone. Very frightening. It brought out the best in some people and the worst in others.”

“So I’m beginning to see.”

“I have a suggestion,” interrupted May. “We’re all about to head to our house for dinner. On Primdius, our two families have a big meal after the concert. Please come join us.”

“Thank you, but I don’t want to impose.” He looked at Ninlilé, who had planned to shop.

“No, it’s no imposition at all. We often invite people to eat with us. Chalésté will have plenty of food ready, I assure you.”

“Alright.” The Prince looked to Ninlilé and she seemed positive about it. “Thank you, we’ll be glad to join you.”

“Excellent,” said Amos.

“If you want to drive there, we can go with you,” suggested Andranu. “That way, you won’t get lost.”

“That’d be very helpful,” agreed the Prince. Andranu pointed to the exit from the plaza that led to the parking lot, so the four of them waved goodbye and headed out of the building.

“I’m intrigued by your project,” said Andranu, as they walked. “The flood changed the entire world! It was absolutely huge.”

“And it came right after the New Knowledge, which was the other big disruptor. The Menneas were in touch with the aliens and I suspect they said something, but I’ll have to ask. The entire sea was drying up and if it had shrunk much more, the entire civilization on Éra might have been doomed. On the other hand, if the landslide had washed away, Ora would have been totally destroyed.”

“It appears the aliens put the sea back as gently as they could. Do we know how many people died when the flood began?”

“No, but I hope to figure that out. It wasn’t very many because the flood started gradually.” Mégékwes unlocked the car and the four of them got in; Andranu climbed into the front, leaving the women to sit in the back. The Prince put the key in the ignition and turned it, and they heard a whoosh as an alcohol fire erupted in the engine’s firebox.

“I think more people died afterward, from poverty caused by the displacement. Twelve villages were gradually submerged over the next five or six years, forcing 15,000 people to move to higher ground. Lord Mitru opened towns inland but gave no money to create them, so people struggled. Many moved to Məlwika and the lower Arjakwés granges: Əjnopéla, Béranta, Ornakwés, and Məlita.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know, but I think I can find out.” The steam pressure had risen up into the green area on the pressure gauge, so the prince put the car in reverse and slowly backed out of his parking space. Andranu pointed.

“Go out onto Route 2, take a right, cross the river, then use the roundabout to come back across the river and turn right onto Second Street.”

“I can’t take a left?”

“No! Too much traffic. There was an accident almost every day for a while, so I’m told! Skandé and I drove down Route 51 past Mitranimela a month or so ago. The inland towns look pretty good, now.”

“They’re twenty years old, so they’re pretty well established, but when Lord Mitru assigned the land to his cronies, they were pretty primitive. The cronies did pretty well, too; Lord Mitranu of Mitranimela had to be stripped of all responsibility and benefits because he was using development grants for his own benefit.”

“I remember. I suppose he’s living in a nice house in Ora now, with a country villa in Luktrodəma. It’s just like the situation in the Nəfa Basin; the rich lords are exploiting the people as much as they can.”

“Yes, so I noticed.” The prince paused to look for a big gap in the traffic, then turned right. “The villages in the Néfa Basin look really wretched, with abandoned houses and run-down houses. There are very few prefabs and new structures; just garages for Albanu’s tractors and threshers.”

“It’s pretty sad. We haven’t been able to do anything with the village councils there. Skandé and I have established contact with five townships in northern Véspe and the five on Route 41 that runs outside around the Néfa Basin on the east. We’ve met with the Councils of Oyapéla and Luktrodema; in fact, Oyapéla may ask Skandé to serve as their part time town manager! We’re excited about that. We’ve met with the Mitranimela Council, which has had some personality problems, and maybe we’ve been able to help. Dekané was here two weeks ago and was pleased.”

The prince nodded as he slowed and went around the roundabout. “But what happened with the councils in the Néfa Basin?”

“Nothing. We made enquiries with Duke Albanu’s office and he wouldn’t give us contact information or any names. The palace felt that we should try to get it ourselves, first; I guess they want the Village Assistance Corporation to establish its independence, and that’s good. So we tried a very simple trick; we sent letters made out to ‘Oyapéla Village Council, Oyapéla’ figuring that the local postmaster would do the rest. That worked with the four townships east of the Basin; we heard back from all four of them. But none of the Basin councils responded.”

“That’s strange.” The prince slowed the car and turned right onto Second Street.

“It’s five blocks up, and you have to go slow because every intersection now has a little roundabout. Pértatranisér is a city of roundabouts! I used to hate them, but they do

keep you moving. Anyway, we're so busy with our existing contacts, we haven't had any time to send a second letter, or go to the villages and ask who is on the councils. I am sure we could find out that way."

"This doesn't sound like the sort of work you were looking for."

"It isn't, but I'm enjoying it for now. There are a lot of services one can offer village councils. Most are too small to employ a full time manager and they really appreciate someone providing outside services at a reasonable price. It saves them time and money." They went around the second roundabout, then the third. Andranu pointed. "That big house is Kεkanu's and it includes his studio."

"I recognize it, he interviewed me once."

"Oh, that's right. He has made a *lot* of money. Who would have thought that selling records and talking on the radio would be worth so much? He has his library of recordings here and you should see it; he must have 10,000 records."

"A precious repository of culture."

"Turn right here and then turn left up the alley."

The prince nodded and made the two turns, then Andranu had him stop outside a gate. Andranu got out and used his key to unlock it, so the Prince could drive his car into a small parking area. Andranu pointed to a spot for the car.

They all got out, and as they started to walk into the house, Amos and Kεkanu drove up in two more cars, so they waited. Then everyone headed into the house and straight to the dining room, where the food was being brought to the table by Fithu and Chalésté.

“So, tell us more about your plan to write about the flood,” said May, after the chatter over passing dishes of food was over.

“There’s not a lot to tell, yet. I’ve been interviewing people about their experiences; if I dress in working man’s clothes, people don’t recognize me as Prince Mégékwés. The marketplace has been a great place to meet people.”

“What sorts of stories are you getting?”

“Accounts of life in Ora the day the flood started and the months afterward. That’s my focus right now. A lot of money poured into Ora to build a whole new city on the northern slope of city hill; a beautiful city, with a new palace on top, a new marketplace, a port down on Banana Creek, and an impressive industrial park. A city with pressurized water in iron pipes, too, which was an important innovation; Ora had that before Mèddoakwés. The houses were all new, also. Many people comment on how beautiful Ora is, and how that attracted them to live there.”

“It’s true, old Ora was pretty run down,” said Amos. “Did you look at the pictures Thornton took?”

“Yes, I’ve studied them in detail, and I plan to make a map showing where each one was taken. I was talking to someone in the palace two days ago and suggested to him the idea of opening a “Museum of Ora” so people could learn its entire history. He loved the idea.”

“That is a great idea,” agreed Kėkanu. “I’m originally from Bėlledha, but I’ve lived half my life in Ora, and I *love* that city. It’s so ancient and so significant to our civilization. It deserves a museum.”

“Have you talked to people from the drowned villages?” asked May.

The prince nodded. “A few, and I plan to talk to a lot more. That’s an important phase of my research that’s coming. All I have to do is go to the new villages in the western valley and interview people there.”

“You’ll hear some tragic stories,” said May. “But go to Mēlwika and Ējnopéla also to interview people who had to flee the chaos and starvation of Véspe. For example, Chandu Chartagras, the head of the All-Grange Council. He and a bunch of friends took a steam wagon to Mēlwika from Chartagras, which is now under the waves, and they squatted on brushland at Dēksawsuperakwa; in fact, they started that hamlet. My dad came along and gave them some work because they were starving there. Chandu was either 16 or barely 17 at the time, an illiterate orphan with no skills, and now look at him!”

“He has quite a story; I’ll be sure to interview him. I am also struck by the sad stories in Rudhisér province, when a handful of wealthy lords decided to expel almost 2,000 farmers and their families from land they had sharecropped for generations.”

“That’s a terrible injustice,” exclaimed May immediately. “Thousands suffered unjustly. A hundred or two died in the violence and from illnesses exacerbated by poor diet and poverty. Even more just abandoned their farms or sold them to the lords over time because they couldn’t make a decent living without tractors and other equipment, and the lords prevented the formation of granges. The eastern towns outside the basin from Pértatranisér to Lepawsdomas have over 16,000 people and almost all of them are from the Basin. The villages in the Basin are down to half to three quarters of the population they used to have, and the young people in particular have left.”

“I don’t remember seeing very many schools.”

“That’s right. Most villages have a single-room school to teach grades 1 through 8,” said May. “The high school students go to Néfa or come here. The Néfa Basin probably has the highest illiteracy of any of the provinces bordering the sea.” She raised her voice. “It’s scandalous.”

“Is there nothing Pértatranisér can do?”

Amos shook his head. “It’s difficult because almost all the lords are hostile to us. Letters to them go unanswered. Whenever you call them, they’re too busy to talk. Relations have improved in the last few years, but are still strained. They do send high school students here and pay the standard fee, but not many students come and I am sure they discourage it. Pértatranisér may pay its taxes to Néfa, but we function as if we were the second largest city in Vésa province. Most business contracts come from Vésa. We even have more high school students from northern Vésa than from southern Rudhisér.”

“What does the provincial bureaucracy do?”

“It’s pretty small and doesn’t have a lot of money. One thing to remember is that the huge farms that Albanu and his friends manage are pretty unproductive. If independent farmers belonging to a grange farmed the same land, they’d raise fifty to one hundred percent more food. Albanu doesn’t hire enough workers and doesn’t pay them well, so they are overworked and don’t care. This is what one man here in town told me; he knows his old village and his friends who work the land as hired hands.”

“Albanu and his friends also operate a brewery and they can’t get enough high quality grain from their own lands, so they buy some from Lépawsdomas,” added May. “There is almost as much farmland outside the Basin on its eastern side as in the Basin itself and it is much more productive. It’s operated by grange members, who own their

own land. If the Basin land were converted to grange farming, it would be much more prosperous.”

“And the existing granges would be glad to stretch and help their cousins in the Basin, so the transition might not be too difficult,” said Amos.

Mégékwes sighed. “This is so sad. I’m definitely going to write an expose about Rudhisér; a rather frank one! It may be the only way to make things change.”

“Yes, definitely!” said May. “Eryan journalists are often too timid to tackle issues like this. It’s understandable; the forces opposing change are huge, and in the past there were repercussions. There was censorship, and we encouraged timidity at first so that the idea of newspapers wouldn’t be blocked. But times have changed and you are the crown prince; they can’t throw you in prison.”

“No, but let’s remember Bahá'u'lláh’s words about speech,” exclaimed Amos forcefully. “We didn’t encourage timidity; we advised wisdom. You have to know your audience, and it includes the rich and powerful. Exposes are not always the best way to bring about change; they create polarization and contention, not unity. And unity is the ultimate force for bringing about a change in conditions.”

“Newspapers almost got all of you killed anyway,” said Kekanu. “Her Majesty Dukteréstó, may Esto bless her, was furious about the printing press you gave Kameru in Tripola. It caused a lot of trouble, and it did get Kameru killed.”

“That was our biggest mistake,” agreed May. “And it was partly my fault; I pressed father to give him a printing press because Tripola was far away and Kameru was a good writer. I have always felt guilty about that.”

“As we all know, May has always been a rebel,” said Kekanu. “I have always balanced May’s advice with Amos’s! And I think our radio programs have worked out very well as a result. We have built a lot of unity in the kingdom, while also exposing injustices and raising difficult issues. So I have advice for the journalist Ornpitru. First, once you gather your information, ask your mother for advice, because that’s the most important relationship for you to maintain. Second, be sure you have all the relevant facts, and describe them as fairly as you can. Third, do not attempt to interpret anyone’s motives. Just lay out the facts and let your audience interpret them. If someone comes off badly, they can question the facts, but they can’t accuse you of slandering them. Fourth, don’t include unflattering information that is irrelevant to your story. Have a sin-covering eye. Be gracious to people who do evil things; just expose what happened. Maybe they will apologize or repent, if you are gracious to them. And if they don’t, that is a matter for Esto and not us. Fifth and finally, please wait for Albanu to pass, because he is very ill.”

“He is?” said May, surprised. Kekanu nodded.

“We’re always the last ones to hear,” added Amos.

“I met with him last week,” said Mégékwes. “My mother sent a gift for me to deliver to him. He has pancreatic cancer and has only a few months to live.”

“Is that what it is,” said Kekanu, nodding.

“I wonder what we should do?” said May to Amos. “Perhaps we should send him a gift as well.”

“Yes, that’s a good idea,” said Kekanu. “He has done many bad things, but most of them are simply expressions of the old ways that have passed. He is a man of a different era.”

“And in spite of him, life expectancy is longer, literacy is higher, and prosperity is greater for most people in the Basin than they were when he became lord,” added

Skandé. “He opposed some of that, but he also tolerated and allowed some of it as well.”

“That’s true,” agreed Kεkanu emphatically.

“We will reach out to him, then,” said Amos.

“And I won’t publish anything until after he passes,” agreed Mégékwes.

497.

Plans and Plots

Late Prusménu /late Dec.. 23/641

“I see that your research has become more complicated than you or I thought,” said Queen Estoibidhé, after hearing her son’s summary of the last week. She looked at him; they were using the cameras on their smartphones and thus could see each other. “I am not saying you should stop, but I am getting concerned that you will open old wounds and revive old grudges. Many people are still upset that Lord Mitru gave new towns in the western valley to friends, rather than giving them to the lords of the drowning villages, and then he diverted all the monies from the province and from the palace to Ora.”

“I was told that the palace had given the money for the rebuilding of Ora alone.”

The queen shook her head. “No, that’s not what I remember. I wasn’t in the palace all the time, and the decisions were being made by mother and carried out by my brother. I suppose he allowed the money to be expended on Ora alone, but I remember she asked for half of it to be devoted to the resettlement of people displaced by the returning sea.”

“Maybe Lord Mitru argued that if everyone settled in Ora, the money would go to resettle them.”

“Maybe, but as I said, that’s not my recollection. Let’s remember that my father—your grandfather—was Lord Mitru’s first cousin. You are related to him dozens of different ways. Albanu, too.”

“Kεkanu told me not to publish anything about Albanu now, because of his declining health, and I plan to respect that suggestion.”

“Good. That’s wise. He has a lot of friends, especially among the Old Houses. But it is true that the situation in Rudhisér province is more tragic than in Véspe, primarily because it was man made. It really needs to be researched and written about. Maybe you should be a historian rather than a journalist.”

“Lady May said that too, as we were leaving their house! But I will write a book about it, too, some day, and I will write it like a historian would, carefully and with footnotes. The article about the flood will be my Master’s thesis for my journalism degree, which will be this Kaiménu. Maybe I should get a Masters in history next year. Did you know Melwika Génadema has awarded only five Masters in history, and no doctorates? It’s actually an under-studied area.”

“No, I had no idea. The Royal Museum has two of them.”

“It does. One other thing, mother: I’d like to make a request of the Ministry of Statistics.”

“For what?”

“Basic information about Véspe and Rudhisér; economic productivity, for example, and the role of the village councils.”

“Rudhisér’s councils are not very strong. Last summer, not all of the councils even showed up for their training, and some had only one or two members. We were not pleased.”

“From what I have heard, I’m not surprised. I’d like to get the names of the council members, their contact information, and their budgets, if possible.”

The queen considered a moment. “I think all three of those pieces of information should be public, so I see no problem. You have email on your phone, right? Bidhu does as well, so email him with your request and copy me. I’ll approve it, and that will be that.”

“Thanks, mother. The Village Council Advising Consultancy on this shore has written many of the councils in Rudhisér and hasn’t heard back from a single council member of a village from inside the Néfa Basin.”

“That’s not right; the councils need to cooperate with the consultancy. Feel free to pass the names and addresses to them.”

“Thanks, mother, I will.”

“Good, and have a great day! I’m surprised you got up so early to call!”

“It’s 6:20 a.m. here. I wanted to be sure I could write Bidhu before the eclipse.”

“Well, now you can, and I have a meeting in ten minutes, so I had better go.

Goodbye, dear.”

“Goodbye, mother.” Mégékwes waved, then pushed the button to close the call.

“I’m nervous,” said Mitru, as he and Chris got out of the front of Mitru’s fancy car and Thornton and Mayor Kérdu got out of the back.

“No reason to,” replied Chris. “This is a preliminary meeting. I doubt anything will result.”

“If anyone has something to lose, it is we,” responded Mayor Kérdu. “Mélwika is the largest city, not Mèddoakwés. Any authority we concede to anyone else diminishes us.”

“But it advantages everyone, theoretically,” replied Thornton.

“We hope,” Kérdu quickly responded.

They walked into the old Lord Mayor’s palace, as it was called twenty years ago before the Lord of Mèddoakwés was elevated to the rank of Duke of the province of Arjakwés. It had been extensively renovated several times, most recently when Kandékwés and his family had moved into the royal palace across the Main Square. Now it served only as city and provincial offices. An aide met them at the front door and led them down a corridor to a comfortable meeting room where Wérodatu, the Duke’s “provincial assistant”—essentially, the province’s governor—waited with Yimoséru, Kandékwés’s assistant for the city, who functioned as the mayor of Mèddoakwés. As they were settling down over tea, coffee, little pastries, and small talk, Kandékwés himself strode in with his second-oldest son, 15 year old Kandéstu. “Greetings to my friends in Melwika!” he said. “Thank you for coming. The subject of discussion you have proposed is intriguing.”

“Thank you, Honored Duke,” replied Chris. “We look forward to the discussion.”

“Then let us sit at the table and get started,” suggested Kandékwés, sitting at its head. The others came and sat as well, the Melwikans on his right side. “Melwika’s five-year development plan is very impressive; I read through it carefully when it was published last month. And now you propose to extend it to the entire province, or at least to the eastern half of it.”

“Not exactly,” replied Chris. “Our plan can’t serve as a plan for the entire province because the needs are different, but it might be able to serve as a model. As for the area covered, there are three ways to think about it; the plan could be designed for the

entire province, in which case it would be run by the provincial government; or it could be a commission appointed by the governments it serves, either greater Mèddoakwés-Mèlwika or the entire western shore. There are advantages to all three possibilities."

"We already have fairly extensive coordination," noted Wérodatu. "The province has three school districts, those of Mèlwika, Mèddoakwés, and Èjnopéla, and some kids go to Nuarjora. It has five fire districts and coordinates with Mèlita, Sullèndha, and Arjdhura. It has four municipal police departments and a provincial department."

"Correct, but we're talking about zoning, industrial development, and transportation, at minimum," said Kérdu. "There are also issues of hazardous waste, energy supplies, deforestation in the Northern Mountains, and potential flooding problems."

"And why does Mèlwika want to tell us how to plan these things?" asked Yimoséru suspiciously.

"We don't," replied Chris quietly. "We want to discuss with you some of the problems and figure out a mechanism for how we can all work on them together."

"And what if we don't agree that they are problems?" asked Wérodatu.

Chris shrugged. "That will save all of us a lot of time. We'll go home and deal with them ourselves as best we can."

There was awkward silence for a moment, then Kandékwés said, "Where do you want to start?"

"How about deforestation?" suggested Thornton. "That's not on city territory, but provincial territory. In the last few months, the advanced ecology course at Mèlwika

Génadema has been hiking the foothills and higher slopes of the Northern Mountains almost all the way up to the ridgeline, where Arjakwés province ends and the North Shore province begins. They became concerned about the extensive deforestation in Melwika—which we were aware of—and began making hikes along the Isérakwés, the Dwobrébakwés, and the Gédhakwés. That confirmed a serious problem, so we had Okpétu provide new aerial photographs.” Thornton pulled out a map and unfolded it. “Fifty percent of the forest in Melwika has been cut, but we required the companies to leave strips of forest twenty meters wide every seventy meters across all slopes to reduce erosion and gullyng. This has mostly been done. But east of Melwika along the Isérakwés it has not been done, and about sixty percent of the trees have been removed. The Gédhakwés is in better shape because it’s farther away and the land is more rugged, but it has lost a third of its forest cover. An unusually heavy series of rains could overwhelm the Isérakwés dam, and if it bursts, Megdhuna would be wiped out, some housing and factories on the Isérakwés floodplain could be inundated, and the damage would continue downstream all the way to the Sea. That’s a serious provincial issue.” Thornton looked at Wérodatu, then handed him two copies of the map and a report. “The second copy is for the army. They need to check the dam.”

“Thank you,” said Wérodatu, taking them reluctantly.

“Alright, that’s something we can do,” said Kandékwes. “But you could have brought that to us any time. It doesn’t involve coordination with Melwika.”

“Correct,” said Kérdu. “But we think zoning does. Greater Mèddoakwés-Melwika now has 84,000 people and that number is growing at five percent per year; that’s 4,000 people, 1,000 new houses, and 1,500 new jobs in factories and businesses per year. It’s

also almost 1,000 additional vehicles on the roads every year. It's seven percent more gas consumed per year, eight percent more electricity, and ten percent more water. That doesn't count the lower valley from Eɲnopéla west, the Dwobrébakwés Valley, and the Gédhakkwés valley, which have 22 villages and towns and 32,000 more. The province is just a little bit short of having three times the population when we took the first census. It's the richest region in the realm as well.

“We need to encourage the growth of villages and discourage the growth of Melwika and Meddoakwés, for several reasons. First, larger cities are harder to manage; for example, there's more water demand in one spot and more sewage to deal with. Second, they are more impersonal; in villages people know their neighbors, tend to live a more relaxed life, and are less likely to break the law. Third, housing gets more and more expensive in cities because everyone wants to move to them. If we can make villages more attractive, housing demand will be less and house prices will be more reasonable. We can do this with policies that encourage the opening of more business in villages, setting up more industrial parks, and improving transportation.”

“Regarding the latter, Mitru Transportation has been experimenting with more frequent buses,” said Mitru. “Melwika gave me 10,000 dhanay three months ago to provide free bus service in the city of Melwika itself and along two roads to Deksawsuperakwa, and Yimuaidha has given me 3,000 to extend it to Yimuaidha. Three buses run continually in the city itself and two run continuously from Yimuaidha to Deksawasuperakwa for 16 hours a day, providing service every half hour. There is noticeably less car traffic in Melwika's streets and many more people commuting in for work or to shop.”

“And you’re making money?” asked Yimoséru.

Mitru nodded. “But the subsidies make it possible; otherwise, I’d have to cut back.”

“How much, for the eastern end of the province?” asked Wérodatu.

“About 45,000 dhanay more, and 30,000 more if we wanted to connect the western half to Ejnopéla. If everyone in the eastern half can get to Meddoakwés or Melwika within an hour—that includes walking to the bus stop and waiting—between 4:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m., then the entire area is essentially one big city. But it means that most of the buses that now take children to school must be run all the time, which increases salaries and maintenance. It will be easier if we can get the factories to stagger the times their shifts change, to spread out the load on the buses.”

“It’s really a bargain, considering the number of people who benefit,” said Chris.

“But the province will need to establish a housing construction code, because some villages have one and some don’t, and they differ, which is hard on housing contractors. With a uniform code, everyone would know what to expect when they buy a house, and the bank would be able to issue standard mortgages.”

“That means taking the matter to the provincial assembly,” said Kandékwés. “And who knows whether they’d agree.”

“We need to educate them,” replied Thornton. “I think most villages would welcome the chance to grow and be connected, though.”

“Probably,” agreed Wérodatu. “And if we can encourage the establishment of small businesses—stores, bakeries, service stations, barber shops—in each village, and

disperse factories more widely, people would have even more of a reason to settle in a village.”

“Factories are already located pretty widely,” replied Chris. “We’ve been investing in Yimuaidha for several years, and Morituora has quite a few factories. Megdhuna and Domamitrui would be good places to encourage industry, though. The lower valley already has the Triwika Industrial Park, but it could use industry at Weranowika and Ornakwés, and perhaps Terskua, which has developed its own industrial park pretty well.”

“Now I see why you were talking about the entire western shore, because this effort could be expanded to include Swadnoma, Morana, and Lepawsona provinces,” said Kandékwes.

“Exactly,” replied Mitru. “The fast, frequent bus service could be extended to Endraidha, Arjdhura, Nuarjora, and Sullendha pretty easily. But they’d have to set up their own zoning laws and construction codes.”

“You also mentioned hazardous waste and energy,” said Yimoséru. “Hazardous waste is going to the disposal area in Kresona.”

“Yes, but the fee needs to be raised thirty percent because the facility needs to be expanded,” said Thornton. “Disposal is becoming very expensive; 100,000 dhanay per year for Melwika. If we establish more industrial parks, they’ll need hazardous waste disposal as well.”

“As for energy, the development of hydropower in the Long Valley can provide us with electricity, but we’re going to have problems soon with gas,” said Chris. “Gas production is the principal reason for deforestation. Hauling wood from the Spine

Mountains and their western slopes is expensive. But if we build a gas pipeline to Gordha, we can import their surplus biogas from their huge cattle herds, and we can establish a blue water gas plant there to make gas from local wood.”

“We could also use a gas pipeline to Mēdhpéla,” added Thornton. “They also are able to produce surplus biogas from their cattle manure.”

“These are expensive projects,” commented Kandékwēs.

“That’s what happens when you grow; the problems become bigger and more expensive,” replied Kérdu.

“And it’s even more expensive than you think, because right now, we’re cutting down trees in Arjakwēs and Lēpawsona faster than they’re growing back,” said Chris.

“So we have to start using timber from Kwétékwona, Northshore, and the Spine. The tribes there will sell it to us and they are learning the skills to provide it at a good price. But they will also have to learn to replant the forest. Hundreds of kilometers of logging roads will have to be created, and that causes another problem; it increases access to hunting areas and could cause excess hunting, so they will have to regulate hunting.”

“We still don’t have adequate regulations regarding hunting seasons,” said Wérodatu. “The provincial assembly, so far, hasn’t passed strong laws, as required by the consultative assembly.”

“Well, they’ll have to, soon,” said Thornton.

“I find it very hard to believe that Mēlwika is now supporting policies that decrease demand for motor vehicles,” exclaimed Yimoséru. “Not only does it cut into your economy, it cuts into the economy of Mēddoakwēs and the entire province, plus Swadnoma and even Ora. You don’t have the right to do that!”

“There’s still plenty of demand for vehicles,” replied Mitru. “We just did a survey. But we want to favor pickup trucks in particular because they are useful to farmers and businesses. Cars are mostly used by city people and commuters and we’d prefer that people take buses. Parking is becoming a huge problem; have you seen the parking lot next to Miller Motors? A lot of our vehicle assembly line workers proudly drive their vehicles to work and we have had to expand the parking lot twice in the last 18 months. Cars are very convenient, but they require a lot of space for parking, at home, near businesses, and near work. They also will require us to widen the roads.”

“There’s also another problem we are beginning to see,” said Chris. “It was a big problem on Gædhéma. When people have cars, they move to places far away from other people and build a house. This causes several problems. If they have a fire, it’s harder to get to them to fight the fire. If they need medical assistance, it takes longer to get it to them. If there’s a forest fire, we’d have lots of houses scattered in the forest to protect. It also breaks up wild areas and makes life more difficult for wild animals. If there is a problem with a shortage of fuel and cars are expensive to operate, it is very, very expensive to provide scattered people with bus service. On the other hand, if we are using buses, people mostly stay in or near villages or on major roads. So there are advantages to building a society around cheap and frequent public transportation. It also costs people less in the long run, especially if there are cars they can rent when they occasionally need one.”

“Still, there is the question of what advantage Melwika gains when planning is at a provincial level,” said Wérodathu. “Doesn’t that diminish your freedom?”

“It does somewhat,” agreed Chris. “But we are counting on greater benefits and advantages coming from a provincial approach.”

Kandékwes looked at his friend. “I have never gotten used to the tendency of the Menneas to share power and wealth. But it has served you very well, and I should add that it has served everyone else well also. Still, what you propose has potential pitfalls, and the big one is the provincial assembly, which approves the budget.”

“Most villages have no zoning or building codes,” added Yimoséru. “They will resist any effort to require them.”

“Building codes start simple and gradually become more difficult over time,” replied Thornton. “Mélwika just changed the requirements for electrical wiring of new houses, for example. Mèddokawés has a building code similar to ours 4 or 5 years ago, Morituora’s code is very simple. The provincial Assembly would not approve the code, but it would fund an office to inspect buildings and enforce one. The code would be finalized by the staff and the governor.”

“And there is one way to get funding through the provincial assembly,” added Chris. “Of the 84,000 people in the eastern half of the province, 62,000 are in our two cities. The purpose of the buses is primarily to move workers and consumers to our cities, so it makes sense the cities should pay a portion of the subsidy. The assembly just has to come up with maybe a third of the total.”

“I see what you are suggesting,” said Kandékwes, stroking his beard. “How much are we talking about for the faster bus service?”

“Twenty thousand per year from each city,” said Mitru. “That’s based on our experiment in Mēlwika. The increased service almost pays for itself. If we subsidized the tickets so they were cheaper, the result probably would be even better.”

“That’s a different matter,” said Kandékwēs. “I think we can rearrange the budget to find 20,000. But I have a suggestion: you should make the same pitch to Morituora. Lord Mitrusunu wants his city to be included in discussions like this. With their 7,000, Mēddoakwēs and Morituora are a continuous city larger than Mēlwika. A lot of the bus routes will go through Morituora, and it’s big enough for free service within the city as well. I also want them on our side when we approach the provincial assembly.”

“Alright, we can do that,” agreed Chris.

“Another idea,” said Kandékwēs. “This province has a lot of very strong and influential granges. If anyone can push zoning and a construction code, it is they. You should talk to them.”

“We can do that,” agreed Chris. “But they usually have their own concerns.”

“What else could they want?” asked Wérodatu. “The granges are in a very strong position. Strong legislation has already been passed that incorporates them and builds them into rural life as providers of job training, health coverage, investment in small businesses, crop storage and sales, and a lot of other things. They’ll love the expanded bus service, too.”

“I agree, they are in a very strong position, especially here on the western shore,” said Chris. “But they will always want more.”

“Well, they have plenty,” growled Kandékwes. “Let’s move forward on the bus service, zoning, and construction codes. I take it the province will need to devote more money to the forests as well; can you give us an estimate?”

“Easily,” replied Thornton. “Lɛpawsona is an excellent model and we can expand it. I’d start with 11,000 per year; enough to hire two professionals and an assistant and buy them a pickup. We’ll need research by Mɛlwika Génadema’s Ecology Department, but they probably can get a grant from the palace for that. Eventually, you’ll need maybe two or three more foresters and an office.”

“We could try imposing a tax on wood cutters to cover it,” considered Kandékwes. “Or fine people violating the regulations.”

“This is an important matter,” said Chris. “Because once the topsoil washes away, the land won’t grow trees very quickly. If we need wood, we need to increase tree production, not decrease it. With the population growing every year and the economic output growing every year, we can reach this world’s carrying capacity at some point in the future, and then we will have severe problems.”

“And we don’t even know what that carrying capacity is,” added Thornton.

“What about disposal of industrial waste?” asked Yimoséru. “You said it was becoming more expensive.”

“We’re running out of space in the Krésona Storage Facility,” said Thornton. “It’ll have to be expanded. But more importantly, the time is coming when we have to initiate tougher standards. Air pollution is getting worse and it will soon start to damage health. Our current system causes industrial waste to leak into the ground in isolated areas and we’ll have to stop that. Last year, two kids climbed over the fence and entered the

Melwika Industrial Waste Sink. They got very sick from the poisoned water and soil they encountered. There are ways to recover useful materials from the waste streams, but they are expensive to set up. These are the costs of becoming a more prosperous society; we have to deal with waste products and spend more to protect the environment.”

“That’s a matter for another day,” said Kandékwes. “Meanwhile, we have a plan, and we have plenty of time, since the provincial assembly won’t even meet for four months.”

“Mégékwes, you’ve got a phone call from Bidhu Doma-Agrasi!” shouted Ninlilé from outside the bathroom door.

“Damn, I’m in the shower! Tell him to call back . . . no, tell him to hold on!” Ninlilé heard the shower turn off and a towel pulled off the rack. A moment later the Prince, stark naked but with dry hands and face, took his cell phone. “Good day, Honored Lord-Minister.”

“Good morning, Your Majesty. I apologize for calling so early, but if we waited much longer, the Statistics Office would be closed for the day! I also apologize that it took us over two weeks to get back to you. Your request was simple enough, but it provoked other research.”

“Oh? What have you found?”

“You asked who was elected to the various village councils in Rudhisér Province. We had to look up each village separately because we have separate files for each village, so that took a little while, but it also meant my assistant poked through the files. Most of the villages have three-member councils, rather than the five we recommended, and

apparently the reason is because the villages themselves are small; the average population in the Néfa Basin is 400 people. The villages outside the Basin are all larger than that.

That was our first surprise.

“Second was their addresses; most Councils have a post box in the Néfa Post Office rather than having an address in the village. Again, there’s a reason; many villages are so small, they don’t have a store, so they don’t have a post office. Of course, most of them have a one-room schoolhouse, and there are plenty of post offices located in schoolhouses. This explains why none of the village councils in the Basin responded to a letter from the Village Council Consultancy; they probably never received it.

“But the big mystery was the budgets. Most are quite small. We looked up the tax records and figured out why; about a quarter of the men in a typical village work for Lord Albanu on his farms. But since they are employed out of Néfa, based on the taxation sharing law, half their taxes go to the city of Néfa and therefore to Lord Albanu, and only half goes to the village coffers! The irony is that these farmers are probably farming land in the village, but since they are employed out of Néfa, that city gets half the tax they pay.”

“That’s a neat trick by Albanu.”

“Even more, the budgets are almost all handwritten, and most of them are in the same hand. That’s not something you’d notice when you read them one at a time. So someone in Néfa is filling out the budgets. Again, that’s not illegal, but it is unusual. In many cases the budgets are nearly identical; so much for a one-room schoolhouse teacher, so much for the Headman, so much for the local Lord, so much for the Health Service, and small amounts for fence inspections and mending or road repair, etc.”

“So, the lords get their share, *and* a headman?”

“That’s what it looks like. A typical village has only 10,000 in tax receipts because the average family has an income of about 1,500, there are about 100 families, they pay 11% in tax—16,500 dhanay altogether—but Néfa gets part of it because some of the men work for Albanu. The local health care tax is 5 dhanay per head or 2,000, the teacher gets 1,500, the headman gets 1,500, there’s 1,000 in miscellaneous expenses, and the lord gets 4,000.”

“Why is there a lord and a headman?”

“I don’t know, but we will give Her Majesty a report about this and I doubt she will be happy. We recognize the names of some of the headmen; they are employees of Lord Albanu. If they are in charge of the work on his fields in the township, they would be well known to the villagers and be likely to be elected to the village council. In other villages, though, the lord himself must serve as the headman, because he gets 5,000 to 6,000 and no separate officer is listed.”

“What sort of budget does Néfa have?”

“It’s much larger, obviously, because it has 25 times the population, a higher average family income, and it gets thousands from each village. But even there, Albanu gets about half, or 250,000 per year, and that’s on top of profits on his farmland.”

“That’s shocking, considering how poor his province is! Unbelievable!”

“Well, there’s a bit more. Yusdu is here because we got in a conversation about your request, since his office is just down the hall, and he did some looking. Here’s Yusdu.”

There was a pause. “Good morning, Your Majesty.”

“Good morning, Yusdu.”

“As you know, I am the palace’s liaison with tomis and large businesses, and last summer I met with the Boards of the large operations in Rudhisér. There’s a provincial tomi that processes agricultural products, producing flour, bread, pasta, rice, lentils, and corn products. There’s also a brewery that produces beer—a quarter of the kingdom’s—and a winery that produces a fifth of the kingdom’s wine. They are owned by a group of six or eight men each and the groups overlap so that only ten investors altogether are involved. Albanu is the largest investor and consequently gets about a third of the profits. And these three companies are quite profitable; their total sales are four million dhanay, with about a ten percent profit. So Albanu is making 130,000 there as well. That’s all legitimate and legal, of course, but I suspect if anyone digs, one would find some questionable financial decisions there as well.”

“Probably. How much is Albanu earning, anyway?”

“We can’t look up and share his tax records, obviously,” replied Bidhu. “They’re in the Exchequer. But think of it this way: The Néfa Basin has 25,000 people—6,000 families—and they earn 1,500 dhanay per year on average. That’s double their earning twenty years ago, but barely more than half the world average. That’s 9 million dhanay. We’ve already come up with 400,000 of income. So it’s safe to assume he’s earning over half a million. I doubt it’s a million, though.”

“Thank you for that additional background. Bidhu, can you email to my cell phone pictures of all the election forms and the village budgets? That wouldn’t take you long and would be pretty easy to do.”

There was a pause. “Yes, I suppose I can do that.”

“Thank you. I want to go find some of the headmen and interview them.”

“Well, be careful. If you are uncovering corruption, there could be retaliation.”

“I know. I plan to talk to Her Majesty first, of course.”

“Good, because we’ll pass this information on to her as well.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your assistance, gentlemen. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

Mégékwes closed the connection and looked at Ninlilé. “That was interesting.”

“What are you going to do?”

He thought for a moment. “I have a few days of interviews lined up about the flood and subsequent displacements here in Vésa, so I will use that time to think. I’ll need to ask for some advice, but I think I will try to find some of the so-called headmen and interview them.”

498.

Regrets?

Mid Belménu /mid Jan.. 23/641

“How is your father?” Amos asked Awwskandu, as he and May stepped into the palace in Néfa. “We heard he was seriously ill and we wanted to pay our respects to him.”

“Thank you,” replied Awwskandu. “It’s very kind of you to come. He is very seriously ill and I don’t know whether he will feel well enough to meet with you, and if he is, I would advise that you not stay too long. But today has been a good day.”

“Is he able to walk around?”

Awwskandu shook his head. “Not very much. He is either in serious pain or he is on morphine and not very lucid. It’s . . . a very difficult time.”

“I’m so sorry, Awwskandu,” said May. “I am sure a lot of responsibility falls on your shoulders.”

“Indeed, as the eldest. I was always aware of father’s work in some detail, but now all of it has fallen on me. He can still help some, fortunately.”

“A gradual transition,” said Amos.

“Please, let’s not call it that! We are still hoping for a miracle!”

“I wasn’t sure whether I should even come,” said May. “Your father and I have never been on good terms. If you think it is better, I can stay here and Amos can visit on our behalf.”

“I’ll ask him, That’s very kind of you to offer. Give me a minute.”

Awskandu disappeared down a corridor and a butler appeared with glasses of lemonade. Before they had drunk even a third of the glasses, Awskandu returned. "He will see both of you. He was surprised and seemed pleased you had come."

"Perhaps we should have called."

Awskandu shook his head. "No one calls us before visiting." He beckoned them to follow him. They walked across the grand meeting hall, past some meeting rooms and offices, then up an impressive staircase to the second floor. Albanu was in a large, elegant room with windows overlooking the palace's courtyard, lying in a hospital bed.

"Thank you for coming," he said, barely louder than a whisper. He raised himself a bit.

"Please, Honored Duke, rest comfortably," said Amos. He offered both of his hands to Albanu, who took them with a weak grip.

"Greetings, Lord Amosu," he replied. That in itself seemed to be a concession; Albanu on various occasions had used circumlocutions to avoid referring to Amos as lord.

"We came as soon as we heard," added May, offering her left hand, as was customary by women.

"Thank you, Lady May." He shook her hand as well.

"I'm sorry to hear you are often in pain," said Amos. "Have you talked to doctors about that?"

"Indeed, Honored Stauréstu visits once a week and Nefa hospital sends over a doctor twice a day. I am getting as good care as is available." He sighed. "All this gædhémé medicine, and they can't cure cancer."

“No one can defeat every illness,” replied Amos. “Auskandu is a good man and a good son, and I am sure he’s taking good care of you.”

“Yes, he is. So, how are all your efforts going? How is Pértatranisér?”

“The city is well. The people are hard-working and clever, so they are happy with their lives.”

Albanu nodded, apparently satisfied. “I have more investments there than you think.”

That surprised Amos and May. “I suppose you haven’t been able to get out of the palace recently,” she said. “The Basin is beautifully green right now. The corn is getting tall and the wheat is approaching harvest. Down in the southern end the rice paddies are lovely. We know how much you love your lands, so we thought this would bring you some happiness.” She reached into a large bag she had been carrying and pulled out a landscape painting.

Albanu's eyes opened wide. He sat up as much as he could—Amos helped—and put on his glasses. “This is so beautiful! I recognize the scene because this is a common place to go, up on the Brow, to look down on the Basin and see the city! This land here is mine, in fact!”

“How very fortunate!” said Amos, pleased.

“Where did you get this?”

“The Art Gallery in Luktrudema,” replied May. “The painter calls himself Spékaku.”

Albanu nodded and pointed to a painting on the wall. “That’s his work, too.”

“Yes, I recognize the style! Is that the Rudhisér where it breaks through the Brow?”

“Exactly. I love his eye for detail. Thank you so much, I will cherish this painting. It will take my mind out of this room, and out onto my farms.”

“I’m glad, Honored Duke,” replied Amos.

Albanu looked at him a moment, and then his eyes seemed to harden a bit. “We have deep and very serious differences, but I respect the work you have done, even if I strongly disagree with it. I have no regrets.”

“We respect you as well, Honored Duke. And while we may disagree about many things, May and I celebrate that the people in Néfa and in the Basin are twice as wealthy as they used to be, they have schools and hospitals, they live longer, their children no longer die as infants, they do not starve in the winter. I think we can all be happy about those results.”

Albanu considered, a bit surprised. “Ah, indeed, we can all be happy that the people are living better.” He nodded.

There was a long silence as they all looked at each other. “Perhaps we should let you rest now, Honored Duke,” said Amos.

“Perhaps. It’s just about time for my next meal. They give me several large spoonfuls of soup every hour or so. It’s mostly mashed up vegetables in a lot of water, which is bland, and they add maple syrup to give me calories, which tastes terrible. I can’t eat fat and my stomach can only accept a little bit of food at a time, or I lose it all.”

“I’m sorry, Honored Duke. You will be in my prayers every day.”

“Please pray for a miracle, Honored May. Perhaps Esto will listen to your prayers. He hasn’t listened to mine.”

“I will indeed pray for a miracle,” said May, nodding, though she couldn’t help but think that they had already gotten the miracle the province needed.

Amos shook both hands with the Duke again, May offered him her left hand, and they stepped out of the room. Awskandu was in an office next door and came out to thank them for coming again, chatted with them for a moment, then escorted them to the door. He returned to the office and grabbed a large ledger to carry it to the bedroom. He saw his father admiring the painting.

“Isn’t this beautiful?”

“It’s gorgeous! Spékaku?”

“Yes. They bought it at the Art Gallery in Luktrudemā.”

“That’s expensive . . . a hundred or two dhanay.”

“Indeed, I think so.” He pointed to a spot on the wall opposite the bed. “I want it right there so I can see it easily. It was very kind of them to visit and bring such a gift.”

“What did you talk about?”

“The painting! And I assured them I have not changed my views about their ideas and . . . progress.” He detested that neologism.

“Oh, father. You don’t like their progress, but you do like *your* progress. The assessors are just about finished reviewing your property and investments, and they will be discrete, don’t worry; they won’t tell anyone what you are worth.”

“And what’s the total?”

“They’re still reviewing all the investments via your silent partnership with the Kérékwes clan in Swadnoma. A lot of them have been moved over to the Kérékwes Investment Bank under an assumed name, but not all. But the total is in excess of 4 million.”

Albanu smiled. “How much of Pértatransér’s industry do I own?”

“I suspect you are the largest single investor in its factories. Probably a quarter.”

Albanu smiled. “I guess that is progress.”

The prince wasn’t sure where to park his car. The Keino household had “no parking” signs around it; one of the precautions they took to remain safe. But he was able to park two blocks up the street and walk to their main entrance. There was a secretary-receptionist there to direct him to the offices of the Village Development Consultancy on the bottom floor of the house’s middle wing.

“I’m glad you told me you and Yusdu were coming,” Mégékwes said to Dekané, as he settled into a chair in the conference room with her, Skandé, and Andranu. “It sounds like my inquiry generated an investigation.”

“Yes, into the village councils and into tax matters,” replied Dekané. “Her Majesty was extremely concerned about the information your questions to the Statistics Office generated. I gather you have more information.”

“Yes; I received a copy of all the election forms on my electronic telephone. If you compare them, many are in the same hand, even though the signatures are different. I have tried to find some of the headmen to ask them about the election, but so far two have refused to talk to me, and I couldn’t even find three of them. I plan to keep looking,

though. Did you check the attendance at last summer's conference for village councils against the voting list?"

"Yes; we did that at the conference itself," replied Dekané. "We checked off names as people came in. But of course we had no way to verify identities because very few people have driver's licenses. I've been thinking about that conference, and it was rather strange. A lot of the people in attendance didn't seem to know what we were talking about. When we asked people to break into groups and make plans, we didn't get very much. Of course, the village councils in the Néfa Basin wouldn't have any experience at all, so we didn't think much of it."

"Most of the comments and ideas came from the council members from the villages and towns outside the Basin, too," said Skandé. "I didn't mention that to you at the time, but I know many of the council members from those places. I'm not sure we had any comments from inside the Basin."

"So, maybe some of the council members were replaced by others?" asked Andranu.

Skandé shook her head. "I don't think so. Too many of them know people outside the Basin. It'd be too much of a risk."

"They probably didn't know what to say," said Dekané. "I looked at the budgets after the conference was over. They were all very simple, though the Lord got more money than recommended and there was a headman getting money as well."

"That's not a violation?" asked Mégékwes.

Dekané shook her head. "There is no law about compensation, just Her Majesty's guidelines. I pointed out the irregularities to her and she seemed to feel we should wait

and press the matter next year, after the village councils had more experience. But now I wonder whether they are even meeting and gaining experience.”

“Do you want us to check?” asked Skandé.

“You have too much to do already, with the northern Véspe villages and the places east of the Basin, and we have no money to hire someone else for the office.”

“I’ll investigate,” replied the Prince. “My mother doesn’t want me to publish anything while Albanu is sick, but I have a lot of research to do before I’ll be ready to publish anyway.”

“So, you are planning an article?”

“Oh, I’m planning a lot of things! The effect of the flood on Ora and Véspe will start out as a series of articles, but I am sure I could write an entire book! I don’t know what a project on Albanu and his friends will uncover, but I want to find out.”

“Well, if anyone can do it, you are the one,” said Dekané. “Say, you’re staying at the palace in Ora, right?”

“Yes. Ninilé is visiting elementary schools and reading stories to the kids while I do my research; today she’s at one of the schools here in Pértatranisé. She’s also collecting a lot of information about the need for children’s literature and I am sure there’s an article or two to write about that subject as well.”

“I ask because Yusdu and I will be staying there tonight as well. Duke Aryu is a cousin of Yusdu and they enjoy talking about development.”

“Of course. Then we’ll see you. We usually eat dinner with the family, since we’re cousins as well.”

“Yes, of course. Then we’ll see each other tonight. I’d like to have a chance to get to know Ninlilé better, too.”

“I’d like that. She needs friends, especially here on the western shore.”

Just then, someone stepped into the doorway. They looked up and saw Wërétrakešter. “Prophet!” exclaimed the prince, jumping up.

“Please sit, Your Majesty, you are the one to honor.” Wërétrakešter entered and walked straight to the Prince, to whom he offered both hands. “Esto has guided me here, most certainly. I did not know you were here.”

“Ninlilé and I are staying at the palace in Ora while I research some articles. What brings you here, Honored?”

“Thank you. I had a dream last night that disturbed me greatly. It was about Duke Albanu. So at dawn this morning I got on a bus and went straight to his palace in Néfa. There I found a band of about fifty people with signs in front of the palace, chanting ‘Give us back our inheritance!’ Their signs called him a leech, among other things. I asked them what was going on and they told me they had heard he was dying and the Hymn Hall here decided to organize a ‘protest’ because he had stolen so much wealth from the people. Which is true; but now Esto will decide the consequences of his actions.”

“It is true; the Hymn Hall is organizing this action,” said Andranu. “Today is the third day. I think the *Néfa Yoros* is planning an article about the protest. I am quite surprised that my father is supporting this action. He is not one of the organizers; that falls on Lomu, President of the Hymn Hall. But he feels that people must be active and the hymns must energize us to speak out for justice.”

“Yes, of course, that is true, but this is the wrong kind of action. There must be two goals. The first, obviously, is justice. Duke Albanu has legally but immorally taken millions of dhanay of wealth from the people of this province and he must return it in some way. But the second goal must be to help Albanu change his ways while he is still alive. Because once he dies, Esto will judge him, and probably it will be a harsh judgment. Albanu can still redeem himself by seeing the error of his ways. But if you protest against him and make him angry, he can’t repent. Either he will be defiant or he will feel forced to concede something he does not want to concede. He must want to make amends.”

“When I saw him, he was proudly defiant,” said the Prince. “He had no regrets.”

“That’s what he said to my parents as well, when they visited him ten days ago,” added Skandé.

“I’m not surprised; he is a proud man, and one set in the old traditions. But he is pious, or he can be. I need to talk to him.”

“Are you going to stop the protests?”

“No. We need to transform them. I’ll go to the Hymn Hall and talk to Lomu. Then I’ll go to the temple to talk to your father and the other priests. People should not be chanting protest slogans. They should be chanting the hymns. Always chant the hymns! Chant the Hymn of the Immortals for him!”

“But that’s a hymn for eternal life!”

“Correct. Chant a hymn that will help his transition, because that will help his spiritual state now. That’s what we need to change.”

“It’s also a hymn that those who admire the Duke can chant as well,” noted Mэгékwes.

“Exactly,” said Werétrakester. “It is a hymn to unite everyone in praying for the Duke’s spiritual progress. And if he makes spiritual progress, he will make an effort to right the wrongs he has done.”

It took several days to convert the protests into hymn gatherings. Many people in the Hymn Hall were furious about the change; when they had gathered outside Albanu’s palace two years earlier to influence the lords choosing the members to represent them at the House of Lords in Melwika, there had been no effect. But everyone knew the massive rally in Meddoakwés subsequently had had an impact, and Werétrakester pointed that out as an example of the power of spiritual action.

For two days, there were no protests outside the palace at all. On the third day, Werétrakester led the hymn singing and they completed the entire cycle of hymns. At lunchtime the crowd swelled to several hundred and the police brought in reinforcements at Albanu’s urging. On the fourth day, the crowd doubled in size again as the entire city went over to watch and sometimes to participate. The entire police force was mobilized to surround the palace; Werétrakester convinced them to sing along, especially when they sang the Hymn of the Immortals, which they sang often, and loudly.

On the fifth day, practically the entire city came at lunchtime, filling the plaza outside the palace and overflowing down the streets. Werétrakester invited Mitrubbéru Kanéstoi, a popular singer and radio personality from Néfa who was also a prominent Bahá’í, to come assist him with the hymns because his voice was wearing out. They both

repeatedly emphasized that the gathering was to benefit Albanu spiritually, and they added the Hymn of Immortality to the hymn cycle every ten hymns. Finally when the cycle was completed at 4 p.m.—only a hundred or so singers remained at that point—Albanu’s butler came out seeking Werétrakester.

“My lord thanks you for the hymns, which he can hear from his bed, but requests that the people disperse and sing for him at the temples and hymn halls.”

“I see. Well, Honored, this plaza is a public space, is it not? And does Widumaj not say to chant the hymns for the ill, to raise their spirits and warm their hearts? That is not possible if the Duke can’t hear us.”

The butler wasn’t sure what to say. “I have conveyed my lord’s request.”

“I would like to come in and see him, chant for him, pray for him, and perhaps revive his energy a bit.”

“That would require a miracle, Prophet.”

“Miracles are things I work on all the time.”

The butler considered. “Come in and talk to Awwskandu.”

Werétrakester followed the butler into the palace and down the long corridor past the impressive ballroom and dining room to the private area in the back. Awwskandu came down to a small waiting room.

“Prophet, your gathering has greatly disturbed my father. It has made it difficult for him to rest. I implore you to end them.”

“How is his health? We were hoping the hymns would improve it.”

“Please don’t change the subject. They have been very upsetting, especially the signs and shouting.”

“Signs and shouting? That was a protest. I stopped it. Those people wanted your father to resign and surrender his wealth. I told them that was not respectful, considering his contributions to this province and his delicate health. The hymn gatherings are praying for his soul. When we pass, we all face judgment by Esto. Should we all not pray that Esto will be merciful to him? Does not Widumaj urge us to chant the hymns on behalf of the ill and the departed, so they may do well in the next world? That is precisely what we are doing. What else could possibly result from chanting the hymns, my lord?”

Awskandu was exasperated. “I have conveyed my father’s wishes to you, Prophet. He is seriously ill and you are just upsetting him.”

“Perhaps if I could see him, I could bring calm to his heart. I had a remarkable dream last night and it inspires me. Perhaps it will inspire him as well.”

“What sort of dream?”

Werétrakester shrugged. “Perhaps it is a prophecy. I’ll tell both of you at once.”

Awskandu scowled, irritated. “Very well, I’ll talk to father.” He rose and headed for his father’s bedroom upstairs. He returned shortly thereafter. “Father will see you briefly. Very briefly.”

“Thank you.” Werétrakester followed Awskandu up the stairs and into the first room on the right. At first, he did not recognize the man lying in bed; his hair had turned completely white and much of it had fallen out, his face was thin and the features sunk in, and his skin had a jaundiced tint to it. But Albanu’s eyes were alert and darted to Werétrakester.

“How are you, widu?”

“Saddened to see you in such a state, honored Duke. I won’t ask you how you are.”

“Good, because I am not improving; my son says you hope to bring a miracle. I need a miracle.”

“We are praying for such a miracle, honored. We are saying the entire cycle of hymns for you, and once an hour we pause to chant the Hymn of the Immortals. Much of the city has joined in. The angry protesters have been replaced by hymn singers.”

“Perhaps that is a small miracle. How did you do it?”

“I reminded the crowd that it is *Esto* who judges, not us. As we know in the Hymn of the Immortals, after death we stand at one end of the *upergluba modtoi*, the Bridge of Judgment, and that bridge can be as narrow as a hair or as wide as a wagonway, depending on our deeds in this world. Our hymns can widen that bridge for you.”

“And why would the people want to do that?”

“Because it is not yet too late for us to do a good deed that can assist you.”

“And it is not yet too late for me to do a good deed to assist them as well.”

“That is true, Honored Duke. But I have told the people repeatedly that *Esto* does not reward a good deed when it is done for an ulterior motive. The motive must be pure. Their motives and your motive. You still have time, Honored Duke, to make amends for things you did that hurt many people. Even if they were legal and allowable, and even if the people who left the Basin did well elsewhere, what you did hurt many people, and that grieves *Esto*. I fear it narrows the *upergluba modtoi* for you.”

Fear entered Albanu’s eyes. “I have worried about that as well, widu. What is our fate after death?”

“No one really knows, but if Esto is just, then injustices that are never corrected in this world must be balanced by justice in the next, loss here is balanced by gains there, and excessive wealth and worldliness here is balanced by spiritual poverty there. It is the only way, if Esto is just. But Esto is also patient and merciful.”

“We know that from the hymns,” said Albanu, nodding. He looked at Awskandu, who had a complex expression on his face; fear for his father’s fate and for his own inheritance, all at the same time.

“What was the dream?” asked Awskandu, partly to change the subject.

“Oh, the dream.” Werétrakester nodded. “It happened in the middle of the night last night. A stag elk had a herd of females and calves in a beautiful meadow, up in the Snowy Mountains east of here. He had fought off other stags to assemble the herd and was very proud of it, but he was not careful to guard it. A female went to a meadow on a nearby hill to graze with her calf. Another female went down the mountain to a particularly green spot. A third went to a beautiful stream nearby to drink the water. The calves scattered to play. Meanwhile, the stag stayed with his favorite two females and their calves and ignored the others.

“Then a herd of wolves came. They attacked the female by the brook and she fought them off; he came to help. Meanwhile they attacked another. The calves gathered together with two females defending them. One wolf attacked a particularly big and fat calf and by miracle he kicked the wolf in the mouth and it ran away. The stag had to fight very hard to save his herd; he fought like he had never fought before. And in the end the wolves ran away. The calves and females were bloodied and wounded, but they all

survived. The stag learned an important lesson: to never abandon any member of his herd.”

“You had this last night?”

Werétrakester nodded.

Albanu looked at Aweekandu. “We must do something.”

“I agree, father, but you are looking pretty tired right now. Perhaps the widu can give us suggestions.”

That surprised Werétrakester, who was not prepared with any. “I am sure there are many ways you can improve the Basin; better education, better access to work, better water and electricity; there are many things that can make life better.”

“Please give us suggestions,” said Aweekandu.

499.

Awakening

Early Plowménu /ealy Feb. 23/641

The barn was an old brick structure with a thatched roof, typical of many barns in the middle of the Néfa Basin where rock and wood were scarce. Its loft was stuffed with wheat straw from the last harvest, but the ground floor was full of modern equipment: a new tractor, plow, harrow, seed disseminator, and a combine. A man was standing near one side of the barn, pumping a spinning whetstone with one foot and sharpening an ax.

“Hello? I’m looking for Arvarju.”

The man stopped working and looked at the Prince. “You’re looking at him,” he said suspiciously, perhaps because of the Prince’s Eastern Shore accent.

“You’re headman of Weranuagras?” Then he caught himself and repeated the village name in the local dialect: “Váranúagras.”

He smiled. “I suppose. Why do you ask?”

“I’m researching a story about the development of village councils in the Basin.”

“‘Development’?” The man smiled.

“What’s funny?”

“Don’t you know? The village councils here are a joke. They don’t meet, and there’s nothing for them to do, anyway. Every village has a one-room schoolhouse with a teacher, so the budget pays for the teacher, for sending some of the older kids to high school, paying our share of everyone’s health service tax, and occasionally some charity.

There's no input from the people, no planning, no ideas what to do to improve the village."

"But you're headman and get paid what? A thousand a year? Two thousand? To do what, sign a few checks?"

"Yeah, that's about right."

"Why don't you propose some projects to the council?"

"First, there's no extra revenue; second, no one in the village wants to displease Lord Váranúbárú and Duke Albanu; and three, I don't want to displease them, because I might lose the headman job."

"I noticed that you and some of the other council members didn't attend the meeting of village councils that Her Majesty called last summer."

"Oh, you're checking attendance?" Arvarju nodded, impressed.

"I am. You don't seem very concerned about all this."

"Frankly, I'm not, and I wouldn't mind at all if Albanu is exposed as the petty tyrant that he is. I heard Werétrakester on Kekanu's eclipse show yesterday morning. He said Albanu is near death and has expressed regrets. I don't believe he has regrets; that's not Albanu."

"That's what the widu said. I heard it, too."

"At any rate, once he dies there will be chaos and no one will be punished for exposing him, especially if the information is anonymous. You're Prince Mégékwes?"

"Yes; how did you know?"

"You've already talked to a couple of headmen and they refused to say anything. The word has been going around to us. But there are several of us who *will* talk. Like I

said, once Albanu is gone, hell will break loose. There are a lot of angry people.

Werétrakester's hymn singing hasn't stopped that. Even a lot of the so-called headmen feel exploited."

"Why?"

"He pays us less than we could earn, working in a good factory job in Pértatranisér. I take care of 200 agris for him out of this barn and he pays me 2,000 dhanay per year. Of course, I get 1,500 more as headman of Váranúagras for doing 500 dhanay of work at most. It's an arrangement between him and Lord Váranúbárú, who persuaded the council to hire me."

"How did you get the job?"

"I persuaded him I could handle 200 agris, and I can read; he wants farmers who can read instructions. Váranúbárú works closely with Albanu because his wife is Albanu's daughter; Albanu has five daughters and they're all married to local lords, but I suppose you know that because you're a cousin. Two hundred agris is not easy with this equipment; a farmer really shouldn't try to plant more than 100 agris of wheat, you have to work crazy hours to keep up. Yield per agri suffers too; some of the crop is always harvested late. A lot of guys are farming 120 or 150 agris, and they're paid even less."

"How many farmers worked your 200 agris previously?"

"Before machinery? Fifteen or twenty. Váranúagras used to have nearly 1,000 people; 250 farmers. Now it has 20 farmers, and about 40 men commute to work in Néfa or Pértatranisér."

"So, how much does Albanu make off the 200 agris you farm?"

“He gets maybe 60 dhanay per agri. He’d get more if he paid for fertilizer and allowed us to rotate the crops and let the fields lay fallow sometimes.”

“Twelve thousand dhanay.”

“He pays a tenth to himself as local tax, two tenths to the crown, 2,000 to me; and he keeps the rest.”

“That’s . . . a bit over 6,000 dhanay I think.”

“I have cousins in Lëpawsdomas who farm 60 agris and they get almost 100 dhanay per agri, and after grange fees and taxes they keep half. And it’s their own land, their own farm.” Arvárjú shook his head. “My brother in Pértatranisér earns 3,000 and works shorter hours than I do. People are tired of being exploited. It used to be that we couldn’t do anything about it; we felt helpless. But now our cousins are part of granges outside the Basin or in Arjakwés, others are accountants or factory workers where there is support for them, and we no longer want the conditions to continue. Watch out; when Albanu dies, there will be trouble.”

“Why are you telling me all of this, when the others wouldn’t?”

Arvárjú sighed. “In the last few years, there has been constant talk on the radio and in the newspapers, and among the Bahá’ís, about the importance of living your morals, and building a world based on ethical planning and justice. Everywhere else, that seems to be advancing. Melwika has a development plan and everyone participated in its creation for over half a year. They spent their time and got lots of input. Now they’re doing that in Pértatranisér. I hear they want to do that in Melita and Tripola and Mëddwoglubas as well.”

“And in all of Arjakwés province.”

“Well, people here want to have a voice, too. They don’t know what they want, but they definitely know what they don’t want. I don’t have anything to lose any more because the palace is in chaos, and once Albanu dies the chaos will get worse.”

“Who else can I talk to?”

“Get your notebook and I’ll give you names.”

“It’s so nice of you to come to Ejnopéla, honored Count Kris! What brings you here? Your lands?”

Chris extended both hands to Chandu, the President of the All-Grange Council, and Chandu took them, then Chris hugged the younger man. “I wanted to see you, Honored. We don’t talk so often, now that you’re down here. No, I have no lands left to supervise in the lower valley. They’re all sold. Even the lendhapotu estates we took in Estoiyaju’s and Weranu’s new towns are all sold.”

“Have you heard of any plans to open more towns? South Brébetroba and Boléragras are now full, and the northern extension of Terskua apparently filled last week.”

“So I heard, and young couples are moving in. They’re buying prefabs as starter houses. I wanted to talk to you, however, about some legislative proposals we’re developing to present to the provincial assembly in the spring.”

“What sort of proposals?”

“Establishment of a provincial planning commission to coordinate development, a provincial forestry agency to manage the forests because deforestation is spreading and

causing soil erosion and flooding, and a plan to double or triple the availability of buses, so people can live outside the towns and still get to work easily.”

Chandu nodded. “Those are all good plans, but I suppose if there are more buses, villages will have fewer small businesses.”

“They don’t have a lot of businesses now, but if more people can move to them and get good jobs with good salaries, they will want to purchase food and small items in their villages.”

“That’s true, and haircuts and other services. The granges are helping create a lot of small businesses, as you know. Farming is becoming less and less profitable every year because it is getting more mechanized.”

“It’s a wise move, as is the encouragement of diversification of crops and the establishment of local factories. The granges have been really creative in the last few years to spread prosperity.”

“Thank you,” said Chandu, who had been a key figure in the efforts. “I’m sure we can support all the proposals you have mentioned, though we’ll need to see the details.”

“Of course. I have the latest versions here.” Chris reached into his satchel and pulled out several stapled reports. “Maybe we can get together again next week, after you’ve read them. We want your input. I suspect you have some ideas about further improving the agricultural extension service.”

“Yes, we’ve been working on that, but we have another proposal in mind, and it is for the House of Commons and Lords, not for the provincial assembly. The idea is coming from the Pértatranisér grange, but several other Rudhisér granges have also

supported it, and the Swadnoma granges are looking at it with interest. We want to propose legislation that will limit the land a family can farm to 300 agris.”

“Really? Why?”

“Because the really big land owners hire workers to work the land for them, pay poorly, get lousy yield per agri, but can still sell their harvest for less than our farmers. We want them broken up.”

Chris wasn’t sure what to say. “That’s asking a lot. There are a lot of lords who are still dependent on agricultural income, and they still have a lot of power.”

“Do they? The queen has power. They are her cousins, admittedly, and they can persuade her. But the House of Commons is pretty powerful as well. Rudhisér province is practically ready to revolt because of what Albanu and the lords there have done.”

“Werétrakester has been doing his best to redirect their energy.”

“That is his intention, but he has also made the movement much bigger. People were scared to speak up and he gave them a way to do so. But Rudhisér isn’t the only place with this problem. The Kérékwes brothers are the largest landowners in the world, and as much as they pay their workers—they pay well—they still undercut the grange prices. We have to maintain farm prices, and the simplest way to do that is to keep the farms reasonably small and the farmers in granges.”

“I don’t know, Chandu. There are other ways to solve the problem.”

“And we’ve talked about some of them. On Gædhéma they do crop price supports, but you want to avoid them.”

“It makes the farmers dependent on the government. We need to develop a system where farmers earn enough to support themselves and feed the world. We also need to

increase the productivity of each farm because the population is growing three percent per year.”

“And demand for food, fiber, and alcohol is rising five percent per year. I know. The palace keeps releasing more farmland, though, and that keeps production up and prices low.”

“So we need to talk the palace into releasing less land. They also need to buy more grain and other staples and store them against a bad harvest; that policy needs to be updated.”

“That’s all well and good, but we still have the problem of exploitive farm policies in Rudhisér and the growing anger in Swadnoma.”

“We do, and Albanu’s death will trigger changes.”

“I am sure, Count Chris. Because all the talk about values and principles over the last few years have sensitized a lot of the population. It has raised expectations: people want to see changes, and they often have clear ideas of what the changes should be. Wërétrakester has sensitized them to becoming organized, too. This is a complicated combination.”

“Complicated and dangerous,” agreed Chris.

“I’m sorry I’m late for supper,” said Amos, as he arrived in the dining room. “Late business with the plantation.” He noted a guest at the table. “Welcome to my house, I am Lord Amosu.”

“Very pleased to meet you; Estodéu Tentruwergu.” The man rose and they shook hands.

“Ah, the census man? You just opened an office here in Pértatranisér a few weeks ago.”

“Yes, in the North River Building, and we have a good staff. I was invited to dinner by Skandé and Andranu. I was visiting them to ask about the village councils in the area.”

“He has good contacts with the same ones we have, and no contacts with the same ones we have no contact with,” added Skandé.

“The Basin?”

Estodéu nodded. “Pretty much. The Duke’s palace has promised we’d get their full cooperation, and obviously they mean that because they don’t want an undercount, but they are pretty distracted right now. I went to Pértatranisér High School today, however, and talked to a bunch of the kids, and they gave me the names of the elementary school teachers. I’ll do the same thing at Néfa High School tomorrow, then my staff and I will fan out across the Basin and visit every school, talk to the teachers, and recruit them to run the census in their villages.”

“That’s a good idea, and you can pay them?” asked Amos.

“Of course, 10 dhanay per 16 completed forms, which is about 8 hours of work. Teachers around here could use the money. We’ll spot check, also, to make sure there are no imaginary village members.”

“You’re cutting it close! The census starts in three weeks!”

“Tell me about it! The Statistics Ministry hired me just two months ago. They’re the ones who were running late. When this effort is done, I’ll have a network of trained field workers to conduct surveys, too.”

“That’s excellent, we need a proper surveying company. The marketing people have been wanting one for at least ten years!”

“Well, I’ll fill the gap.”

“We’ll want to talk to your contacts in the Basin after the census is over,” said Skandé. “We’ve been working with the northern Vésa towns and the towns east of the Basin and we’ve got most of the relationships with them pretty well established. The Basin is next, then once we have more staff, southern Vésa. Tripola, Belledha, and Isurdhuna offices are planned for next year.”

“Everyone is interested in the Basin, now,” added Amos. He looked at Marié. “How was school today?”

“Good! I’ve completed the portrait project and I’ll turn it in tomorrow. I was hoping to show it to everyone.”

“I’d love to see it,” replied Amos, between bites of pasta.

Marié nodded and walked out of the room. She returned a minute later with a detailed pencil drawing.

“Werétrakester!” exclaimed Amos, with a smile. “That’s a great image!”

“You have incredible talent!” agreed May. “Your art teachers must be very pleased.”

“They seem to be,” said Marié, modestly.

“Are you the only girl in the art program?” asked Andranu.

“No there are three of us women,” replied Marié, emphasizing the last word. “We’re all in the Women’s Géndha and the boys know the géndha won’t tolerate harassment, so it works out pretty well.”

“Half the women in génadema are either here or in Melwika,” added May. “The other génademas are somewhat hostile to women. Both women’s géndhas now have about 500 women.”

“That’s impressive,” said Estodéu. “Tripola Génadema was maybe twenty percent female. I suppose it was hard on them.”

“Yes, I’m sure,” replied Skandé.

Just then the doorbell rang. Fithu went to answer it and returned a minute later with Werétrakester.

“Ah prophet!” exclaimed Amos. “Come join us for supper.”

“I’m afraid I may not have much time, and I urgently need your advice, Lord Amosu, about the proposal I must revise for the Duke. He asked some questions the other day. I hope to see him tomorrow, if he has another lucid day.”

“What proposal?” asked Andranu.

Werétrakester shook his head. “I cannot say.”

“I can help you; I’ll take my food, if you don’t mind.”

“Oh, that’s fine, Lord! I apologize for interrupting your dinner with your family!” His eyes fell on the portrait, which Marié had put down partially out of sight. “Oh, is that me?”

“Indeed, honored widu.” Marié picked up the pencil portrait. “It’s a school project.”

Werétrakester looked at it closely and smiled. “That’s very, very good! I think you used a photograph; I recognize the photo, too!”

“Yes, the one with you sitting in a chair. I used that one.”

“Exactly. Lord and Lady, your daughter is a very talented artist!”

“Yes, we are very proud,” agreed May.

“You should be, indeed! She could earn a living doing portraits!”

Amos rose with his pasta. “This way, honored widu.”

“Thank you.” The two men headed for Amos’s office.

Andranu looked at May. “Is this the proposal Werétrakester is making about how the Duke’s wealth should be used to serve the people of the province?”

“How do you know about that?”

“The prophet is staying with my parents right now.”

“Oh, of course. I’m sure it is. He and Amos have met several times about it, and they’ve talked to Luktréstu, who runs the Mennea Foundation. The Duke had a lot of questions about the first proposal, though.” She looked at Estodéu. “This is not something to mention to others.”

“Oh, of course, I will keep it confidential.”

They resumed eating their pasta and chatting about minor subjects. Then the phone rang. Fithu rang over and picked it up. “Hélo?”

There was a pause as he listened a moment, then he turned to May. “It’s Honored Budhéstu. He just received a call from the Duke’s palace summoning Werétrakester to come as quickly as he can.”

May jumped up. “Alright, I’ll tell him and Amos. You call a taxi for him immediately.”

500.

A Passing

Mid Plowménu /mid Feb. 23/641

The small crowd gathered outside the Duke's palace at sunset noticed the urgent arrival of the Chief Physician of Néfa Hospital. A slightly larger crowd noted Werétrakester's arrival by taxi 45 minutes later. He was followed by Drs. Stauréstu and Aréjé, an hour later. The rumor began to spread very widely that the Duke was in his last hours. The crowd swelled even more, but they did not chant the hymns; they sat in silence or talked.

As the sky began to brighten at 4:00 a.m., the doctor from Néfa Hospital left, looking sad. More people began to gather as the city awakened for the day. At 5:45, a bit before sunrise, A wskandu, Werétrakester, Stauréstu, and Aréjé appeared on a balcony overlooking the plaza.

"We have just informed Her Majesty, Queen Estobidhé, that her third cousin, Duke Albanu, has gone to Skanda," said A wskandu, referring to the traditional belief that Skanda was the place for the afterlife. "A traditional funeral service and pyre will occur on Penkudiu. As Lord of Néfa and Duke of Rudhisér, I am declaring three days of mourning, leading up to the funeral. May he enjoy eternal rest and bring us manifold blessings." He paused for the audience to repeat the traditional formula. He waited and then heard a few people respond.

He realized that the audience on the plaza was hostile. That had not occurred to him and he was startled. "He can't take his riches with him!" shouted someone.

Werétrakester stepped forward. "Let us sing the Hymn of the Immortals for him."

“Only one more time, prophet!” shouted someone else.

Werétrakester nodded and began to chant, and the audience joined in. When it was finished, the four of them stepped off the balcony. By the time Stauréstu and Aréjé were in their car and heading across the city to take Werétrakester back to Pértatranisé, every car driving around Néfa was blowing its horn. When they reached Pértatranisé, every car there was doing the same; and it had three times as many vehicles as Néfa.

The ones passing Lord Amosu’s house often seemed to blow their horns especially loudly. Amos, May, and Marié were eating breakfast and listening to the radio at the time. “We’ll have to release a statement,” said May. “Shall I draft something?”

“Would you? It needs to be positive and . . . honest.”

“That won’t be easy.”

“I know, but I don’t think we should sugar coat the situation.” He pointed toward the street. “The horns tell you; people are mad at Albanu.”

“And they should be. If I had been in charge, he’d be in prison.”

“Well, as far as the queens are concerned, he never broke the law, and I don’t think he ever did because he was following all the old rules. They used to burn villages that didn’t pay their taxes, remember.”

May sighed. “I know, and things are still not where they need to go. But we have to move the process forward positively.”

“Somehow.” A car drove by blowing its horn very loudly. “One thing is clear: the people of Rudhisé have awakened. They want a just society.”

“Thank God, but do they know what justice is?”

“Probably not, and that’s a problem.”

The news reached Melwika at 3 p.m. and by 8 p.m., as the last twilight was fading, Chris and Liz set out in a car with a driver for Pértatranisér, followed by Thornton and Lébé in another car. They reached Pértatranisér 4 ½ hours later, at 3:30 p.m. local time the same day.

“Have people been blowing horns all day?” asked Chris. “I think we heard horns blowing when we drove through Belledha!”

“They’ve been blowing them all day,” confirmed Amos. “It’s quite remarkable. In the last month, Albanu’s secrets have been gradually coming out. The Prince has been investigating, but he’s not the only one; the *New Times* has been publishing articles and people have been calling Kekanu and telling him things.”

“But the Prince’s not doing a story yet, is he?”

“No, he plans to wait until after the funeral.”

“It’d be indecent to publish something too quickly,” said Liz. “The *New Times* is a rag and doesn’t have much of a reputation.”

“I think it’s actually based here; the fact that it’s published in Tripola is a cover,” said Amos. “It never publishes any bad stories about South Shore Province.”

“The blowing horns suggest a pattern to me,” exclaimed Chris. “The new focus of the Four Year Plan on spiritual values and a sense of justice, over the last two years, has raised a new consciousness. We saw that in Melwika last summer and fall. It’s interesting; it has generated a certain unease with the City Council, even though it has been pretty open and progressive.”

“The same here. The City Council is starting a process of exploring the city’s long-term plans. Of course, most of the effort will have to wait until after the election next month.”

“‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains it in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*,” said Liz. “He says that when the people have no access to education, when an injustice is committed against them, they don’t even know how to ask for justice. That day is now over.”

“It is,” agreed Chris. “I had a conversation with Chandu a week or two ago about a plan of the Mēlwika Planning Commission to propose some legislation to Arjakwés provincial assembly: to double or triple the bus service so people don’t crowd into the cities, set up a Forestry Ministry to police the timber industry, and planning the growth of the province. Chandu had some other ideas, like legislation to limit all farms to 300 agris.”

Amos was startled. “I have 5,000 agris of forest plantation here.”

“Albanu had at least 5,000 agris, too; that’s the problem. The All-Grange Council has been thinking about ways to protect small farmers from the big ones, because they can undercut prices.”

“They can, in spite of inefficiencies. But that’s not the way to do it. Mechanization is continuing; the number of agris a farmer can farm increases every year, and crop pieces drop correspondingly. Any limit to the size of farms will be a problem at some point.”

“The average acreage a farmer farms has been increasing because some people are doing other work and leasing their land,” said Chris. “When we arrived, it was 10 or 15 agris; a few years ago, it was 40; now it’s probably 50 or 60, and some are handling

100 just fine. Chandu knows that, too. We need legislation that levels the playing field for small farmers; perhaps a surcharge on the profits of large farms, though I don't know how that would work. People would ask their cousins to say they were farming part of the land instead."

"It might work on very large farms," suggested Thornton. "No one would have enough cousins for 500 agris, for example."

"That's a thought," agreed Chris. "What we really need is legislation to encourage the more efficient and sustainable use of land. The population is still growing at 3 or 3.5% per year, which means it doubles every 20 or 25 years. We're approaching half a million—the census will nail that down in a few months—and another doubling will bring us to a million. The cities will quadruple because they're growing the fastest. Maybe the world had a million before the sea dried up, but they may have been on an unsustainable path, too. We're burning almost two million tonnes of wood per year and we're using 800,000 agris for agriculture."

"That's about 3,000 square kilometers of land," noted Thornton. "Era has 90,000 square kilometers, and thirty percent, of 27,000, should be arable."

"Yes, but a lot of that belongs to the Tutane," replied Chris. "They need to retain their right to it, and besides, much of their land is available to wildlife. We have to remember them. If we have a million people, they'll need 1.6 million agris for food. If those people drive 100,000 vehicles, we'll need 50,000 additional agris of sugar cane to power them. A lot of the agris now in use can support three crops per year, but we don't have much more in the tropical zone, so we'll need even more agris in the temperate zone."

“We have a ways to go before our agriculture is as efficient as Earth’s, though,” said Amos. “Our yields per agri are still half the yields Earth had reached before we ended up here. We probably have enough land to feed everyone. With hydroelectric power from the Long Valley, wind power, and sugarcane, we can probably reduce wood consumption per capita.”

Chris nodded. “We probably can, but I still worry. I’m getting near the end of my time here; Albanu’s passing reminds me of that! He was a bit younger than me. I want to fix things as much as I can while I can. Forestry is my big worry right now; the Forestry Tomis have not taken reforestation seriously enough. If I could, I’d fire Manusunu Miller. He has not managed the Melwika Timber Company well at all.”

“Did you talk to John?”

Chris shook his head. “John is out of the picture now. He’s retired and really able to do very little now, because of arthritis.”

“I can talk to Mitru,” volunteered Thornton.

“Chris, please remember you are not the king of Éra,” said Liz. “You can do only so much, and your energy is diminishing as well.” She turned to May. “How’s the Faith doing here?”

May considered. “Not as well as in Melwika, but we have had a small upswing of enrollments. I’d say most people here are bitter about Albanu and right now is the wrong time for them to let go of that.”

“Budhéstu has helped rejuvenate the prayer hall,” added Amos. “It’s now full on Primdius, and the city is enthusiastic about the reconstruction work going on across the street on the old temple. Werétrakester has been here most of the winter; I think he’s even

been thinking about renting a house so his wife can join him here. Together, they have been shaping and guiding the peaceful prayer events outside Albanu's palace."

"I was wondering about that, after I heard Weretrakester on Kekanu's show," said Liz. "They sounded like something he'd do."

"Oh, definitely," agreed Amos. "But Lomu—the head of the prayer hall—has his own ideas, and Budhéstu and Werétrakester have had trouble persuading him to keep everything peaceful. The entire protest against Albanu has been planned by the prayer hall here with a lot of help from the granges here and in Lepawsdomas."

"Then a new consciousness among the people has definitely been created," said Liz. "Thanks to education, the Faith, and Werétrakester."

"And I suspect his strategy has very much been a response to the Bahá'í teachings," added May. "Because the old priests tried violence and that backfired."

"How has Budhéstu worked out?" asked Chris.

Amos nodded. "Quite well. He's very smart, a literary fellow—remember, he was one of the people who revised and revived the old writing system after we simplified it and added vowels to it—and he's smart enough to see how things have changed."

"And he's open minded enough to change with them," added May.

Just then, they heard the front door open and a moment later, Skandé and Andranu came in with Prince Mégékwes. "His Majesty has written an absolutely brilliant piece about Albanu!" exclaimed Andanu. "We persuaded him to show it to Lady May." He then noticed who else was here. "Oh, greetings, Honored Count Kristobéru, Lord Dhoru, Lady Lizé and Lady Lébé."

“Greetings,” replied Chris. “And greetings to His Majesty.” He rose and the others did as well.

“Thank you,” replied the Prince. “I came here to verify a few details for my article while Princess Ninlilé reads to children at the Atranimenga Elementary School. I was happy that Andranu and Skandé wanted to read the draft of the article, but had not intended to face such a distinguished audience!”

“We don’t have to read it,” replied Liz. “That’s not our decision. It’s your piece.”

“Well . . . perhaps it’s just as well,” replied the Prince. He opened a satchel and pulled out 10 typed pages.

“Wow! Where will this go?” asked May.

“*Melwika Nuēs*, serialized as three articles starting the day after the funeral.”

“So soon?” said Liz.

“That was my mother’s concern as well, but I told her that if we wait, people will say we are suppressing the truth. Besides, I have tried to write a truthful but neutral article.”

“Good,” said Liz. “Are you showing it to your mother first?”

“Ah . . . no.”

“Then I’ll read it and imagine I’m your mother,” said Liz.

The Prince looked concerned about that, but May smiled. “Don’t worry, you’ll get your mother’s opinion this way, and won’t have to obey.”

Lébé and Skandé both laughed at that. The Prince handed the article to May and she sat next to Amos to read, pencil in hand. She occasionally circled matters of grammar and phrasing; every time she finished a page she handed it to Lébé, who did the same;

then she handed the page to Liz, who read and occasionally underlined. The husbands read over their wives's shoulders while Mégékwes, Skandé, and Andranu watched, the former nervously.

“Wow, you are a beautiful writer,” said Lébé when they all finished.

“It's true, the kingdom is fortunate,” said May, nodding.

“Whatever complaints one can have about Endraidha High School, they do give a high quality classical education,” said the Prince.

“If you are a student who cares,” said Amos. “A lot of the kids don't.”

“Very true.”

“You really should consider a Masters or doctorate in History,” added May. “It'd give your writing some context and depth.”

“I'm interested in doing that. But are you concerned about the title ‘The Last of the Old Fashioned Lords’?”

“I am a bit,” said Liz. “I can't say my Eryan is at the right level, but there are still a lot of ‘old fashioned’ lords around. Maybe ‘Old-Style’ would be better?”

“Yes,” said Mégékwes and May at the same time.

“My main suggestion is to work on your tone,” said Liz. “Your article seeks to be fair; ‘old-style’ lords, after all, could do some pretty callous things to their peasants, at least in Néfa, the North Shore, and a few other places, so in a sense he was just continuing the old practices after they were no longer acceptable. But after making that point, your article is still judgmental. And it doesn't have to be, because if you simply present the things Albanu did in a neutral tone, your audience will be outraged, because they no longer view the old-style behaviors to be moral. That's even true of Albanu's

friends who are fellow lords; they know times have changed and they can't turn back the clock. So I'd go back over the whole thing and tone down some of the verbs you use, and eliminate some of the adjectives. The result will be more effective, and it will be harder for people to call you biased."

Mégékwes took a deep breath and nodded. "You are right, and that is what my mother would want."

"Even if it is published under the name of Ornpitru, most people will know it was authored by you," added Chris. "As such, it will inevitably reflect on the monarchy as well, and it will shape your reputation. The more wise and the more neutral, the better."

"Alright," said the Prince. "I'll look over your remarks and see what I can do."

Over the next day, the wealthy villas in Luktrodema filled up with members of the Old Houses from the Eastern Shore, as did the Palace Hotels in Pértatranisér and Ora, and the small hotel in Néfa. Her Majesty and Duke Kandékwes settled into the best suite in Pértatranisér's Palace Hotel. A steady stream of visitors headed to the ducal palace in Néfa to express their condolences to their cousins.

Penkudiu dawned warm and sunny; perfect weather for a huge outdoor funeral. On the edge of the city next to the High School was a large field that served as a gathering place for festivals and the funeral pyre was built there; a huge stack of wood with a platform on top for Albanu's coffin. A pavilion with several hundred chairs was set up nearby for the invited guests. The inhabitants were provided places to stand to the right and left of the tent where they could hear the service, but when it began there were

very few residents present. Their absence was obvious to the lords and ladies in the pavilion. At least the crowd swelled until it was thousands as the service neared the end.

It was a long, traditional service that began with a procession that brought in Albanu's coffin and placed it on top of the pyre, followed by the chanting of hymns, the reciting of elegies—there were traditional ones that could be quickly modified to refer to the decedent—and carefully phrased eulogies by the Queen, Auskandu, and three local lords who were his sons in law. The three priests in Néfa blessed the pyre and chanted a final hymn of Widumaj, and Werétrakester was given the privilege of chanting a final hymn. Then Awskandu stepped forward, took a flaming torch, and touched it to the pyre at a spot where the wood was soaked with pine pitch. The flames quickly rose and spread throughout the pyre.

The custom was to wait until the flames had engulfed the platform on top and then the leading member of the family led everyone back to the house for the funeral feast. The Queen looked at Awskandu and he looked back, uncertain who should rise from the chairs first. As they waited, a man in the crowd to the right of the pavilion—Lomu—walked forward and threw something on the pyre.

Awkandu frowned. "What did he do?"

Then suddenly a dozen people stepped forward and did the same, then scores more, then a hundred or more.

"They're throwing bits of wood and straw on the fire!" exclaimed Kandékwes, startled.

"How dare they!"

“I was wondering why people were walking away from the crowd, then coming back with things in their hands,” said Kandékwes, and the queen nodded; she had noticed it also.

“Such ingratitude,” she exclaimed, her anger rising. “Their lord is dead and they do this!”

“I will cancel the feast we are setting outside for the people!” exclaimed Awskandu, furious. “This is insolence! Rebellion!”

“Let us remember, honored lord, that your family has accumulated 4 million dhanay in land and stock while the people have struggled,” exclaimed Wérétrakester, who was seated to the left of Kandékwes. “This is a peaceful comment by the people about their lord. If you can burn him, can they not assist you?”

Awskandu’s eyes grew large and his face turned red. “How dare you do this, widu! You humiliate my family!”

“I did nothing, honored, and there is nothing in the customs that say the people can or cannot contribute to the pyre. If you are humiliated, that is your interpretation of their act.”

“Some of them are tossing big branches onto the pyre with derision!”

“And some are not.”

“Your family has 4 million?” asked the queen.

Awskandu turned to her, and realized he could no longer look furious. “My father was a *very good businessman*, Your Majesty.”

That startled her, as lords usually insisted they would have nothing to do with business. “That’s more than a businessman,” she replied.

Awskandu rose, so she did as well. They were both standing, so they led the seated crowd of lords and VIPs out of the tent and toward the palace. They walked silently the ten minutes back to the palace, and it wasn't just because it was the solemn act that was expected; it was because there was nothing civil to say.

When they reached the central square in front of the palace, Awskandu hurried over to the cooks who had prepared a huge quantity of bread and roasted boar for the thousands who would soon fill the square. They were startled by his command that all the food be removed. Then he led the VIPs and lords in through the gate, where there were chairs and tables set up in the palace's central courtyard. There were little name cards at each place and a long head table for Awskandu, his five sisters, and the royal party, which included Mégékwes, Ninlilé, and the other three children of the queen.

The queen looked down the row at Albanu's surviving children. Two of his sons had died in a pélu epidemic thirty years earlier; his wife had passed just two years earlier. Awskandu was still extremely upset, as were four of his sisters. The oldest sister—the eldest surviving child—was Albesé, a widow, and she seemed less insulted. The queen made eye contact with her and nodded to her. Albesé nodded back.

Estoibidhé leaned over toward Awskandu. "I understand from Werétrakester that your father had reviewed the family's assets and was considering a way to use them to the benefit of the province's poor."

Awskandu clearly was unhappy that the prophet had spoken to the queen. "He was reviewing various options before he passed away. He had made no decisions."

"I see." The queen looked directly at Awskandu. "How long will it take you to make the final decisions? You are the executor of the estate, are you not?"

“Yes, of course. It’ll take a month or so. I need to consult with my sisters, though most of the estate will stay intact, as it is the property of the province’s duke.”

“I see.” The queen paused. “I want a full report of the plan to distribute the estate within a month. Your family may keep the title and authority as duke, or the accumulated wealth, but not both.”

“You have no right to take our wealth from us!”

“I didn’t say I would, but I do have the authority to take away your title and authority. The distribution of the wealth is your choice.”

500.

Everything Comes Out

Mid Eĵnaménu /mid March. 23/641

The old thatched brick barn looked exactly as Prince Mégékwes had described. When Andranu and Skandé got out of their car, he automatically reached to feel his dagger, to make sure it was on his belt. The place was old and decrepit and gave him the creeps.

“Hello?” called out Skandé. Andranu frowned at her and repeated her call. She had a slight Eastern Shore accent; he could easily speak the western shore accent and could even speak it with a working class accent if he was careful.

A man wearing old pants and a shirt came forward from the shadows in back.
“How can I help you?”

“We’re looking for Árvárjú, the headman of Váranúagras.”

“You found him! How can I help you?”

“I’m Andranu Doma-Widumigi and this is my wife Skandé Doma-Menneai. We work for the Village Council Support Consultancy. Your Council may have received a letter from us some months back; we wrote to all the villages in the Basin.”

“We want to offer our services to your council,” continued Skandé. “They’re free, also. You may remember the company was mentioned last summer, but at that time it wasn’t organized on the western shore.”

“I do remember.” He looked them over. Skandé’s skin color verified her identity, and his educated Kerda accent sounds like a priest’s, as suggested by his family name.

“You’re an interesting pair! A priest and a Mennea!”

“Indeed, Honored, we get that a lot,” replied Andranu. “We’ve been working for the village support consultancy since the fall and have concentrated in northern Vésa and the eastern Rudhisér townships. Now we’re turning to the basin.”

“Good timing. Why did you start with Váranúagras? We aren’t the closest village to Pértatranisér.”

“We have to start somewhere,” replied Andranu.

“We were hoping to arrange a time we could meet with the Council,” added Skandé.

“We probably should talk to Lord Váranúbárú first.”

“You certainly can if you want, but it isn’t necessary,” replied Skandé. “The basic village charter that the palace has drawn up specifies that the Lord meets with the council unless he appoints a headman; then the headman meets with the council instead. You’re the headman, so you and the council can make legal decisions without the lord. Has the council met and ratified the charter?”

“No. We met twice last year. After I was appointed headman, I called a meeting and we talked about our duties. Lord Váranúbárú gave me a copy of the basic budget and we approved it. We saw the charter paperwork but never read it. Then after the conference the queen called, we met again to discuss the materials covered by it. But we had no money to spend, so there was really nothing more for us to do.”

“The council can apply for development grants from the palace, though,” said Skandé.

“But we weren’t sure what we’d ask for and how to do it. The village got a development grant about twelve years ago to build our school. We needed two rooms at

the time, but we built only one and the Lord kept some of the money to install running water and a modern bathroom in his house in Néfa. The kids were badly crowded into the school, but now the village is a lot smaller and the kids more or less fit. We don't have money to hire a second teacher, anyway. Then seven years ago we got a grant to install running water and a sewer line that connects about half the houses together to a well and a septic field. The other half of the houses are too scattered and too far away, so they don't have modern conveniences."

"The lord handled both grants?" asked Andranu.

"Yes, but he made it clear we had to do it, now."

"We can help with that," said Skandé. "We can meet and help rough out the development grant. The Development Consultancy can clean it up and submit it to the palace, and as you probably know, they don't charge you; the palace pays them a commission based on the size of the grant if it is approved and if grants are audited afterward."

"There is no cheating with the money any more," added Andranu.

"That's good. There's been enough of that in the past. What sort of grants would we apply for?"

"I see you have a power line," said Skandé. "I'd petition for a telephone line. The telephone company will handle that development grant, because they'll get the money to do it. With a telephone in the school, it'll be possible to call for a fire truck or an ambulance. After that, I'd recommend a petition to the army to pave the road connecting you to Route 2. That doesn't count as a development grant because the army has its own budget. After that, there are various possibilities; they give grants to install electric lines

to every house, to dig wells, gravel farm roads, purchase farm equipment for granges, set up grange businesses, etc.”

“We don’t have a grange. But it’s possible we’ll get one in the future, of course. The leak yesterday that Albanu was worth 4 million has outraged people. Since the funeral, the anger has only grown. The Prince’s articles have made people even angrier; the rumors around here are that the lords want him assassinated.”

“He now travels with armed guards,” said Andranu. “He is a bit surprised by the anger; he was careful to write a piece that sounded neutral. But a lot of people are praising him to the skies for writing it.”

“Yes, I am looking forward to hearing him on Kekanu’s show tomorrow morning. I have read the articles because they were reprinted in the *Néfa Yoros*. The pen name has not conveyed any anonymity at all. Albanu deserved every word.”

“I agree,” said Andranu. “But I think the Prince got it right when he described Albanu as the last of an old style of lordly leadership. He didn’t do anything wrong, based on the old ways. But the old ways are now gone.”

“They are, but don’t assure people what he did was right, even then. It wasn’t.” Árvárjú pointed to the schoolhouse. “Let’s see whether we can find Mitrú. He’s the teacher at the school and he’s on the council. Two of the other three are within walking distance. Maybe we can hold a quick meeting and agree on a time when the entire council can meet with you.”

“So, we have our census form,” said Chris, sitting at the dining table and looking through the mail of the day. He opened the envelope and pulled out the form. “We’ll need an additional page; there aren’t enough blanks for everyone in the household.”

“How many do we need?” said Liz. She did a quick count. “Including servants . . . eighteen!”

“We can add a page.” Chris put it down. Just then Jordan and Tiamaté came in with their kids. “Hey, Jor, can you fill out the census form for everyone in the household?”

Jordan pulled it out, glanced at it, and sighed. “Sure. It’ll take some time, but I can do it.”

“How’s your fast?” asked Liz. She and Chris no longer needed to fast.

“Today’s better than yesterday. The first day is always the hardest.” He looked at Chris. “You’re fasting half a day, right? You don’t need to.”

“I ate lunch and drank some water then, but I am happy to fast the rest of the day. At my age, that works fine. I got a copy of a report from the All-Grange Council this afternoon. They’re projecting a larger harvest this year and a drop in crop prices, but the big uncertainty is the Néfa Basin. If there’s land reform there, harvests could be up or down.”

“Are they making plans, if granges can be formed there?”

Chris nodded. “The eastern Rudhisér granges especially.”

“We got a report from Miller Motors right after you left for lunch,” said Jordan. “Production just reached 75 vehicles per week, which is 4,875 per year. Did you get some reports from Yusdu?”

“No, they’re delayed. The uncertainty in Néfa has delayed some of the reports from Pértatranisér and Belledha, so we don’t have a final quarterly report yet. What was the final result of the stock market?”

“Down another two percent,” said Jordan. “So now it’s down five percent. But I gather no one is worried about the economy.”

“No, this should be temporary.” Chris looked around. “Where’s Thornton?”

“He’s at the Royal Geological Survey offices,” said Liz.

“Oh that’s right! The celebration of the completion of the mapping effort! I should go congratulate him and see the maps. I told him I’d be there.”

“You haven’t missed much. They scheduled it for a little before sunset so the Bahá’í staffers could enjoy the reception.”

“Lots of free food,” echoed Jordan. “Shall I drive you over?”

“No, I’ll take the bus. This time of day, there’s one every few minutes.” Chris rose, grabbed his coat by the door—it was a chilly *ĕjnaménu* evening—and stepped outside. It was rush hour and a bus had pulled into Fortress Square to pick up passengers, so he climbed on board. He didn’t need a ticket because it was free anyway. Several people immediately jumped up and offered him their seats, which he declined.

It wasn’t a very long ride to Temple Square, but it saved his arthritic legs and he had a very pleasant conversation with two passengers, who were pleased to see their aged lord on the bus with them. He got off and walked through an alley into the Melwika Génadema campus as the sun was setting. The campus was still getting new buildings, as its student body had recently hit 2,000 and its faculty 150. He headed straight to the

Geological and Environmental Sciences Building and entered the large first floor classroom where the celebration was being held.

He had missed the formal program; everyone was now eating and talking. Chris was immediately drawn to a huge map of the entire planetoid. The completed Mercator projection was ten meters long and five meters high—scale 1:50000, or 1 centimeter equaled half a kilometer—and it was a work of art, with squiggly brown lines for altitude, darker green areas for forest, lighter green for grasslands, a pale greenish brown for patches of farmland, blue for water, white for permanent snow and ice, and red for built-up areas. On each end were polar projections for the arctic and antarctic regions that were a meter across. Chris paused before it, captivated by its magnificent detail. He ran his eyes along the various routes on the map and saw the scenery in his head. In his 23 years on Éra, he had seen just about the entire planetoid, and the map brought a lot of it back. The exception was the south polar map, which was wholly unfamiliar to him; except for fir-covered lowlands south of Tripola, the entire circle was the gray of bare mountain peaks and the white of permanent snow and ice.

Thornton saw his father's enchantment and hurried over. "Isn't it beautiful? The cartographers did an incredible job."

"Son, you did an incredible job. You oversaw the work and did a lot of the first maps."

"Thanks, dad. Those early maps are totally outdated now, thanks to aerial photography and extensive surveying." He pointed to the southern Spine Mountains.

"That was the last area to be mapped properly, but we now have the entire world mapped in quadrangles at a scale of 1:25,000 with a contour interval of 10 meters. This is a

smaller version because a 1:25,000 map of the entire world wouldn't fit on a wall anywhere!"

Chris leaned close to look at the southern Spine Mountains. "I see every peak has a name, too."

"Yes, and the creeks and lakes. The Gëndonë know the area and have named the creeks and lakes. We named the peaks and showed the results to them, and they proposed some changes."

"Is that how it worked?" asked General Përku, as he approached the two of them. He held out both hands to Chris. "Honored Count, it is so good to see you again."

"Thank you, Honored friend-General," said Chris. "I thought you were in Néfa."

"I came back just for this celebration, since the army paid for about half this map and the palace for the rest. Her Majesty asked me to be her representative to this gathering."

"How are things in Néfa? I gather the army proved valuable."

"I fear yes. There was some looting last week, right after the funeral, but we imposed a curfew and it stopped. There were a handful of trouble makers. Most people are waiting to see what the palace plans to do. In the last week, silk-screened posters have appeared all over town denouncing different lords, and they have been specific; this lord cheated farmers of some of their harvest, that one overcharged the tax, this third one diverted money for irrigating the rice paddies to his new villa in Luktrudëma, etc. We're recording all the complaints and passing them on to the royal police force, which will investigate."

"Not the provincial police."

“No, they’re not trusted. I’m sure most of the complaints are true; they were common problems in the past. I doubt anyone will be prosecuted for them because they were part of the expectations, but the Réjé will probably impose her own punishments.”

“I get the impression she’s fed up.”

Perku nodded. “I think that is correct.” He turned back to the map. “But today, we celebrate this grand achievement of the Royal Geological Survey! Over 20 years of steadfast, detailed, precise work! It really is amazing.” He looked at the southern Spine Mountains, since they had been discussing the area when he had walked up. “So, are there any good passes down there? Any places we could build a road?”

“There’s one spot at 40 degrees south.” He pointed roughly and they could see a wide gap between two peaks by the 40th parallel where gray and white was replaced by a thin band of dark green. “The altitude is about 2,500 meters. You see how the line of southern peaks is about 3 kilometers east of the northern peaks? Most likely, there’s a fault crossing the Spine there and the southern peaks have been displaced eastward. We’ve been through the area several times; I hiked it personally with a team four years ago. There’s a hunting trail through the gap.”

Perku nodded, fascinated. “It looks like one could extend Route 99 from Jérpola in southern Géndona across the mountains to the southern extension of the Kaitere Valley, where it could connect to Route 69 to Tripola. That would open the southern mountains to hunting and timbering.”

Thornton nodded. “From what I remember, that would be possible. Jérpola, or Gérépola as they call it in their dialect, is small, isolated, and poor. They’d be just 170 kilometers from Tripola; a two hour drive.”

“It would also provide another electric line for the hydropower at Moruagras,” noted Chris. “It has three lines already, but in the winter a fourth line would provide useful redundancy.”

Perku nodded. “I’ll propose it in next year’s budget.”

“Be sure to ask the Géndone first, though,” cautioned Chris. “They are a proud and independent people.”

“I know,” said Perku.

“Thank you so much for coming,” Her Majesty, Queen Estoibidhé said the Dekané.

“Please, come sit with me.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” replied Dekané. She tried not to sound nervous. She sat in a chair next to the queen’s. She noted that Wepokester was already swiftly taking notes, which made her wonder what there was to write down before she had said anything.

“I wanted you to come because I have grown increasingly concerned about the situation in Rudhisér. I have sent a group of investigators from the royal police and they are reporting more and more rumors about various bribes and misappropriations of development funds, some as recently as three years ago. It will take some time, of course, to investigate the claims thoroughly, and in many cases the claims will prove to be baseless. But a consistent theme is that the village councils are weak, and that was also a theme in Ornpitru’s article ‘The Last of the Old-Style Lords’ which appeared in the Melwika Nues several weeks ago. So I thought I’d ask what services the Village Council

Consultancy has been able to provide to village councils in the Basin, and whether you have the resources to assist them.”

“We have not been able to do much, and we do not have the resources we need to assist very much. The consultancy has only two employees on the western shore, so far: Andranu Doma-Widumigi and Skandé Keino-Doma-Ménnéai.”

“Them? They’re rather young.”

“Indeed, but Skandé has several years of experience in the government of Pértatranisér and Andranu, as a business major, knows the techniques for consulting to help a group of people form plans. Since late last summer they have been building connections with the township councils in northern Vésa, and they have been very helpful for them, especially Mitranimela. They have also been able to help the councils in eastern Rudhisér, outside the Basin, but those townships are new and not dominated by lords. They were not even able to find and contact the village councils in the Basin until the last few weeks. They have now been able to meet with one council, that of Váranúagras, and they will soon meet with the council of Rudharudha. But the councils are so weak and undeveloped; they’re timid, afraid to upset their lords, starved for money, afraid to request development grants, and lacking basic skills in accounting and management. Their villages are small and consist mostly of older farmers with no land, a few men who take the bus to Néfa or Pértatranisér for work, and a few clever farmers who work large areas on behalf of land owners.”

“What do you need to assist the councils in the Basin? Because it is very important that the councils develop and become strong. Their weakness is symptomatic of many other problems, and strengthening them is part of the solution.”

“We . . . we’d need more staff. Skandé and Andranu have three days a week of existing work for the northern Vésa and eastern Rudhisér townships, so they only have one day left to help the Basin townships. Furthermore, the services to northern Vésa and eastern Rudhisér more or less pay their salaries. The Consultancy, remember, provides both free and paid services, and the latter covers the costs of the former. The paid services are such things as handling payroll, hiring teachers, and what we call ‘township management’ services; essentially, serving as headman. Most of these places need a part time manager only, not a full-time headman. The Basin villages need a lot of help and already have headmen, so they can’t request many services.”

“I see. If the palace gave you a large grant—say, 10,000 per year—that would be sufficient to hire two more people, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, and cover a lot of the office’s other expenses. We’ll need even more to expand to southern Vésa and to Kërda, Jérntisér, the North Shore, Ləwésa, the South Shore, etc.”

“Well, right now I’m talking about the Basin.”

“Two more people would revolutionize the situation, but we’ll have to wait and see what they can accomplish. Progress may be slow at first, but over several years the councils will begin to function much better.”

“I agree, this is not an immediate fix. I would hope you could go personally for a few weeks, hire more people, and train them.”

“Yes, I can do that. There are other things that can be done to help the Basin. If there’s land reform, they will need granges.”

“Land reform is a possibility; we will see. There’s one more issue I want to raise: corruption. It will no longer be tolerated in Rudhisér. There are many provinces where corruption is minimal. I suspect it is the worst in Rudhisér. If your team hears allegations of corruption in the last three years, I want it confidentially reported straight to me. I may pass some of the allegations on to the royal police; others, I may act on personally, since I control titles and lordly authority. I know the lords in the Basin; they are all cousins, one way or another, and I am essentially the head of the family. I have obligations as a consequence.”

“Yes, of course, Your Majesty. I will inform my team to pass all such allegations straight to me and I will pass them on to you.”

“Thank you. I understand that the consultancy is an independent company and not an agency of the palace, but this is a condition for the 10,000 dhanay annual contract to serve the village councils in the Basin. We’ll draw up a contract and send it to you in the next few days for your review, and you can call Wepokæster if you have any questions or want any changes.”

Dëkané smiled and nodded. “Very well, Your Majesty. We will make this happen. But . . .” She hesitated. “I’d like to ask you something.”

“What?”

“I know we can’t endorse specific people for the election; that’s a pillar of our election system, and it has served the kingdom well. But it seems to me we can encourage the election of women and minorities, like Sumis.”

Estoibidhé thought for a moment. “We can move only so fast, Dëkané. The men are used to a monarch who is a woman, and an occasional daughter of a lord who

becomes the lord. But they are not used to a large number of women in positions of authority.”

“No they aren’t. I agree. Neither are the women of this world. But everyone needs to get used to women in positions of authority, more and more, gradually. If we start, the next generation will be prepared.”

“Yes, you have a good point. I’ll think about it, Dekané.”

“Thank you so much for inviting us to dinner, Your Majesty,” said Amos, bowing to the queen as he entered the dining room. “We were surprised to hear you were staying at the Palace Hotel here in Pértatranisér.”

“This is a very comfortable place for us to stay,” Estoibidhé replied, extending her hand, and Amos grasped it delicately. “The purpose of our visit would be difficult for us to achieve if we stayed in the palace in Néfa or even in the royal residence in Ora.” She turned to May. “It’s very good to see you again, Lady May.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty. It’s very kind of you to invite us to dinner.”

“I’m so glad you came. I look forward to our conversation. Please sit.” She sat, so they could as well. “I would have invited you earlier in the day, but during the Fast socializing is . . . different.”

“Indeed,” said Amos. The hotel’s servers came forward with roasted turkey, roasted fish, rice with vegetables, bread, and Passionfruit juice. The queen took her share and passed it to Amos, May, and Kandékwes. “We’re happy to say this hotel is probably the finest one on the western shore.”

“It certainly is,” the queen agreed. “In anticipation of our visits, they have really fixed up the second floor and equipped several suites quite luxuriously. If we stay in a palace, we have to deal with the local duke and family, but here we have our own space. So, how is Pértatranisér?”

“The city is doing well and growing,” replied Amos. “Based on the tax revenues, at least, we are pretty sure we have the highest family income on the western shore. The population is growing about six percent per year, so we are approaching 12,000, while Néfa has 9,000 and of course Ora is up to 29,000. We have four génademas, including the second largest women’s géndha, the second largest commercial center on the western shore—barely smaller than Ora—and the second largest industrial park. We also have a very active Hymn Hall and we’ll be opening a new temple this summer.”

“I have heard about the Hymn Hall. They were central in the hymn gatherings outside Albanu’s palace.”

“They were indeed; they are the biggest and most organized community of followers of Widumaj on the western shore. We also have the biggest Bahá’í community on the western shore.”

“Together, they have raised the ethical and spiritual conscience of this city’s population,” added May. “Werétrakester appears to be planning to move here, too.”

“He has praised Pértatranisér highly for exactly this reason. You have a large high school, right? And it serves about half the province?”

“That’s about right,” agreed May. “About a third of the villages in the Basin send students to our High School, plus all four eastern Rudhisér townships: Luktrudema,

Owyapéla, Bolérripura, and Boléragras. There are even a lot of kids who come from Lépawsdomas, 50 kilometers from here! The buses carry workers here as well.”

“How does Néfa High School compare?”

Amos hesitated. “It’s not a bad high school, but we spend more money on science and engineering and offer a wider range of courses. Néfa High School does offer a lot of business courses, though. That was Albanu’s passion: to train good quality businessmen. And it has paid off.”

“Though Pértatranisér has more business, does it not?”

“Indeed, because the business environment is better. Businesses in Néfa needed patronage to do well.”

“The old way of doing things,” said Kandékwes, nodding.

“I gather most of the lords in the Basin opposed Pértatranisér when it was established.”

“Of course! They wanted the refugees from the Néfa riots killed or least severely punished. They didn’t want them to build a city and do well. For years, we had no relationships with the villages in the Basin at all, except for Bruagras due north of us. We had much better relationships with the northern Véspe townships just south of the city. They sensed an opportunity; they sent high school students right away, because we were closer than Ora and had a better school. They established businesses to provide us with raw materials and factory parts. And they accepted granges, though grudgingly.”

“There are only one or two in the Basin.”

“Of course,” said Amos. “The Basin has 80,000 agris of farm land and 60,000 agris is owned by twenty lords. The remaining 20,000 agris is scattered and the farmers

have no encouragement to organize. It's amazing that the 800 small land farmers in the Basin have any granges at all."

"The lords hire about 400 men to farm their land, and the lords provide them with equipment, so there are the equivalent of granges for them," added May. "But since they don't own the land, it is not farmed very efficiently; little or no fertilizer is applied, crop rotation is not done systematically, crops are selected arbitrarily, and there's a shortage of equipment, so planting and harvesting is often delayed."

"So, if the land were owned by small land owners, how many of them would there be?"

Amos considered. "About 1,500 or so. Twenty years ago, the Basin had 6,000 farmers farming about 15 agris each, but nowadays a farmer needs to farm 50 to 100 agris each using tractors and other machines in order to earn a living."

"So, not that many more than work the Basin now," said the queen, disappointed.

"Correct, but they'd do better, because they'd keep a large fraction of the profit and they'd probably get fifty percent more harvest per agi. And with more money, they'd spend more, so there would be more stores, bakeries, and barber shops in the villages."

She nodded. "I see what you mean. It would lift up the Basin."

"Exactly. Some would buy pickups, so there would be some garages to repair them. The Basin has very few modular houses; there would be more of them. People would pay for electricity and indoor plumbing, so there would be a need for electricians and plumbers. They would do more shopping in Néfa, so Néfa would have more businesses and it would grow."

"But what about all the investments Albanu had? What should we do with that?"

“Did you see the plan Werétrakester proposed to Albanu? He brought the third draft with him to the palace the night Albanu died. I’m sure he left it with Awwskandu. He consulted with many people about it, including me. As I understand it, there were three options. First, everything could be sold and redistributed to the people in the Basin. That would be difficult to do because some suffered more than others, and many have moved away, so it would be difficult to know whom to compensate. Second, the profits of the investment could be used, every year, to improve the Basin through a charity that owns all the investments. And third, Albanu and his family could keep everything and disburse the profits as they see fit. This would be a continuation of the injustice, however.”

“I have heard of the plan, but have not seen it. I agree, they should not keep everything, and it cannot be redistributed at this point. It should be used to benefit the people of Rudhisér now and into the future. But I suppose they should keep something.”

Amos nodded. “Yes, something, but how much?”

“We will see what Awwskandu proposes tomorrow, when I see him,” replied the queen. “But ultimately, it is up to me, not him.”

Awwskandu was terrified to meet the queen. The rumor that she had moved into the Pértatranisér Hotel reached him first; then the letter summoning him; then he heard from other lords that they had been summoned as well. He went to the hotel, debating whether to be contrite or defiant, whether to insist on the distribution of the estate he had finalized or whether he should negotiate and compromise, whether to appeal to Estoibidhé as third cousin or obey her as queen.

When he saw her in the salon of her hotel suite, seated in a fancy chair and wearing a small crown, all the scenarios he had run through in his mind had to be abandoned. He had to follow his gut.

“Your Majesty.” He nodded to her and went down on one knee.

“Rise and sit, cousin,” she replied, pointing to a chair. He took it as a good sign and sat. “I have reviewed your plan for distributing the estate of your late father. Your sisters get 100,000 dhanay each.”

“Correct, Your Majesty. This is according to our customs of primogeniture; I am the prime inheritor. All of them have estates and income already, even Albesé, who is now a widow.”

“Indeed, they all do have an income through their husbands, who are also large landowners. You propose to keep 2 million dhanay of stock and all 5,000 agris of your father’s lands and turn 2.5 million dhanay over to a ‘Rudhisér Development Trust’ that you would chair.”

“Correct, and it would generate 250,000 dhanay per year of profit, which could be dedicated to education, health, infrastructure, and other needs of the province.”

“That would help the province considerably.” She looked at him. “That is generous, but not generous enough. You have been too generous to yourself, Lord. This money is blood money; it caused much suffering when it was extracted from the people. It was extracted according to the laws and customs of the time, it is true. But those customs are no longer acceptable, and the people are keenly aware of that fact. The laws, no doubt, will be changed during the legislative assembly in a few months. What do you have to say about that?”

Awskandu looked at her. “Your Majesty, please accept this plan. It guarantees the continued significance of Doma-Néfai in this world and allows my son to have a reasonable inheritance and an important role in the kingdom. Your husband, the Duke of Arjakwés, is worth at least this much, as is the Kérékwés clan and Duke Aryu of Ora.”

The queen’s face hardened. “The Kérékwés brothers were exiled to uninhabited land and they have sold most of it to farmers, who earn a good living, and they have used the money to build factories. Duke Kandékwés also acquired title over Médhelone land south of Meddoakwés and sold it to farmers, investing the result into factories that have built up his city and made it wealthy. Duke Aryu actually has very little himself because he had no land, but he has built up his city and made it very prosperous; it’s three times larger than Néfa now. Your father expelled thousands from the land they had used for generations, resulting in the burning of half of Néfa, and he was not generous with the profits; he just plowed them into factories and purchased more land. As a result, Rudhisér is the poorest of our major provinces and Néfa is one of the smallest and poorest of the traditional large cities. Do you dispute any of these facts?”

“No, Your Majesty, but I am telling you that I will do much better. I will use this wealth to build up Rudhisér so that it is much more prosperous.”

“I am sure you would, but I think you want to do it primarily for the sake of the prestige of your family. And that is not acceptable to me.”

Awskandu angered at that. “Then do with me as you wish, Your Majesty,” he dared her.

“I will.” She paused. “You may keep half a million dhanay and nothing more. The Trust will get 3 million. Your sisters can receive 100,000 each; I have no objection to that. But all your farmland will be sold.”

“Your Majesty, a gentleman must have an estate and earn his living from the soil!”

“From the soil? You’re earning maybe 50,000 from the land and 400,000 from your investments! What sort of gentleman is that? No, you will have no land, and you will have no authority, either. I will grant you the title of ‘Count of Néfa’; you will have a title, but no authority whatsoever, either over the city or the province.”

“You can’t do that!”

“I can’t? Let me assure you, as your monarch, that I can. My ancestors often took land from lords. They confiscated property. I can even confiscate investments, though I have never done that. And there is no question that I can give titles, or take them away. If you want the title of Count, you will sell your land over the next year and turn over all but half a million dhanay of investments to the Trust. You may even name the trust the ‘Albanu Development Trust’ if you wish, but you will not be on the Trust’s board or have any influence over its disbursements.”

“But Your Majesty, please! And . . . a city and a province have to have a lord!”

“That is true, even if they are lord in title only. I will give the title of Lord of Néfa and Duke of Rudhisér to someone else.”

“Please, Your Majesty!”

She shook her head. “No. You are dismissed, honored.”

501.

Regents and Elections

Late Eḵnaménu /mid March. 23/641

“Your Majesty, I understand your plea that when we vote next week, we even think how we would vote for a woman or a Sumi, but the average person doesn’t know any Sumis. What do you suggest the average voter do?” asked Kēkanu.

The queen turned to the microphone in front of her. “Of course, there are many places where there are no Sumis at all, or Tutane. There are women everywhere, and everyone knows women! But let us consider minorities for a moment, and that includes Eryan on Sumilara who are learning Sumi, settling there, and want to help the place develop and flourish. The first thing to do is to walk up to someone you don’t know, offer them your hands, and greet them. Ask them their name. Get to know them. Get to know who in their community is trusted and respected. Who is experienced and wise; who has good judgment. Perhaps you can go to a gathering where you meet minorities; perhaps a Sumi temple. In the case of women, get to know women who are teachers, who are leaders in the local gabruli, who operate a stall or a store in the market. Then, when you are voting—especially if you are asked to vote for several people—think about people who are wise and experienced, who have the interests of the kingdom foremost in their mind and not their own, *and* consider diversity. Because there are many, many people who are qualified to serve on councils, but the council must also have diversity, as well as selfless experience and wisdom.”

“Well, said, Your Majesty. It is a very important responsibility.”

“It is *very* important. Any community needs wise, selfless, experienced leadership. There is no simple and easy way to obtain such leadership. There is no foolproof way. Asking every person to decide independently, without people running around and demanding you vote for them, is also not a guarantee, but it is the best we have.”

“This was the recommendation of the Bahá’í Faith.”

“Yes, it is, but we have now been trying it for almost twenty years and it has worked well.”

“Our time is coming to a close, Your Majesty, so do you have anything else to say about our elections?”

“Just to reiterate the importance of praying and taking some time—as much as a few days—to think about who you will vote for. This is not an instant decision, it requires care.”

“Thank you. What can you tell us about the census?”

“The report I got early this morning is that the census in most villages is complete. Néfa is the city that is still the least surveyed, but the task should be done by the end of the month.”

“Eight days. What’s the news about Rudhisér?”

“All I can do is summarize what everyone already knows. Lord Awwskandu has accepted the title of Count and has turned over the bulk of his father’s estate to the Albanu Development Trust. His sister Albesé has agreed to be Lord of Néfa, but only in an honorary sense. I have spoken to ten lords in the Basin and they have agreed to sell their large estates on the same terms as lendhapotus: farmers will give half their harvest

for twenty years to cover taxes and the purchase of the land. Lords have agreed to surrender significant portions of their assets to a Rudhisér Development Trust separate from the Albanu Development Trust. The amount they have surrendered and the amount they have kept is confidential information. The palace will soon augment both Trusts with additional funds, so that they can assist the people in the Basin to catch up with the rest of the kingdom.”

“I believe, Your Majesty, that the people have much to thank you for.”

“I think, Kekanu, that my mother and I have to ask the people of the Basin for their forgiveness for allowing this injustice to continue as long as it did. It is my hope that the time for restoring the balance has come.”

“What about other places in the Kingdom, such as Kerda and Swadnoma?”

“We will see.”

“And who will run Rudhisér, now that Aweekandu and Albesé have agreed to honorary status?”

“That will be resolved in the following days, after the election. All the more reason for the people of the province to choose wisely.”

“On that note, Your Majesty, I want to thank you for coming on *The World Table* today. It is always an extraordinary privilege to have you on this program.”

“Thank you, Kekanu, I am extremely appreciative of the wisdom and balance of this show. It is a friend to the people of the kingdom. We are all in our debt.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty. This is Kekanu, thanking everyone for tuning in today and wishing you all the best. We’ll be talking to you again tomorrow. Goodbye.”

Kekanu queued the closing music and looked at the control room, who signaled to him that they were off the air. He turned to the queen. “What an extraordinary show, Your Majesty. It is very kind of you to be a guest. Thank you so much.”

“Thank you for the opportunity, Kekanu. You really run an extraordinary program, filled with culture, news, and ideas. I rarely miss it.” She rose, so he did as well, and they exited the studio. The waiting room outside the studio was crowded with Kandékwes, Prince Mégékwes, Ninlilé, Amos, May, Yusdu, Dékané, and Wépokester.

“You were brilliant, my dear,” said Kandékwes, kissing his wife.

“It was great,” echoed the prince.

“She’s a very articulate guest,” agreed Kekanu.

“After the meeting with the local gabrulis tomorrow, my work over here will mostly be finished. Kekanu, can you send someone over to record my comments to them? I’d like them to be broadcast over the news.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty. I’ve scheduled the chairs of the gabrulis in Pértatranisér, Néfa, and Luktrudema to appear as guests on the program, the day after tomorrow.”

“Excellent, that will help reinforce the importance of electing women to our councils and legislatures. Thank you, Kekanu.” She turned to the others. “Since all of you are gathered here, let me make a request of you. I want to appoint a Council of Regents to consult about Rudhisér province until the provincial legislature can meet in a month or so. General Perku will be arriving tomorrow to serve as governor. I’d like the Council of Regents to include Amos, Yusdu, and Dékané, to whom I will also appoint Albésé if she is willing and Widubéru of Lepawsdomas, and one more lord who is progressive. With

Perku, that'd be seven. I will be a member as well when I am in the area. Otherwise, Prince Mégékwes will be my representative as a nonvoting member."

Mégékwes was surprised. "Thank you, mother."

"I want you to get experience, but that also means Ornpitru can't write about the province any more."

"Ah . . . alright."

"The other lord to appoint would be Brébalu," suggested Amos. "He was governor of the province for a while, when your mother took authority from Albanu after Néfa rioted. His father was lord of Rudharudha and now his brother is."

"That's a good suggestion," agreed Kekanu.

"Alright, I'll invite him to meet me tomorrow afternoon."

"We can't stay here very long," said Yusdu. "Once the provincial assembly can meet, who will run the province?"

"Let's see what the provincial assembly is like. If it appears to function well, I will nominate a governor and ask them to ratify the choice. If that works well, perhaps in two years I will let them select and approve a governor, and I will ratify the choice." She turned to her husband. "I think the time has come for the provinces to be ruled on a regular basis by governors, rather than Dukes."

"We will now have a question from Bolakra," exclaimed Lébé. She turned to an assistant, who brought a telephone over to her microphone. There was a pause and Lébé looked out over the audience. Of Melwika's 22,000 adults, some 12,000 were standing or sitting in the main city park, the big field where the Arjakwés exited its gluba, listening to the

“Future of Məlwika” city gathering. They were divided into ten areas, one for each electoral district in the city. Each area had a big sign so people could see it easily, a table with information about voting in the district, and tables of free food, now bare.

“This is Wəranu Mitranimeli, and this is my suggestion: that if we want people in Məlwika to spread out more and enjoy nature more, we encourage people to build more houses along the farm roads in southern Ménwika. Most of the farm roads are paved now and they have electric lines. Most even have irrigation ditches along them, so they have water.”

Lébé looked at Budhu Mitrusunu, the city’s new Development Officer, and he walked up to the microphone. “We want to do exactly that, but we can’t have people taking their drinking water from the irrigation ditches, so what we want to do is build a city water line all the way down Route 2 to Deksawsuperakwa, and another line from Bolakra to Route 2. That will extend city water to more areas, which also means there will be fire hydrants, and we will then encourage the development of neighborhoods along those roads. Thank you for the suggestion.”

Lébé turned to the two lines of people waiting to speak. “Please, from the right-hand microphone.”

“This is Əndrolubu Tribrateri, Third District; I’m an assembly line foreman for Miller Motors. I would like to propose an informal vote: do people want curb cuts added to their streets so they can pull their cars part way onto the sidewalk at night? A lot of people are doing it now where the curb is low enough, but in some places the curb is too high and they damage their tires or the bottoms of their cars. Most of the older streets are too narrow for parking on both sides of the street, but they have sidewalks on both sides

wide enough so people can pull their car part way off the street and people can still walk by. Parking is mostly a problem late at night when Skanda is getting pretty bright and not many people are out walking anyway. If short curb cuts were added every three meters, it would make a lot more space available.”

Lébé looked to Wéroilubu, the Chief of Police and he nodded. “Alright, we will ask the table at each district to record this question: ‘should curb cuts be added to streets so people can pull their cars partly onto the sidewalks at night?’ If you are interested in giving your opinion, please go to the table near you and write down your opinion of that idea. Right now, parking on the sidewalks is against city ordinances, but the police have stopped enforcing the rule. Note that we are almost out of time, so if you have an opinion, please go write it down soon. Now, the questioner at the left-hand microphone, please.”

“Estomigu Isukwénu, Sixth District. I work in Melwika Chemicals. I want to thank the City Council for setting up the park here so we could easily go to our own district’s area, meet people from our own district, talk to them, and we could even eat with them; thank you for feeding all of us! But Melwika has gotten so big, it seems to me it’s getting hard to elect the City Council. We have ten districts here, plus one for Deksawsuperakwa and one for Bolakra, a total of twelve; but the council has two lords and only seven elected members, so not every district can have a representative on it. Can’t we raise the City Council to fourteen? Or since Melwika will have 34 representatives in the provincial legislature, who not have all 34 of them serve as the city council? I think it’s time to redesign the city council.”

Estomigu stepped away from the microphone and there was some applause from the audience. Léb   looked to Thornton and Mitru, so the two lords stepped to the microphone.

“This is a matter we have been thinking about,” said Thornton. “We agree that it is a problem, but we are currently constrained by the bylaws of cities and villages promulgated by the palace. They were based on M  lwika’s, but the city has now grown large and the structure needs to change, so we will have to propose something new to the palace and get the queen’s approval. One possibility is a City Council of one member per thousand people; that’s 34 members at the moment. Another is a Council of 15; 12 elected, the mayor, and the two lords. Another is a council without the lords. Another is a smaller council elected by the 34 provincial representatives. There are advantages to all of them. A council with one member per district will have a representative from every part of the city, but probably will consist just of Eryan men.”

They stepped off the platform and L  b   called for the woman at the right hand microphone. About a quarter of the speakers that day had been women. “I am Sulub  r   K  rt  r, First District, and I teach third grade at the First District Elementary School. I take my kids on a nature walk along the Arjakw  s above the reservoir four times during the year and I have noticed that a lot of people walk along the river there, but there is no trail, so my suggestion would be that the city develop a trail along the riverbank for at least a kilometer or two above the reservoir. I think a lot of people would benefit from it.”

L  b   nodded. “Thank you, Goodwomen Sulub  r  , we have recorded that suggestion. I believe we have a question now from Deksawsuperakwa.”

There was a moment while the phone was brought to the microphone and she surveyed the audience again; people were still listening carefully. “This is Tritanu Bakagrasi and I am a farmer. We’d like to know when Her Majesty might open another town to farming. South Ménwika is now all assigned; it’s been full for five years. Three more townships have been laid out south and east of here. I’d like to propose that the City Council write the palace and request that another township be created and opened for farming.”

“Thank you, Honored Tritanu,” replied Lébé. “The suggestion has been recorded and will be discussed by the City Council. As I understand it, all the farmland in Arjakwés and Swadnoma is now allocated, so it may indeed be time to open another township, though the Néfa Basin will probably be reallocated and that may increase more farm production for a few years. Please, now, the right-hand microphone.”

This is Rudhsteru Terskui, Tenth District, and I work at Home Improvement. Lately we’ve had some very heavy rain and the sewers have overflowed on my street. It’s been a very bad situation and needs urgent attention from the city.”

Lébé turned to Mayor Kérdu who had already jumped up and was heading to the microphone. “This is a very serious problem and it has been caused by the new neighborhood north of you, which puts too much storm water into your sewers, which weren’t designed for them. It’s a very expensive problem, too. We will be installing a diversion so some of the storm water will flow into the industrial waste ditch along Route 2 and will flow into the industrial waste pond. We think we can divert enough water to keep your street dry *and* not overflow the industrial waste pond. Longer term, I’m afraid we need to dig up your street and install an additional storm water sewer. This is an

unfortunate problem and as the city grows, we may have the problem in other areas. We never imagined Melwika would have 34,000 people. We're now trying to design the city to expand to 100,000 people, believe it or not."

"Thank you, Honored Mayor," said Lébe. "We're approaching 3 p.m, which is the end of this meeting, so we have time for one more question. Please, the man at the left-hand microphone."

"Modékwu Kriséliséku, and I am indeed a barber," he began to laughs, for that was the meaning of his last name. "I'd like to open a shop in Bolakra, but there are no commercial buildings in the village there. People say they want more businesses in small villages. Bolakra is a small village, but with over a thousand people, it's plenty big enough for a store, a barbershop, a bakery, maybe a photographer, a doctor or nurse, maybe even a garage to repair trucks and cars. What can the city do to open businesses there?"

Lébé looked at the Development Officer and Budhu walked up to the microphone. "There's an area in Bolakra zoned for businesses and the city can encourage construction of a commercial area with tax rebates, but someone has to commit to invest in a building there. Come speak to me afterward and I'll see whether we can make it happen."

"Alright," said Modékwu.

"Thank you, Honored," said Lébé. "We have now reached the end of our two-hour meeting here in Arjakwés Park. I want to thank all of you for coming today. Our city meeting is the only large gathering in the world. It's so large, it is difficult to hold; in two years we may have to develop a different system. But I think it worked out pretty well today.

“As a final reminder, we will vote a week from today on Primdiu, the first day of the month of Bolérenménu. Remember that we will all vote for six members of the City Council. In addition, the ten districts within the city of Melwika will elect three representatives each to the provincial assembly, so please vote for three, and please consider diversity as well as selflessness, wisdom, and experience when making your choice. If you are in the district of Bolakra or the district of Deksawsuperakwa, you vote for two representatives each. At the table for your district you can see a list of all the voters in your district, and it will be available for you at your polling place to examine at any time, 8 bells to 19 bells, during the next six days. Please pray, contemplate the importance of this vote, do not discuss your vote with anyone—even your spouse—and vote wisely. The leaders we choose together will help move Melwika into a prosperous and successful future. Thank you again, and may Esto guide you.”

Lébé stepped off the platform to very strong applause. She had been very nervous, but she hadn’t dared show it; now she could finally relax. Thornton walked toward her, embraced her, and kissed her. “You did great!”

“Thanks, it was quite frightening!”

“It is, but you were perfect.”

She walked to the front row of chairs that had been set up for the elderly and her father rose, tears in his eyes. “You did very well! I’m so proud!”

“I am, too!” said Awsé, and she began to weep in relief and joy.

Lua and Liz stepped forward as well and embraced her, then Behrouz and Chris. “We should have had women chairing this gathering all along,” he added. “I feel I need to apologize to the women of Melwika.”

“Saréidukter has been on stage before,” said Lébé. “She didn’t chair, but I could hear her voice in my head sometimes.”

“And now young women all over the world will hear your voice in their ears,” said Thornton.

“The gathering was broadcast to the world over channel 2,” added Lua.

“It was a very successful gathering, in spite of its large size,” said Chris. “But Melwika will need a new system. If we have 40 thousand, 50 thousand, 100 thousand, we can’t meet together any more.”

“The park was packed,” agreed Mayor Kérdu, who came over to them. “Thank you, Lébé, you did a great job.”

“Thank you, Honored Mayor.”

“But what system should we try next?” asked Kérdu. “Forty-five would be a rather large City Council!”

“It would,” agreed Chris. “We’ll already have a City Council of a mayor, 2 lords, and 6 elected members, so we can’t add 36 more. After the election, we’ll have to ask the people what they think. Maybe we can ask the 34 to vote to add two or three more to the Council, and approach the palace for another system in two years.”

Just then Sarébejnu, chief priest of the Melwika temple, approached. “That was an excellent meeting, in spite of the huge size. I am amazed people kept their comments short, as you requested. How many spoke in two hours?”

“About 110,” said Thornton. “I was watching the secretary recording the whole thing.”

“Still, that’s a tiny fraction of the voters,” noted Behruz.

“True, but you also asked people to go to the table for their district and ‘vote’ on the various suggestions, and I counted 20 suggestions altogether,” said Sarébejnu. “That was a great way to involve people. Do you have a count yet?”

“No, that’ll take an hour or so,” said Mitru.

“By the way, while this gathering was going on, 50 or 100 people were gathered outside Kandékwés’ palace in Mèddoakwés,” said Sarébejnu. “They were chanting the hymns in order to bring attention to the fact that Melwika had a city meeting but Mèddoakwés did not.”

“Really?” said Chris, surprised. “Who organized that? Not the priests.”

“No, they decided to stay neutral. The Boléripludha Hymn Hall organized it, and . . . we helped. It is time for all the cities to hold city meetings to discuss the city’s needs. There was a similar gathering yesterday in Isurdhuna and Tripola, and there will be another one in both cities today. We’re trying to organize hymn gatherings in Bellédha and Ora in the future, because city-wide meetings can occur after the elections as well.”

“Really? Interesting,” said Chris, not sure what to make of the effort.

“Even Pértatranisér and Néfa. They need these meetings, too. It’s time the lovers of Widumaj expressed their desire for ‘consultation with the people’ spiritually and distinctly.”

“Yes, I agree that’s appropriate,” said Chris, trying not to sound worried.

The next week was unusually active politically, with hymn gatherings held in a dozen towns and cities to highlight the importance of the involvement of the people in decision making, as well as voting. The result was a strong turnout and lines at polling places,

with the counting going well into the night. All day the next day—the second of Bolerenménu in the year 642, the beginning of the 24th year of the Menneas on Éra—radio announcers and journalists strove to make sense of the result. Finally, after Kεkanu’s *World Table* show ended, Amos gave the family in Melwika a call to exchange thoughts.

“This is the year democracy became a tiger being held onto by its tail,” said May. “We have been busy waking up the Bahá’ís to spiritual principle while Werétrakester has been waking up the Hymn Halls to them. And they are not the same principles, either.”

“No, the Halls want to be politically active,” said Chris. “The Melwika Temple, too.”

“Which was the world’s first hymn hall, in a way,” said Thornton. “The priests there have been stressing education in the hymns and acting on them for two decades.”

“They have,” agreed Chris. “The situation in Meddoakwés is the most interesting: two new people were elected to the City Council, and both were active in the hymn meetings. I gather that Kandékwes is furious.”

“You had no turnovers, I understand,” said Amos.

“Correct, but more people voted for representatives to the provincial assembly than to the City Council. That’s never happened before. People have some idea who they’d like to vote for in their neighborhood, even though it averages 3,000 people and they know only a small fraction of the inhabitants. But they are tired of voting for the same people for city council and really don’t know who else to vote for because the city is so large.”

“Well, that’s your interpretation,” said Liz to Chris. “It may be right, but we have no polling to back it up.”

“True. I think we should commission a poll to figure out what the public is thinking,” said Chris.

“Kérdu said the same thing to me today, though,” said Thornton. “And he has a pretty good idea of what's going on in town.”

“What will you do?” asked May.

Chris looked at Thornton, Liz, Lébé, Behruz, and Lua, and thought. “I think we should consider electing the City Council indirectly, by the provincial representatives. There are 34 of them. We could even ask each district to elect 4 or 6 representatives rather than 3 or 2 and have 68 of them, and they’d meet, deliberate, and vote on the City Council. There might be more diversity and turnover.”

“We’d have to ask permission from the Palace, though,” said Thornton.

“Correct,” said Chris. “But that wouldn’t be difficult. Even now, I think we should ask for permission to have the representatives choose 2 additional members of the Council.”

“What about establishing a City Council of all 34?” suggested Lébé. “All the City Council members were chosen to serve as representatives as well.”

“That’s another possibility,” agreed Chris. “But that would be a rather large City Council. Another idea would be to ask all 34 to meet 2 or 3 times a year in an advisory role.”

“I have an interesting possible problem here,” said Amos. “Lomu—the President of the Hymn Hall—was elected to the Pértatranisér City Council. I really don’t know him, so he may be fine, but he’s an example of this new activism.”

“It allows people to run for office without running,” said May. “But it doesn’t break any laws, so I don’t think there’s a problem with it.”

“Unless the resulting people make trouble,” said Amos.

“Well, that’s unavoidable in a democracy,” noted Chris. “Don’t anticipate trouble if there isn’t any.”

“In a way, I think we should be grateful for this development,” said Thornton. “For thousands of years, people here on Éra were passive before the aristocracy. That had to change. We can’t expect the change to be smooth. It’ll have problems.”

“Have they finally finished counting the votes in Néfa?” asked Chris.

“Yes, and it appears 5 of the 6 Council members have been voted out,” replied Amos. “The people there wanted a new council that would stand for them, and it appears they got it. They voted in an interesting group: two high school teachers, a génadema business professor, a popular merchant, and a hymn leader.”

“Is Dėkané pleased with the results in the Basin?” asked Lėbé.

“We haven’t talked to her, but one or two villages still haven’t voted because the lord or headman didn’t organize anything and the one-room schoolhouse didn’t have the voting materials,” said May. “Those villages will vote in the next week. Dėkané is planning a conference for village council members in a few weeks to get them moving.”

“It’ll be quite challenging,” added Amos.

502.

Sacred Spaces

Late Blorménu /mid April 24/642

The new Shrine was a gleaming white, round, domed structure set in a circle of exquisite gardens. Eight paths of crushed red roofing tile divided the garden into eight slices, each with a circular garden in the middle. Each led to stairs conveying pilgrims up to a wide portico supported by sixteen pillars of white Belledha limestone. One could circumambulate and enter the sanctuary through any one of eight portals graced by beautiful bronze doors, though usually only the main entrance was open. In the very center of the sanctuary, three meters in diameter, was a circular white limestone platform elevated a meter off the floor, covered by exquisite carpets and decorated by vases of flowers, beautiful lamps, potted plants, and small potted trees. Somewhere beneath the platform was a gold box containing strands of Bahá'u'lláh's hair that Mary Cartwright had once received from a friend. Around the platform was a mahogany threshold where believers could place their foreheads if they wished. The rest of the sanctuary was carpeted, with a sitting bench along the exterior walls for those who could not kneel or sit cross legged. Over the central ten meters of the Shrine rose vertical walls consisting largely of glass windows that admitted copious light, capped by a dome.

Anxious to enter the new Shrine was the annual Bahá'í convention, consisting of 171 delegates, the Central Spiritual Assembly, seven Auxiliaries, and several hundred Bahá'í guests. They gathered in the auditorium underneath the House of Worship, located a hundred meters from the Shrine.

“I think all of you heard the story of how my mother was given the hair of Bahá'u'lláh,” said Liz, from the front of the auditorium. “She was a young and devoted Bahá'í moving to a new country to help establish the Faith there, and a distinguished older believer came through who was very impressed by her love for Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore, one night that woman showed my mother her most precious possession, a strand of Bahá'u'lláh's hair. This had been collected by His daughter, the Greatest Holy Leaf, who often combed Bahá'u'lláh's hair and then kept the strands that stayed in the comb, which she arranged into locks. Sometimes she gave a lock to visiting Bahá'í pilgrim. One of them gave part of a lock to this believer, who then spontaneously gave half of it to my mother. My mother never went anywhere without it; she kept it in a special pouch and kept the pouch in her luggage or her purse. So that is how it ended up here, on Éra.

“I think I must explain something very carefully to everyone, so we all understand it. It bears repeating many times as well. All of us are made up of atoms, as you know. Bahá'u'lláh's hair, similarly, is made up of atoms, and those atoms are not special by themselves. The lock of hair that we have placed under the inner sanctum of the Shrine cannot heal your illnesses, bring you luck, or help you conceive children. One does not pray to it. Rather, the lock of hair is simply a physical symbol of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh told His followers that when they prayed, they should face the qiblih or ‘point of adoration,’ and that point of adoration was Himself while He was alive, and His resting place after He passed from this world. So on Earth, Bahá'ís face the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh when they say their obligatory prayers. Here on Éra, we do not know where Earth is in the sky, so we cannot pray toward the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Furthermore, the

Central Spiritual Assembly does not have the authority to tell you that this Shrine to Bahá'u'lláh is a substitute. Obviously, God will listen to our prayers, regardless of the direction we face. The Central Spiritual Assembly, however, did decide to *suggest* that prayers *could* be said facing this Shrine until such time as we determine where the Earth is located or until we achieve communication with the Universal House of Justice and are able to seek their guidance.

Hence, this Shrine is symbolic of the qiblah, and the hair of Bahá'u'lláh is symbolic of His bodily remains. We must always remember that. There is actually nothing in the center of the Shrine to imagine or fix one's mind on. The central area, as you will see, is beautified with art objects, flowers, and plants, and it is filled with light. Beauty and light are the symbols of the divine we should imagine. Originally we imagined a large Shrine with a pillar in the middle, but then we decided that even a pillar was inappropriate, so all you will see is a slightly elevated platform.

“Tonight we will have a program which will include a show of images of the Bahá'í World Centre. It will be a sort of symbolic pilgrimage for all of us; we will make the images as large and clear as we can, so you can actually picture the place. And you will see how the design for our Shrine echoes some of the elements of the sacred places at the Bahá'í World Centre.

“Then tomorrow night, after the election of the Central Spiritual Assembly, we will go up to the auditorium of the House of Worship and will view a portrait of Bahá'u'lláh. The Assembly hired a photographer highly skilled at making portraits to take the electronic image of Bahá'u'lláh we had and prepare a large photographic rendering of it. We will then have a devotional program in the House of Worship to celebrate the

completion and opening of the Shrine. The Shrine itself is primarily designed for personal prayer and prayer by small groups. It can accommodate about two hundred people at the most. Large devotional programs will occur in the House of Worship instead.”

Liz stepped down from the podium to excited applause. Dr. Migélu Khermdhunai, secretary of the Central Spiritual Assembly, stepped up to it. “We will now have a prayer. When it is finished, Lady Liz, as Lead Auxiliary, will lead us out of the auditorium and to the Shrine in a silent procession. At the front of the procession will be Count Kristobéru and Duke Estodhéru, followed by the Central Spiritual Assembly and the Auxiliaries, and then everyone else. We will fit as many people into the Shrine as possible, and then Lady Liz will recite the Tablet of Visitation. Once that group exits, another group will enter and one of the Auxiliaries will repeat the prayer. We will continue the procedure until everyone has had their chance to pay their respects. After that, the Shrine will be open for prayer from one hour before dawn until midnight during the remainder of the Convention.”

Migélu stepped down and a chanter walked to the podium. She chanted a prayer by Bahá'u'lláh most melodiously. When she finished, Liz rose and in silence, she led everyone out of the auditorium.

Estodhéru was feeble and transferred to a wheelchair as soon as they were outside. Mitrané pushed her father; Jordan accompanied his grandfather as Liz led them all down the path of crushed orange roofing tiles, slowly and with dignity. They climbed the stairs, circled the portico once, and began to file into the sanctuary. Once it was full, Liz recited the Tablet of Visitation, which had only recently been translated into Eryan. Jordan looked up at the beautiful light of the setting sun on the windows and dome and

then down at the reddish hue that reflected on the flowers and plants covering the platform of the inner sanctum, and contemplated what it must have been like to meet Bahá'u'lláh, a century and a half ago.

When she finished, they all filed out so that another group could enter. Many of them headed for the Haziratu'l-Quds or administrative center of the Assembly, for it had invited the Auxiliaries and a few others to dinner. Jordan looked back at the road that came up the mountain from Meddwoglubas and saw a large crowd moving up it. He pointed to Migélu.

“Oh; the townspeople. We told them that we would finish our ceremony at sunset and then they would be free to pay their respects as well. We’re running a bit late, as usual.”

“It looks like a big crowd!”

“Yes, the city is thrilled to have the Shrine here. They all feel blessed. We’re beginning to see the same stead uptick in enrollments that Melwika has been experiencing. We’ve had nearly a thousand declarations in the last year and a half.”

“Out of a population of what; 6,000?”

“No, 8,500! Meddwoglubas is a pretty big place, now! And it’s a quarter Bahá’í! We’re building two more neighborhood Bahá’í Centers this year! And the Shrine will encourage even more interest in the Faith.”

“How many Bahá’ís now, worldwide?”

“About 54,000 on the membership rolls, so we’re over 10% of the population. But who knows how many people accept Bahá'u'lláh but haven’t said so.”

“That’s true of the entire Kwolone tribe at this point, though our membership there officially stands at 1,200. And even though Mēlwika is about 15% Bahá’í, probably half the population acknowledges Bahá’u’lláh.”

“We’ve moved into a very different world from ten years ago. Even Kēda has a thousand Bahá’ís now.”

“It’s growing in Ora as well. And we were able to send out how many six-month volunteers this year? Two hundred? Plus 500 summer volunteers? I am constantly amazed by the strength of the Faith.”

“And now we have our own sacred place,” added Migélu. “It really is a milestone in growth.”

Amos looked at the crowd milling around in the Néfa High School auditorium. “Are we ready to start?”

Perku looked at the refreshment tables. “They appear to have eaten all the pastries. But I suspect some of these folks never get to eat any.”

“That’s one thing the village council members will be happy about,” said Brébalu.

Skandé came over to them. “We’re expecting 232 council members, headmen, and lords, and so far 206 have arrived. That may be it.”

“Alright, let’s start,” said Dekané. “Skandé, will you chant an opening hymn? You have a beautiful voice.”

“Thank you. Yes, sure.” Skandé often hesitated to chant hymns, as a Bahá’í, but Dekané wanted it, so the two of them went up to the front and Dekané rang a little bell to

get everyone's attention. She nodded to Skandé, who chanted the Hymn of the King, with its words to consult the people.

“Thank you, Skandé. Welcome, everyone, to this first conference of village and city councils for the province of Rudhisér. We are delighted to see so many of you today; about 90% of the province's council members, in fact. The province has 38 villages and 2 cities, for a total of 40 localities. We haven't seen the official census, but a quick, unofficial review of the results suggests the province now has 54,000 people; 10,000 in Néfa, 12,000 in Pértatranisér, 10,000 in the 3 large townships east of the Basin, and 22,000 more in the remaining 35 villages in the basin or west of it, which average a bit more than 600 people. Of those 35, 5 are not on a paved road and therefore do not have electricity or telephone service. The other 30 generally lack a store, have one phone line in the schoolhouse, and usually have mail boxes in the school as well. We have not yet seen the result of the census, but we think almost half of the households lack running water, three quarters lack indoor plumbing and electricity, and half still cook with wood or straw from the fields. The province has a bit over 2,000 cars, pickups, and tractors, 60% of the world average, and $\frac{3}{4}$ of those are located in the cities and eastern townships. Adult literacy stands at 35%, about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world average.

“So those are some statistics that delineate the challenges we face. On the positive side, as a result of the Queen's intervention, various lords have surrendered 5 million dhanay of assets to two trusts, which should yield an average of 250,000 dhanay per year in profits that can be dedicated to the development of the province. The royal development budget, including the army's road building fund, should amount to 3 million dhanay per year for the province. Last year, Rudhisér requested only 2 million in

development grants. Finally, the Basin has 50,000 agris of rich farmland that various lords have agreed to sell back to farmers at the sharecropper's price of half the harvest for twenty years. So we have some very positive opportunities for advancement as well. What we'd like to do is spend the morning on a development exercise where we discuss the priorities of the province together, in order to craft a development plan. This afternoon we'll talk about the functioning of village and city councils. How does that sound?"

There was a pause, then a hand went up. "What do you know about the timeline for selling the farmland back to us? Because it's already time to plant."

"I can answer that," said Brébalu. "The lords are giving up 50,000 agris, but they and their descendants are keeping 10,000. They have a month to decide which fields they are keeping and which they are selling. Then—"

"Why are they keeping any land at all?" demanded a man.

Brébalu stared at him. "Please don't interrupt me. The queen negotiated with 15 different lords and made different arrangements with each, depending on their histories and the number of children they had. Within two or three weeks, there will be a Farmland Office in the palace. You will be able to go there and make a claim. They will have maps—the Royal Geological Survey will be here next week to update their maps of the Basin—and there will be someone who can help you indicate what piece of land you want to purchase. We hope there will be staff who can go to each village, walk the land, and determine the exact borders of each claim, because that will be important.

"To resolve conflicting land claims, Judge Wérgendu will come here in two months. He will have to decide. Men who are currently farming land owned by a lord will

have priority, up to a maximum of seventy-five agris. We will allow claims as small as five agris, but most likely small land purchases will be grouped together in certain areas in each township, so small landholders may not get the land they want, but will get something else. Of course, five agris is too small to make a living.”

“Lord, some of the men farming our land are from other villages or from outside the province, and some got the land through bribery. It is unfair that they can keep the land they are using.”

“I suggest you make a specific complaint about someone at the land office, so the judges can weigh it.”

That obviously did not satisfy a lot of the men present. “What about the equipment that the lords own?” asked someone else.

“We will set up granges in the Basin and they will receive loans to purchase equipment from the lords, or purchase new equipment.”

“The granges in Lɛpawsdomas will provide advice and assistance,” exclaimed Léfɛstu, a member of the grange and township council of that place. “I am sure that is true of Pértatranisér’s as well.”

“And Bolériagras’s grange as well,” exclaimed someone else.

“Most of our towns are really too small for granges.”

“We’ll figure that out,” said Brébalu. “If we divided the Basin into halves or quarters and created a grange for each, that might work better.”

“Then we can be forgotten by a distant grange.”

“You know, some of us have no roads, electricity, or telephones. We really need help!”

Perku leaned forward. “We know that; five villages, plus a lot of people living in scattered houses. We have contacted the army construction corps and they have said they will pave roads to all the remaining villages in the next year as part of their budget. There are also hundreds of kilometers of farm lanes in the province, including in the eastern edge of the province, and granges or village councils can apply for development grants to gravel them with their own workers. There are some excellent gravel deposits north along the Lédhalisér that can be trucked anywhere in the province.”

“What about our schools?” asked someone else. “Our village has fifty kids crammed into one big room with one teacher.”

“What grades?” asked Skandé.

“One through eight, but a lot of kids don’t go to eighth grade because of the crowding.”

“We need to wait for the census information in two months,” said Dékané. “At that point, we’ll know how many kids are in each village, and it’ll be summer, so we’ll have time to plan for the fall. There are several possibilities. We could build some schools just for grades six through eight and bus the kids to them, so they get better quality education from teachers who teach just for their age group. We could also pair up villages, so the grades 1 through 4 go to one school and grades 5 through 8 go to another.”

“And your village can now apply for a development grant to build a second room to your school,” added Brébalu. “You can also apply for funds to build a commercial building that can be used as a store, restaurant, bakery, or post office, which your council can rent out to someone.”

“But really, lord, we don’t know how to apply for funds!”

“That’s fine. Today we’ll talk about that, and the Village Development Consultancy can visit and help. The palace has given them a grant to devote two people full time to visiting villages and providing advice and assistance.”

“Can we apply for funds to get electrical and telephone lines?”

Brébalu shook his head. “Not yet. The province will apply for development funds to connect every village and we hope to get that done by the end of the summer. Once those lines are in place, side lines will be needed to reach scattered houses. Maybe the province can do them as well, if we know which lines are needed, or maybe the local council can submit a development grant for them.”

“What about water and sewer?”

“Theoretically, all of you got those services almost ten years ago, but I know you didn’t because a lot of lords didn’t cooperate,” said Brébalu. “Those are also development grants. In some cases the province can extend water and sewer lines from Néfa.”

“We could use gas lines, because most of us don’t have biogas. There are no longer enough animals creating manure for biogas to work.”

“The province can encourage the use of gas bottles, meanwhile,” suggested Perku. He looked at Dëkané. “Perhaps it’s time to get started with the program?”

“Yes, I agree, but this question and answer session has been useful,” said Dëkané. “I’m glad to see so many people are speaking up. This province needs the voices of its leaders, and all of you are its leaders.”

The procession stepped out from behind the Hymn Hall: the three local priests from Pértatranisér, dressed in their finest robes; a dozen more from Isurdhuna, Néfa, and Ora; three richly decorated, wheeled floats, each pulled by a dozen men, bearing the statues of Werano, Mitro, and Saré respectively; a band of drummers, trumpeters, and panpipers playing solemn tunes; and a group of men, women, and teenagers carrying banners with short passages from the hymns on them. The procession paraded down Fifth Avenue 750 meters almost to Route 2, passing the City Hall, then it turned and proceeded up Fourth Avenue to the rear of the refurbished and renovated temple in the ancient village site. Along the entire route, the sidewalks were crowded with viewers; many joined the procession after it passed their spot. It entered the ancient village site from Fourth Avenue, circumambulated the temple, then turned into it through the front entrance, facing the Hymn Hall. Crowds filled Fifth Avenue and the cleared ruins all around the temple.

The temple was a unique fusion of old and new. The front and side walls and their pillars had been rebuilt and decorated with fresh paintings and looked as good as new. The floor had been replaced with new stones of the same colors as the old. But the broken debris of the collapsed roof of timber and tiles had been removed and replaced by a dome of steel and glass. The sanctuary normally was empty, devoid of statues and images; like the temple at Melwika, Esto was celebrated as light, and the sanctuary was used for hymn singing and prayer. Outside the sanctuary was a round courtyard some 120 meters in diameter, delineated by a curved portico with a double row of pillars supporting an arched stone roof. Thousands packed into the spaces outside the courtyard where they

could hear the ceremony and perhaps catch a glimpse of it, because it was conducted on a temporary stage erected in front of the sanctuary.

A series of hymn singers chanted four hymns, sometimes solo and sometimes *ensemble*. They were followed by a dozen prominent and wealthy men, all of whom made short remarks and pledged money or sacrificial animals to the Temple. Amos pledged both. Prince Mégékwes was last. “My mother, Her Majesty Queen Estoibidhé, has sent me to represent her at this ceremony and convey her loving greetings,” he began. “She was pleased to contribute half the funds necessary to rebuild this temple for use in this vibrant, growing city. And what a temple it is! There is nothing like it anywhere on this world! It is a blend of the ancient and the new, and what could be a better symbol of this city and the era our world has entered?

“We now know that Pértatranisér began as a Sumi colony sent out by Anartu about 1,500 years ago and called *Lalagal Maltitu*, meaning “charming watering place.” They built their town up here on the hill overlooking the river, which they crossed on an elegant stone bridge that still stands. They dedicated their new home to Nanna, the god of Skanda, and built the first temple here to her. Later this became a temple to Anu, the Sumi equivalent of Werano. The broken statue of Anu could not be repaired, so it will be a central item in the city’s new museum when it is built in another year or two, elsewhere here in the ruins of *Lalagal Maltitu*.

“Then came the collapse of the gluluba, the flooding of the Long Valley, the displacement of its people—perhaps 100,000—their displacement of the population of Kerda, and the immense invasion of the Néfa Basin. References in a few records in Anarbala and Anartu mention *Lalagal Maltitu* being overrun and burned. Some very old

references in Ora mention a village called *Galadhabakwa*, ‘beautiful place for water,’ later being burned by a Sumi force, and we suspect it is here. So this place was fought over and has a Sumi and an Eryan history. That is also true of this temple that we have resurrected and rededicated today.

“It is fitting that this ancient structure now has a modern finish, for the beautiful watering place is one of the most advanced and prosperous places in the world, with a population of 12,000, several times more than the Sumi town at its peak. It has a Sumi population as well, so it is a multiethnic place, just as it was at various times in the past. The temple’s sacrifices will reinforce the spiritual power of the hymns chanted here and across the street at the hymn hall and will bring the blessings of Esto down upon its inhabitants. The spiritual and the material must embrace and bring about a balance; the temple and hymn hall now complement the factories and stores of a very busy city. Together they will bring Pértatranisé from strength to strength, and fulfill its place in an ever-advancing world.”

The prince left the stage to strong applause. As he sat, May leaned over from her seat and said, “You see, you are a historian!”

He smiled. “Let me finish my journalism degree next month! Then I’ll think about a history degree next fall!”

Werétrakester walked to the stage next, spoke about how impressed he was of Pértatranisé, how he planned to move here, and how the entire province was now advancing, then sat to sustained applause. Hymn signers returned to the stage to chant several more hymns, then Budhéstu rose. “I feel a great sense of privilege and honor to be the chief priest of this new temple, and even more of a sense of privilege to be able to

participate in, and strengthen, this city's hymn hall. Together, the two institutions have the capacity to transform Pértatranisér into a godly place, a place dedicated to the revelation of Widumaj, a place where all are respected, find justice, and can achieve prosperity. This temple is dedicated to accepting and working with the new knowledge, as the glass dome symbolizes; gone are the days when the followers of the customs opposed the new knowledge based on superstition, closed-mindedness, and violence. Widumaj rejects all three, so this temple rejects them as well. But the temple does continue the animal sacrifice Widumaj commanded; our continuity with the true customs is symbolized by the walls and pillars of this ancient structure. If anything in Pértatranisér symbolizes the renewal of the old, it is this temple. Now we dedicate it to the people of this city. Will Lord Amosu and Lomu Pékamanu please come forward."

Budhéstu grabbed a very large pair of ceremonial ribbon-cutting scissors from inside the podium and walked to the rear of the stage, which had been built next to the entrance to the sanctuary. Amos and Lomu stepped up onto the stage and the three of them walked to the corner of the stage where the ribbon was tied to one of the pillars. Together, they snipped the ribbon. As it fell, the crowd erupted in applause.

They walked back to the podium. "Please come into your temple to see it and chant the hymns," exclaimed Budhéstu.

"And then come to the front of the hymn hall, where we will have food for the entire city!" added Lomu, provoking additional cheers.

The three of them headed down off the stage. "Will you come and have some refreshment, lord?" Lomu asked Amos.

"Yes, indeed. I can smell the roasting meat! Is this sacrificed meat?"

“Indeed it is; we slaughtered the animals this morning,” replied Budhéstu.

“And you can feed everyone?”

“Never underestimate our Hymn Hall,” replied Lomu rather emphatically.

Amos nodded. “I won’t.”

They headed toward the street. May and the others seated in the special VIP section headed that way as well. “I hear, Lord, that the meeting of village councils last week went fairly well,” said Lomu.

“Yes, I think so, considering how some of the council members are illiterate and, until the death of Albanu, they were afraid to say anything. They made it very clear what their villages needed, so the Regency Council is busy setting up offices to assist them and writing development applications to provide them with school buildings, teachers, water, and sewer, not to mention paved roads, electricity, and telephone lines. Most of the villages are anxious to build a store or buy a prefab that can serve as a store, but it is not clear that the villages have enough purchasing power to support a store.”

“That is a problem. Such small places; most people will find it cheaper to take the bus here or to Néfa to shop.”

“Correct. Our commercial success is a factor in their lack of stores. On the other hand, our high school and Néfa High School are both pretty good, so kids who complete high school in Rudhisér are reasonably well prepared. The province needs a plan to improve elementary school education, though, and once the large land holdings are broken up, strong granges will be essential.”

“I assume the Regency Council will be making a detailed report to the provincial consultative assembly when it meets?”

“Yes, of course. It will be our last act. You heard that the Queen announced earlier today that the consultative assembly will have the authority to approve or reject Brébalu as governor of the province?”

“Yes indeed, and that he is the fully empowered executive officer for the province. Duchess Albésé will be a purely ceremonial figure.”

Amos shook his head. “So far, she doesn’t even appear to be willing to be a ceremonial figure.”

“That’s alright. We no longer need lords and dukes. We can manage fine with elected mayors and governors. No offense meant, lord.”

“None taken. I mostly agree with you, Lomu.”

They reached the barbeque grills that had been set up in front of the hymn hall and received a paper plate with an ear of corn and a slice of beef wrapped with bread. They walked over to Werétrakester and sat on the grass with him. Budhéstu, Kalémé, and May joined them.

“Thank you lord, for all you did to make this temple possible,” said Werétrakester to Amos. “I think you will find your city more peaceful and harmonious as a result.”

“I am sure that will prove true, honored prophet, and I am very happy to hear you are moving here as well.”

“My wife wants me to settle down and live with her, and she does not want to live in a damp cave in Kërda. I can’t blame her, either. I’m afraid I’m too old to live in a cave now, too! The weather is much better here, the house I am renting is better, and the bus connections here are quick. Mitru has said I can ride his buses for free any time, and the drivers all know it. I can get almost anywhere from here in a few hours.”

“We are the hub for transportation on the western shore. I suspect ten years from now, Pértatranisér will be the second largest city on the northern, western, and southern shores, exceeded only by Məlwika, Məddoakwés, and Ora. Most likely, the axis from Néfa to Məddwoglubas will have more people and wealth than greater Məddoakwés-Məlwika.”

“The western shore has always been the economic center of the kingdom,” agreed Wərétrakester. “But now we must make it spiritually strong as well.”

“Here here,” said Budhéstu, and Lomu nodded vigorously.

“I hear, Lord, that as many as fifty Bahá’í youth will be working in the Basin this summer,” said Wərétrakester. “At the same time, we will be organizing as many hymn halls as we can.”

“One in every village, ideally,” added Lomu.

“That’s an excellent plan. The people of the Basin need organizations of all sorts. Three quarters of the villages have local Spiritual Assemblies. We plan to form new Assemblies in the villages lacking them, and strengthen the existing Assemblies. That is one of the jobs of the visiting youth. Stronger assemblies and hymn halls, along with businesses and granges and better schools, can help to change the Basin for the better.”

“But are the youth really necessary?” asked Lomu.

Amos looked at Lomu. “Perhaps the hymn halls should send out youth as well. Their energy and enthusiasm is legendary. They are able to make huge contributions to local communities.”

“I hope we will be able to,” replied Wərétrakester. “A little friendly competition is a good thing, eh?”

Amos nodded. “Yes, I think it is.”

503.

Provincial Assembly

Dhébelménu /May 24/642

Chris, Thornton, and Jordan were surprised the meeting room was so full. They had not expected the official first release of the census would attract so much attention. In addition to journalists, quite a few lords had shown up. A microphone attached to a telephone line indicated it was going to be broadcast over the radio as well.

They secured seats in the last row just as Bidhu, the Minister of Statistics, entered. He was also surprised by the crowd. “Good afternoon, everyone,” he began. “I had no idea there would be so many people here today! Thank you for coming.

“I should begin by thanking all the census takers and those compiling the census information for their hard and continuing work. This was the most comprehensive and sophisticated census we have ever undertaken, and the scope of the data collected is unprecedented. It gives us an understanding of our kingdom that is unique in its detail and its implications for the future. The personnel who collected the data deserve our warmest thanks and congratulations. Their work is not finished, because we are still compiling all the data together. Two months after completion of the census count, we now have calculated the total population of the kingdom, place by place and province by province. But we have not yet collected all the age data or the information about people’s houses and property. That analysis will take another six months or more.

“I can tell you that as of Eɣnaménu, the kingdom had a population of 498,232.” He paused. “That is almost double the population of our first census 20 years ago, just 4 years after the so-called ‘New Knowledge’ arrived. In the year 622, Éra had 265,000 people, 53% of our current number. Ten years ago, in 632, Éra’s population had grown 41% to 376,000. Over the last twenty years, our population has grown almost three percent every year; it started out with no growth, rapidly increased to 4% per year as the new medicine and public health measures slashed infant mortality from 50% to nearly nothing, and has begun to fall as education and the movement of women into the workforce has brought down the birth rate from four children per couple to three. Preliminary analysis suggests that the population currently is growing 2.5% per year among the urban population and 3% among the rural population.

“Not all provinces have grown equally. The contrast between Vésa and Arjakwés is perhaps the sharpest. Twenty years ago, Vésa had 40,000 people and Arjakwés, 42,000; they were essentially equal. Then the great flood began, which drowned a dozen Vésan villages. The little-settled west valley proved an inadequate substitute and the development of villages there was not subsidized, so thousands moved to Arjakwés and Swadnoma instead, where increasing rainfall, the introduction of granges, the use of irrigation, and the expansion of Mɛlwika’s industrial facilities supported a large population influx. As a result, Vésa’s population today is 60,000—fifty percent more than 20 years ago—while Arjakwés province has 96,000 people, more than double its size in 622. Twenty years ago, Ora and Néfa together had a much larger share of the population and economy than the entire eastern shore, which consisted solely of Arjakwés. Today their combined population of 110,000—or even 128,000, if you include

Lewésa—is less than the population of Arjakwés, Swadnoma, and southern Morana, which together have 132,500 people. The western shore, also, cannot equal the economic output of the latter three. The economic center of the kingdom has shifted east. This is also reflected in the kingdom's largest cities: Melwika, with 34,000; Ora, with 30,000; Meddoakwés, with 28,000; Anartu, with 19,000; Tripola, with 13,000; Pértatranisér, with 12,000; Melita, with 10,500; Néfa and Isurdhuna, with 10,000; Belledha, with 9,000. The Melwika-Meddoakwés metropolitan area, including the villages between and around them, has 90,000 people, eighteen percent of the kingdom's total population, and is a more compact nucleus than Meddwoglubas-Ora-Pértatranisér-Néfa.

“A fascinating contrast can be drawn between the North and South Shores. Both provinces had 25,000 people and central towns of 5,000, twenty years ago. But the North Shore's more forbidding climate, the near destruction of Belledha by the prison revolt, and the fact that South Shore Province was able to extend northward along the Sea's eastern shore, allowed the South Shore Province to retain more population, while the North Shore's partially emigrated to Swadnoma. As a result, the South Shore today has 42,000 people, compared to the North Shore's 34,000. Tripola has benefitted by closer proximity to Lewésa and Ora and its better educational system, and thus has been able to grow more quickly than Belledha.

“Another interesting pair to compare is Sumilara and Kerda. Both grew about fifty percent, from 40,000 to 58,000 and from 25,000 to 36,000 respectively. Natural increase should have nearly doubled the population of both, but both experienced emigration because of a shortage of farmland and a paucity of industrialization. The people went in opposite directions; of the 12,000 who left Kerda, most went to the Long Valley, whereas

12,000 Sumis mostly moved to the eastern shore, settling in large Sumiwikas in Mēlwika and Meddoakwés, the largely Sumi town of Arjdhura, and as farmers in Swadnoma.

“Finally, there are some areas in the kingdom that neither gained nor lost population through migration. On the western shore, that was largely true of Lēwésipa and Jērnstisér, which doubled their populations over the last 20 years to 18,000 and 5,000 respectively. It was also true of the Tutane tribes, whose total population went from 19,000 to 40,000. Except for about 500 Tutane residing in Mēlwika, very few Tutane have emigrated from their tribal territories.

“Where are we going in the future? It is likely that Swadnoma, with its rich farmland and tropical climate, will continue to grow, along with the lower Arjakwés. Mēlwika and Meddoakwés continue to grow rapidly. Delongnoma, with its rich farmland and easy access to Ora, seems likely to grow significantly in the next decade, as will Pértatranisér and Ora. In the last five or six years, Kwolona and Mēdhpēla has emerged as a growth area, which may spur Gordha and the Mégendres to compete. Other areas can emerge as rapid growth centers as well if their development policies and investment strategies are well thought out. The lesson of the last twenty years is that areas grow if they invest in their people and in the infrastructure to make them prosperous.

“The immediate importance for these census data is in the composition of the Houses of Commons and Lords, whose members will be selected by the provincial Assemblies when they meet in two weeks. Arjakwés will have 18 representatives and 4 Lords; Vésipa and Sumilara 12 and 3; Rudhiser 11 and 3; the South Shore 8 and 2; the North Shore and Kerda 7 and 2; Swadnoma 6 and 2; Lēwésipa 4 and 1; North Tutane Province, 3 and 1; Jērnstisér, Morana, Delongnoma, and Kwolona 2 and 1; Lēpawsona,

West Tutane Province, and South Tutane Province, 1 and 1; for a total of 99 members of the House of Commons and 30 members of the House of Lords. Each province has its own formula for determining the size of its provincial assembly, which is usually 1 representative per 500 people in the smaller provinces and 1 per 1,000 people for the larger provinces.

“In two weeks, we hope to have a breakdown of the population by age and a report about longevity. Any questions?”

Hands shot up. Bidhu pointed. “Sulanu, *Melwika Nues*. I was wondering if you’d elaborate further about your comment that areas that support their population grow faster.”

“I don’t want my comments to be misunderstood or used for political ends. Perhaps Lewésipa is the best example I can cite; it had an isolated but industrious population and acquired the new knowledge very early. As a result, very few people emigrated; in fact, some people from Vésipa moved south to start their own village in the province. The villages pooled resources to start schools and factories, they cooperated and coordinated their efforts, and they spread the prosperity. As a result, their household incomes are the highest on the western shore.”

He pointed to another reporter. “Mitréstu Mitréstu, *Nue Yoros*. “I wonder whether you could comment about Rudhisér’s population, in particular.”

“Certainly. Of the province’s 50,000 people, 22,000 live in the province’s two cities and 8,000 more in Luktroðema, Oyapéla, Boléripura, Bolériagras, and Lépawsdomas, so the Basin’s 33 villages have 20,000 people. This is a bit fewer than we expected. The villages are poor and while we have not done all the demographic work,

we can say that the villages have lost a large portion of their 18 to 35 year olds. Helping the villages recover will be a long, slow process.”

Another hand shot up and Bidhu recognized the man. “Lukaru, *Royal Standard*. Will these numbers be used to allocate development grants starting this summer?”

“Yes, I presume so.”

Sulanu raised his hand again and rose at Bidhu’s nod. “Does the census indicate that all the kingdom’s existing farmland is now allocated? Does it have implications for opening more townships?”

“That’s a fascinating question. We did not ask people how much land they own, so the census does not provide data about that. But tax records indicate that most township land has been allocated. Of course, there is land sufficient to create about ten new townships, not counting the Long Valley, which has room for a dozen more. Over the next decade, I think it is likely many of them will be opened. The most likely townships would be those near Mēlwika, in Swadnoma, and on the southeastern shore in South Shore Province. There is space for a township between South Shore and Lēwēspa and one or two in the southwestern quarter of North Shore Province; also two in Jērnstisér. I think the Arjakwés townships just south of Lēpawsona will probably be opened last, as they’re colder.” He looked around the room. “That’s it today, everyone. Thank you for coming.” Bidhu stepped down from the podium and exited the room.

Chris rose. “Very interesting. This confirms that we have outgrown the western shore.”

“It confirms that Məlwika is larger than Məddoakwés,” added Kandékwés, who was seated a few seats away. “Of course, Morituora and Məddoakwés have grown together and their combined population is 37,000.”

“Boleripludha has merged into the capital as well,” said Thornton. “That’s another 3,000. But we have expanded against Nénaslua and South Ménwika, which add 5,000 to us.”

“We definitely need those bus routes,” said Kandékwés. “Especially westward, toward Əjnopéla, Məlita, and Arjdhura.”

“Yes, that is important for the economic integration of the entire province and Swadnoma,” agreed Jordan. “If people could commute from Əndraidha and Arjdhura to Məddoakwés every day to work, that would really increase economic opportunity.”

“Especially for Məddoakwés, but I have no objection to that,” said Chris.

“It seems to me, with 96,000 people, we should have 5 dukes in the House of Lords, not 4,” added Chris.

Kandékwés nodded. “I think Her Majesty didn’t want to excite too much jealousy. We also need to continue your policy of spreading the wealth, Chris. Məlwika to Gordha is 85 kilometers, which is less than the 90 kilometers from Əndraidha to Məddoakwés. Məlwika to Mədhpéla is just 55 kilometers. Bellədha is 120 kilometers from Məddoakwés, which is less than the distance from Tripola to Néfa.”

“One advantage the western shore has, though, is they’re all on only two time zones, three if you include Tripola. Gordha is three zones east of us and Bellədha is four time zones west,” said Thornton.

“That makes commuting hard, but not commerce,” said Chris. “There are businesses in Melwika who often do contract work in Gordha. We definitely need to look at improving transportation. Not just cheaper bus fares; wider roads with higher speed limits.”

“Let’s look into that,” agreed Kandékwes. “Miller Motors would need to build vehicles with more powerful engines. I’ll talk to the Army Construction Corps about what they can do to make traffic faster.”

The Rudhisér Consultative Assembly had to meet in Néfa High School’s auditorium because the palace was still occupied by Awwskandu and unavailable. The 28 lords were huddled in one corner, drinking coffee, complaining that the queen had expelled 12 lords from their service on the consultative assembly, and looking suspiciously at the representatives. The representatives were scattered around the refreshment tables talking quietly but tensely, occasionally staring at the lords. Dēkané looked at the two groups, sensed their dissatisfaction, and wondered what she would be able to do. Not a single one of the lords or 65 representatives was female. She hadn’t expected the Basin villages to choose a woman; they were small and only had one representative. But Pértatranisé had eleven and Néfa had nine; she had hoped they’d have selected at least one woman. They hadn’t even elected a Sumi, though admittedly both cities had fairly small Sumi communities. The only women there were her—as a member of the Regency Council—and Albesé, who was a purely honorary Duchess of the province, and unwilling to be anything more.

It was time to get started and she was the chair; it was a bad time to be the token female. She went to the podium and rang a small bell. “Let us convene,” she said in the loudest and most formal voice she could muster. She rang the bell again, longer, and they responded to that. The lords sat on the right, the representatives on the left, and the Regency Council sat up front.

“Can we have a hymn to open?” For some reason they hadn’t selected someone. There was a pause, then Lomu Pékamanu rose. The President of the Pértatranisé Hymn Hall had an excellent voice. He chanted the Hymn to the King, repeating the verse about “consulting with the people” three times, much to the visible irritation of the lords.

“Thank you,” said Dekané when he finished. “We have a message from Her Majesty the queen, which will be delivered by His Majesty, Prince Mégékwes.” She stepped down and the prince went to the podium.

“Duchess Albésé, lords of Rudhisér, members of the Regency Council, and elected representatives of the people of Rudhisér, greetings. When I saw the results of the recent election in your province, my heart leapt in pleasure that the people had done their duty well and chosen capable and qualified representatives. I am pleased with the work accomplished by the temporary Regency Council over the last six weeks and joyfully announce that as of today, the Provincial Land Office is open for people to seek title to the land in the province that is subject to the recent land settlement I have arranged with twelve of the province’s lords. Agriculture remains the basis of Rudhisér’s economy and it is my hope that it will become an engine of prosperity for the province’s villages.

“Based on the province’s population and level of income, I am allocating 3 million dhanay for development grants to its villages, tomis, granges, businesses, and

other organizations and encourage you to work with the Village Council Consultancy and the Development Consultancy, both private organizations, to apply for the funds. The army will also be allocating half a million dhanay for improvements in the province's roads.

“Executive authority to organize the province will devolve on its governor. I nominate Brébalu to occupy that position for the next two years, subject to the approval of the provincial assembly. I request that the assembly's first priority be the deliberation on my choice of governor. Once the province has a governor, the assembly will be able to work with the governor to finalize the province's budget and pass laws the province needs. Such resolutions will be subject to the governor's veto unless overrode by two thirds of the two houses of the assembly.

“When I visit Rudhisér this summer, the assembly will convene a second time briefly to provide me with a report of their actions and deliberate further about the province's future. My hope is that the current session will resolve most matters and the second session will be brief, congratulatory, and visionary.

“Rudhisér province is at a historic moment. The old way of doing things has been swept away. The time has come to establish new ways. These must be conciliatory with those who represent the old ways but must uphold justice and lead to the prosperity of all. I look forward to seeing the progress that your session will bring about.

“Signed Her Majesty, Queen Estoibidhé.”

The prince stepped away from the microphone and Dekané returned. “I now invite Brébalu to address us briefly.”

Thank you,” he replied, as he walked to the podium. “As Her Majesty has said, Rudhisér is at a crossroads. You may recall that I was in charge of the province a previous time after the Néfa riots, a time when the financial affairs were in severe disarray. I have inherited a better functioning bureaucracy this time, but it is underfunded and understaffed, so I ask for your patience while we hire and train more people who will be servants of all of us. We will also be moving the provincial offices out of the old palace, which will remain the home of Duchess Albesé and her brother Awwskandu and will be reserved for ceremonial occasions. For now, we are moving into the entire first floor of the Néfa Palace Hotel, but we hope to have a brand new provincial building of suitable dignity in a year or so. Royal offices, such as the tax office, will remain in the palace.

“As Her Majesty mentions, as of today the Land Office opens in the Palace Hotel. We are taking claims for up to 150 agris. No down payment is needed, just a claim. The application process will continue for a month and we hope to have all the claims surveyed in two months. If there are no overlapping claims, a particular field could be assigned to someone in 5 or 6 weeks. We hope to have all the land allocated in three months, complete with clear title. The payment is 1/12 of the harvest for 12 years. Taxes continue to be 1/3; 10% for the local village or lord, 20% to the crown, and 3% to the province. If farmers join a grange, they’ll have to pay 1/12 of the harvest to the grange. This was the standard arrangement for the purchase of land in Arjakwés and Swadnoma.

“We have already met with the Army Construction Corps and they have pledged to pave roads to all remaining villages in the Basin in the next year. The Geological Survey is already set up at Néfa Génadéma to verify the maps we have and they have agreed to indicate which farm lanes are particularly heavily used, so we can coordinate

their graveling and in some cases, paving. The Development Consultancy, also, is establishing a temporary office in Pértatranisér and they will be able to visit every village council over the next few months if desired. They are putting together a standard development checklist they can send a council to guide its deliberations. This will allow a council to draw up a three to five year plan and figure out what development grants they should seek first.

“That’s what we have accomplished over the last two months. We estimate that with 3 million dhanay of development money and 250,000 dhanay of money from the Trust, in five years we will be able to spend 16 million dhanay on development of the province, with a focus on the Basin. If it is used efficiently and effectively, it will have a transformative effect, allowing every village to have paved access, better farm lanes, sufficient classrooms, and sufficient farm equipment. We will live better; we will have pride in the accomplishments of our province, and it will advance, like the rest of the world has advanced. But we will need to collaborate closely, strengthen our trust for each other, and be wise. I have worked with many of you before and I know we have the ability to do it. You can count on me to do my part.”

Brébalu returned to his seat to warm applause, especially from the lords. Lomu rose. “May we ask questions?”

“Certainly,” replied Dekané.

“If we reject the queen’s nomination for governor, can we nominate someone else?”

Dekané was startled by that and looked to the Prince. “It may be difficult to convince the queen to accept someone else, under those circumstances,” he replied.

That did not sit well with the representatives. “Can we modify the rules of the land office?” asked another representative. “Because 150 agris is a lot of land. Who can farm that much? I’d make the limit 100.”

“No; less. Maybe 50.”

“Pértatranisér grange was giving out 40.”

“Why not limit it to 20 and ban tractors? You can farm 20 with a mule or horse.”

“No, you’ll never make money that way, crop prices have dropped too much.”

“We should ban farm equipment throughout the kingdom, then.”

Several laughed. “We need to raise our hands, please. We’re all talking over each other,” said Dėkanė.

“Who made you the chair?” asked Lomu.

“The Regency Council, which called this gathering,” replied Dėkanė, raising her voice. “The two chambers need to meet separately and choose their officers, then when there is a joint session they can decide which chair will preside.”

“The lords have screwed things up so much, we should make these decisions,” said someone.

“The hymn calls for us to consult with you, not vice versa,” replied a lord.

“This is not what the queen has called for!” exclaimed the Prince.

Dėkanė glanced at him, surprised he was doing her job. “Let us raise our hands,” she repeated. “Are there other questions about Brėbalu’s report?”

Everyone stared at each other. There were not. “Let’s separate into our chambers, then,” suggested Lomu.

“Good idea,” added a lord.

“Very well,” said Dekané. “This joint meeting is adjourned. The representatives will continue to meet here. The lords have the teacher’s lounge, which is down the hall on the left.”

The two groups separated and began organizational meetings where they read aloud the rules of organization their chamber had adopted in the past, approved them, and elected a Speaker, Assistant Speaker, and Secretary. The lords were quick, since all of them had participated previously, and the queen had disqualified almost a third of their membership. The representatives took longer because there were more of them and a large number were first-timers. General Perku sat in on the meeting of representatives as an observer rather than going to the meeting of the lords and was concerned about the way Brébalu was being talked about. As the meeting broke up, he walked over to Lomu Pékamanu.

“Congratulations on being elected Speaker, Lomu. You are an excellent speaker; I was very impressed by your comments about examining the conditions of the province carefully and putting forward wise laws. That is the essence of our job.”

“Thank you, General.” He looked at Perku carefully because Perku had slipped into his working class Kerdan accent. “I understand you are a self-made man. That is a very difficult achievement, in this world.”

“It is. I left my village in southern Kerda at age sixteen and walked to Ora to join the army. I was a third son and my oldest brother had just inherited the family farm, which was too small to split between the three of us. After five years I became lieutenant of a company that accompanied caravans across the Salt Desert to Anartu and Mèddoakwés. I was transferred to Mèddoakwés, I reached my tenth year in the army and

was allowed to marry, and I continued to be one of the officers leading the caravans. A few years later the Menneas arrived and my wife wanted me to stay in Meddoakwés, so I applied for the job of commander of the tiny detachment in Melwika—I had only 25 men—but they promoted me to Captain and gave the command to me. Normally, even the position of captain is available only to someone with aristocratic blood, but no one wanted to be in Melwika! So there I was, a commoner in a dead-end job, so everyone thought. But the Menneas taught me and my men to read and write using the new system. They worked closely with me; I was essentially a member of the three-member council that ran Melwika, along with Jonu Miller and Kristoféru Mennea. So I ended up with far more responsibility than I would have ever imagined.

“Then the army deployed against Sumilara and I felt left behind, for I was yearning to join the fight; but instead the Kwolone attacked Melwika, and I was central to the city’s defense. We defeated the Kwolone, which no one would have ever imagined was possible, and I learned new tactics fighting with explosives and armored steam wagons, so I was promoted to Major and then to General.” He shrugged. “It took a lot of work over a long time, but it also took patience and a willingness to sacrifice for what was best for the kingdom and for our queen. But the queens—this one and her mother—have favored competence. They hate incompetence and corruption. They will tolerate them for a time, but they are usually biding their time and waiting for a chance to set things right.”

Lomu was startled by that. “That is certainly not our experience here!”

“Even a queen can do only so much. Albanu was a cousin to her parents; he deserved respect because of his age, and because he did an excellent job of running Néfa

before the new knowledge arrived. He had to be given time to change. He was given warnings, too, but he was clever; he insisted on his rights as a lord and did not cross the old lines. In short, he knew the old rules and insisted on continuing to play the game by them. But now that he is gone, she is able to change the rules. She met with every lord in the province, one by one, and you saw the results today; a third of them would not play by the new rules, so she removed them. Imagine this: a third of the villages in Rudhisér are now free to run themselves, without a lord to tell them what to do! Do you think the other lords are going to ignore that? Things are radically different here. That may not be so obvious to you, since you live in Pértatanisér, where the lord has already reduced his role on the City Council to essentially having one vote out of nine.”

“That is true, though his is an influential vote.”

“But a wise vote, generally?”

Lomu thought. “I think that is generally true. I have been on the City Council only two months.”

“Really? I didn’t realize that.”

“I am President of the Hymn Hall. My day job is foreman in the plastics factory.”

Perku nodded. “Good, you’re a self-made man, too, then! I was pretty sure that was true, from your accent. Well, if you want my advice, it is this: you need to lead based on a vision for what the representatives can accomplish for the province. Don’t think about yourself and advancing your career as a politician; focus on service. Develop your vision for how you can serve the province and the queen. She is wise and experienced. I hope you’ll get the chance to sit down with her, meet her, and share visions with her. Then you’ll see how important it is to work with her, and then you will be in the position

to influence her vision. Ultimately, this kingdom needs a unified vision in order to progress, and she is the pace setter for that vision.”

“But what if you disagree with large portions of her vision?”

“I would counsel patience. She may agree with you more than you think, but sometimes she has to bide her time. In the context of Rudhisér, work with Brébalu. Give him a chance; he is experienced, a good man, he listens, and he has the queen’s ear.”

“I see. So, that’s where this conversation is going.”

“Indeed. I can understand the representatives don’t trust him; he is a member of the old order. But give him a chance to prove himself. Two years from now he’ll face the provincial assembly again, and he will have a track record to review. That will be time to review his accomplishments fairly and open mindedly.”

Lomu thought, then nodded slightly. “That’s a good point.”

504.

The Importance of Agriculture

Dhonmènu /May 24/642

When Thornton finally came home, it was after 8 p.m. Chris, Liz, and Lébé were sitting at the dining room table listening to the radio and immediately turned to him. “I take it, there was no movement,” said Chris.

“No, I’d say there was some, but nothing the radio would have heard about. The lords’ committee met with the Assembly representatives’ committee to discuss the maximum size of a farm. The lords won’t accept any maximum size and they’re inflexible. But they might be willing to accept a tax surcharge on large farms, if it isn’t too large.”

“That’s the sensible way to go, if we’re going to do anything,” agreed Chris. “The Swadnoma Assembly adjourned an hour ago and the representatives were debating a bill that would limit farms to 100 agris.”

“Any news from Néfa?”

Chris shook his head. “No, but it's lunchtime there, so let’s call Amos.” Chris pulled out his cell phone and punched in Amos’s number, then turned on the speakerphone. It rang quite a few times, probably because Amos had to seek a private spot. “Hey Chris.”

“What’s the news from the Rudhisér provincial assembly?”

“Well, the morning got off to a good start in that the representatives approved Brébalu as governor. It was looking uncertain yesterday; Lomu appeared to be opposed,

and he was elected speaker. But Perku had a conversation with him last evening and that seems to have softened Lomu.”

“Wasn’t Perku elected Speaker for the Chamber of Lords?”

“Yes, but he wasn’t even present! I think the Lords thought he was now a lord and was raised a commoner, so he’d be a good bridge to convey their positions to the representatives. They’re running scared. Some of them wanted to elect me Speaker, but I said no, as a black gēdhému.”

“What about the issue of how big farms can be?”

“There’s quite a debate in the Chamber of Representatives because there’s a huge range of opinions. There are old farmers who want to ban all farms over 20 agris. They want the land controlled by the lords sold to as many people as possible. But Pértatranisér had surveyed twenty agri farms and they had proved too small; most farmers have either sold their land, or bought more land, and the average farmer there is farming 40 agris. In Lēpawsemdomas, on the other hand, the average farm was 150 to 170 agris at first, though most farmers later sold half or two thirds of their land. Some still have 160 agris! So they don’t want any upper limit.”

“I understand the Swadnoma Assembly has the same problem,” said Chris.

“It’s crazy,” added Thornton. “The debate today in Arjakwés was similar. Terskua was selling fifty agris, on average, but there are farmers there who bought 150 and other who have just 10.”

“Thanks, Amos,” said Chris. “It seems to me that farmers should be free to farm as much land as they want, or as little. Some farmers are thinking like peasants; in other words, they remember the days when the average farmer could handle only five or ten

agris because he had no farm animals, so they see big farms as bad. There are farmers who are farming two hundred agris and hire seasonal help when they need it. Corn and wheat prices are still dropping and if the farms don't get bigger, no one will be able to make a decent living through farming. There aren't that many lords left farming large farms; say, 500 or 1,000 agris."

"The problem with them is that they had leased the land to sharecroppers, then threw them off the land when mechanization came along," said Liz. "Legally, they could do it. Eventually the farmers would have faced declining crop prices anyway."

"If that had been allowed to happen naturally over ten years, most of the farmers would have left anyway, and the lords would have been blameless," said Amos. "They might have even made more money because the farmers were more efficient. They care for their land."

"So, what are we going to do," said Thornton. "On Earth there was a big problem with agribusiness gobbling up family farms. Here, the granges have mostly fixed that problem."

"What percent of the population *should* farm?" asked Liz. "In Africa before we left, more than half the population were farmers, but at that point in Europe and North America it was down to maybe one percent."

"And that means the price of food was a lot lower, which was good for the majority," said Thornton. "It also meant people could afford food that was partially processed; precooked and frozen, canned, dressed and packed, etc. Essentially, a lot of the people who had been farmers ended up packing, cooking, and processing food."

“And women had that much less cooking they had to do, which was good for them,” said Liz. “This is a complicated issue.”

“Much more complicated than the debate in the provincial assemblies,” said Amos. “Right now, the average person is being supported by two agris of land raising food, fiber, pastureland, and fuel; 500,000 people are dependent on 1 million agris of land. If the average farm is 50 agris, the average farmer is supplying 25 people altogether.”

“And in another twenty years, the quantity of stuff we need to raise per person will increase, but the amount we can raise per agri will also increase,” said Chris.

“How would you count a forest plantation like Amos’s?” asked Liz. “Some is fruit orchard, some is harvested for logging, some is tapped for rubber . . . it’s used a dozen ways.”

“That’s part of the problem,” agreed Chris. “How would one count the thousands of agris owned by forestry tomis in Kwétékwona and Lɛpawsa? They aren’t part of the million agris, either.”

“That’s the problem,” agreed Amos.

“We need to sit down with the All-Grange Council and try to resolve this, because it’s tying up all the other legislation that’s being proposed,” said Chris.

“No,” said Liz. “You already did that. Her Majesty has to get involved at this point.”

Chris thought a moment. “Yes, I think you’re right. I’ll call her tomorrow and see what she wants done.”

“We need more data, too,” said Thornton. “I’ll talk to Mitraisu, he might have more statistics.”

The palace was immediately interested in a meeting about farming, but it took two days to assemble a group to meet who had all the necessary information. Meanwhile, the provincial assemblies in Arjakwés, Swadnoma, and Rudhisér—soon joined by the assemblies in Lɛwésɓa and the South Shore—continued to debate the issue, making no significant progress.

Assembled in the queen’s meeting room was Duke Kandékwɛs, Prince Mégékwɛs, Wɛpokɛstɛr, Duchess Sugé of Swadnoma, Prime Minister Mɛndhru, Chris Mennea, Amos Keino, Chandu Chartagrasi of the All-Grange Council, Snékwu of the All-Grange Council, Mitraisu of the Mɛlwika Génadema’s Agriculture Department, Aryéstu of the Institute of Economics, and Bidhu Doma-Agrasi of the Ministry of Statistics.

“I think we need to start with the Hymn of the Peasant,” suggested Her Majesty, after she entered, sat, and greeted everyone. Mr. Prime Minister, do you know it?”

“I do indeed, Your Majesty.” Mɛndhru paused a moment, closed his eyes, and chanted a hymn to “the hardworking peasant, who wrests food from the soil, is beloved of Esto.” When he finished, Chris raised his hand. “Your Majesty, may I read three short passages from Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá about agriculture?”

“Certainly, Honored Count.”

Chris nodded in thanks and pulled out a piece of paper. “Bahá'u'lláh states that ‘Special regard must be paid to agriculture.’ He characterizes it as an activity which is

‘conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world.’

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that ‘the fundamental basis of the community is agriculture—tillage of the soil.’ I think we can all agree that these give agriculture a special place in the world.”

“Special compared to, say, industry?” asked Duchess Sugé, who, along with her brothers of the Kérékwes clan, owned a large fraction of Swadnoma province.

Chris considered the question. “I’ll put it this way. It is easy for people to give commerce and industry a higher status and relegate farming to a low status, but this passage disagrees. Agriculture is the fundamental activity in our society because it feeds us. Therefore, it deserves honor and respect.”

“But what does it say about large farms versus small?” she asked.

“Bahá'u'lláh talks about the importance of the land and of nature, of respecting the earth and being its stewards, and he once said ‘the country is the world of the Soul, the city is the world of the bodies.’ So it is important for people to live outside cities and to be involved in agriculture, which fundamentally reminds us that we come from the earth and we return to it. It does not say there cannot be 1,000 agri farms, but if all farms were that size, very few people would feel that connection to nature and to the earth.”

“If all farms were 1,000 agris, this world would have only 1,000 farmers,” noted Bidhu. “Right now, the average farmer has 40 or 50 agris, so we have about 20,000 farmers. When you include their wives and children, they number 120,000, or one fifth of the world’s population.”

“That’s all?” said the queen, startled.

Bidhu nodded. “Twenty years ago they were 80 percent of the population. They account for sixteen percent of our gross domestic product and eighteen of our per capita income. Their income is slightly less than the income of factory, commercial, and government workers.”

“It’s important to point out that grange membership is more than twenty percent of the population, however,” said Chandu. “It’s closer to thirty percent, and only three quarters of all farmers are members of granges, either because they live in places like Rudhisér where they were discouraged, or because they are hired to farm someone else’s land. Nearly half of grange members started out as farmers, but moved into small businesses such as raising chickens or grinding grain or canning vegetables. Our granges have invested in a lot of local industries. We have played a very important role in developing the countryside. And we want to continue playing that role. We’re very concerned about the farmers who aren’t members of granges because they earn much less than grange members.”

“Thirty to fifty percent less,” added Bidhu. “That’s based on tax data.”

“Is that one of the reasons the granges are proposing a cap on the size of farms?” asked Her Majesty.

“Yes, that’s one reason,” replied Chandu. “If the hired farmers could own their own farms, they’d earn more. Their children would be more likely to complete school and would have better health. Another reason is that a large farm, by paying hired farmers less, can drive down crop prices. Already, we have seen some small farmers give up agriculture and take up factory work. Very large farms threaten the survival of family

farms. We could get into a situation where small farms close and are bought out by big farms, which then get even bigger and can cut prices even more.”

“It would be a strange situation if granges became cooperatives to support small factories and other businesses,” added Snékwu. “Agriculture is our basis.”

“And how large are the farms of your members?” asked the queen.

“Bidhu said the average size of a farm is 40 or 50 agris, but that includes a lot of farms of non-grange members, and they have to have smaller farms,” replied Chandu.

“I’d say our average size is 60 or 70 agris and growing.”

“Growing?” asked the queen.

“Indeed. People are getting used to the idea of farming more land; they have to farm more because crop prices keep dropping; and every year a new mechanical device comes out that makes the work easier.”

“I see,” said the queen. “So, how large can farms get?”

“That depends on the crop, Your Majesty,” replied Mitraisu. “A farmer can manage 100 agris of wheat and maybe 120 agris of corn with little outside help, but 20 agris of tomatoes will require a lot of help. In Swadnoma, the average sugarcane farmer owns 60 agris and he works very, very hard to earn a meager living.”

“That explains the wide range of proposals for the maximum size of a farm.”

“Your Majesty, the All-Grange Council has always advocated for a maximum of 100 to 150 agris. The debate has seen a wide range of suggested maximums because of the personal opinions of the debaters.”

“I see.”

“What about tropical forest plantations such as mine,” said Amos. “I have 5,000 agris of tropical forest. Some areas have citrus fruit, some nuts, some rubber, and other areas are forest that are being selective harvested.”

“Our legislation focuses on cleared land planted with crops and excludes orchards and forest plantations,” replied Snékwu. “We don’t want to interfere with large forestry efforts run by tribes or provinces.”

“The proposed legislation in Rudhisér does not mention those exceptions.”

“The All-Grange Council has little control over the actual legislation that has been proposed,” replied Chandu.

“But the result is chaos,” commented the queen. “It appears that the motivation is protection of crop prices and family farms. Those are both worthy goals, but the legislation right now might also limit some farmers in the future.”

“I think there are better ways to achieve the goal of preserving family farms,” said Aryéstu. “For example, farm workers currently are exempt from the minimum wage law, but if they were paid better, they’d have a decent living.”

“The current legislation sets the minimum wage too low,” said Chandu.

“Correct, a new law would have to be enacted, and should be. The kingdom can also consider expanding its emergency food storage. It was supposed to store a six-month supply for the population of 370,000 people, but the population is now higher.”

“The problem of low crop prices cannot be attributed solely to the large farmers,” added Chris. “The fundamental problem is surplus production. Some surplus production is a wise thing; it’s a hedge against bad weather. So it makes sense for the government to

purchase some food every year and then throw it away or sell it for animal feed when it gets too old.”

“Another possibility would be a land tax on larger farms,” noted Prime Minister Mendhru. “For example, it could amount to 5 or 10 dhanay per agri over 100 agris. Farmers could still purchase large farms, but they wouldn’t gain as large efficiencies of scale.”

“Needless to say, we’d be opposed to that,” said Duchess Sugé.

“Understandably so,” replied the queen, looking at her former sister in law. “At this point, it is clear to me that there is no single maximum size that makes sense. The chaotic discussion in the chambers of representatives demonstrates this as well. I cannot imagine that the chamber of lords will agree to such legislation, either. Notably, the Menneas are not advocating it; they agree with the Kérékwes! But just about everyone will agree that we need to protect farmers’ incomes, and there is an argument to be made that farming must not become the task of a tiny few. Even if this world could move to a point where only one percent of the population farms, I see no reason to do so, and surely we can afford to be a world where ten or twenty percent of the population farms. Furthermore, I want this issue resolved at the world level rather than the provincial level. Mendhru, Aryéstu, Chandu, Kristobéru, Sugé: I want you to serve as a commission to propose legislation to the House of Commons and Lords when they meet in two months time. The purpose will be to assure the prosperity of the family farm. You will need to keep in mind the different climates and levels of development.”

“That may be an extremely difficult goal,” said Mendhru.

“I agree, and the tactics may have to change from year to year. But make a start.”

505.

Géndona

Blorménu /early June 24/642

The conference room at Mennea Tomi gradually filled up. Jordan and Chris arrived first, and Mitruiluku Doma-Kérékwesi entered a few minutes later. “The Mennea Tomi has a beautiful headquarters! How much did it cost?”

“Half a million,” replied Jordan.

“The Kérékwesi clan needs a building like this; our offices are scattered among four buildings. This is the first time I’ve been to Melwika, believe it or not. A big city; I’m impressed.”

“Next week we have the Farm Committee meeting here, so you’ll be back,” said Chris. “Say, the Swadnoma Tigers are playing the Melwika Motors that evening, right? Why don’t you stay after the committee meeting, we’ll attend the soccer game together, then you can come have dinner with us? That would be fun.”

“The crowd would love to see the two sponsoring lords, too.” Mitruiluku smiled. “The Tigers have been doing very well this year, too.”

“So have the Motors.”

Mitruiluku nodded. “Alright, it’s a plan.”

Just then Yusdu arrived. “Where’s Awsu?”

“He was delayed,” replied Chris. “How’s your work?”

“Very busy; everyone wants palace grants and loans for factories, but it’s not clear there’s demand for all the stuff they want to make. I suppose World Gas wants money, too?”

“Of course,” replied Chris, with a smile. “Is Dëkané here or Néfa?”

“Néfa. She’s meeting with every village council, which keeps her busy most nights and all day Primdius! Slow progress.”

“I can imagine the councils are not prepared to be effective,” commented Mitruiluku.

Yusdu nodded. “Indeed, it’s a big problem. They’re now asking village councils to sign a contract with the province for educational services beyond fourth grade. They’re setting up middle schools for grades 5 through 8 in the larger villages and will bus students to them in the fall. They’re purchasing double-wide modulars to serve as classrooms so they can be ready. The village elementary schools were badly overcrowded and now they’ll function much better. They’re also asking the villages to sign a contract for local road maintenance. Schools and roads are the biggest expenses the villages have. They may offer to place village water and sewer systems under provincial control as well.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Chris. “The villages in the lower valley could use that arrangement as well.”

“She wants to talk to the province about that, when she’s back here permanently in the fall.”

“Is Thornton still over there?” asked Mitruiluku.

Chris nodded. “He’s there to help the Royal Geological Survey complete their review of the land in the Néfa Basin, but he’ll be back next week. He couldn’t leave until the provincial assembly was over.”

“I’m glad we were able to stop the legislation about farm size,” said Mitruiluku. “But I really don’t like the alternatives.”

“Honored lord, we have plenty of money,” said Chris. “We need to protect family farms, especially if we want the countryside to be prosperous and not just the cities.”

“I was happy to see the Arjakwés Assembly approve the bus subsidies and the tougher laws about deforestation and excessive hunting,” said Yusdu. “Rudhisér’s assembly ended up doing well, also.”

“They all did,” said Jordan. “I heard the Mégendre Council approved expansion of the capacity of their irrigation ditch and its extension to the western edge of their land.”

Yusdu smiled. “Indeed they did, and we’re providing fifty percent of the cost to the expansion to increase the total water volume it can carry. We have given them a contract to extend the ditch 15 kilometers; 5 kilometers to the western edge of their land, 5 more kilometers to reach the top of the Okbelakwés, and 5 more to reach the Sorakwés, which flows into the Ornakwés near Médhela. Her Majesty is contemplating the opening of Arjdhuna to settlement.”

The others looked at him, frowning. “Are you referring to the township due east of South Ménwika?” asked Jordan.

“Indeed; that’s the proposed name. The Okbelakwés flows into the eastern side of Arjdhuna, then into the Mégakwés. Additional ditches can take water to the entire township.”

“So, they’re talking about a canal that might eventually go all the way to Swadnoma?” asked Mitruiluku.

“That’s under discussion again. The Majakwés has plenty of water. For now, the extra is going into the Ornakwés, which will increase its irrigation potential.”

“We could use the water in Swadnoma; the summer is dry season. We’d like to have another township opened, too.”

“The palace might open one there soon, too,” said Yusdu. “The new policy is to open a new township in every province so that people don’t emigrate. The provinces have been complaining.”

Just then the President of World Gas, Awsu Khunu, entered the conference room, bearing documents. “I’m sorry for the delay; it was hard to get the copies done.” He passed out his report.

“Give us the details,” said Yusdu.

“Alright. See page one. Gas supply and demand increased ten percent last year, from 14.5 million cubic meters to 16. So far, the increase is continuing at ten percent this year. The extension of a pipeline from Tripola south to Snekh péla, with side lines to close villages, all of which are in the subpolar zone, caused gas demand in South Shore Province to jump twenty-five percent. The gas line from Belledha westward to the shoreline villages and northward to Yujdwoakwés has increased consumption in the North Polar Basin as well. Demand in Melwika, Meddoakwés, Pértatranisér, and Ora jumped by six percent. Nightly demand in the winter now exceeds production, so we have to produce during the day and store. By this winter, the line from Nuarjora will

connect to the North Shore system and the line to Sullendha will be finished, and that will increase demand as well.

“That has forced us to increase storage capacity so that we can store extra production in the autumn for the winter. We’re building new storage facilities in Dhébkua near Meddoakwés, Triwika Industrial Park, Tripola, and South Ora at 125,000 dhanay each; half a million altogether. Remember, our annual income is 3.5 million dhanay.

“That will help the next two years, but puts us dangerously close to 100% production capacity, which could result in a disaster if we have any equipment problems. And we have additional demand emerging. Gordha produces 200,000 cubic meters of biogas per year and uses all of it. Medhpéla produces 100,000 per year and uses 150,000, and the extra must be trucked in. A 275,000 dhanay pipeline is needed and it will probably increase annual demand by another 150,000. The Tutane villages are all using more and more bottled gas. The West Valley in Véspe is developing and needs more. The Néfa Basin villages will use more as they develop.

“To stay ahead of demand, we have to increase production by 5 million cubic meters in three years. We propose expanding the Swadakhwés and Bruagras facilities by 2.4 million cubic meters per year at a price of about 720,000 each. The Swadnoma facility will use crop waste, baggase—the crushed sugar cane after the sugary juice has been removed—and timber floated in from northern Morana. Bruagras will use timber cut in Rudhisér and northern Véspe and some crop waste and baggase, because sugar cane production there is expanding. Bellédha will need a 120,000 dhanay expansion so as to keep up with North Shore’s demand. It will also allow the Bellédha plant to supply Sumiuperakwa when the pipeline reaches Jérnstisér next spring.”

“That’ll keep you going for just three years,” said Mitruiluku.

Awsu nodded. “Correct. Beyond that, assuming demand continues to go up, so do expenses. Gordha will need a pipeline. Isurdhuna’s centralized facility will be too small for growing demand, a problem made worse by the decline in biogas production because villages are using more tractors and have fewer farm animals generating manure for the biogas digesters. It will be cheaper to extend a pipeline to Isurdhuna than to cut timber and haul it down the escarpment to the valley.

“With a growing population and growing incomes, we figure the world will need 32 million cubic meters per year in seven years. Our pipelines are too small to transport that much gas; they will either need to be replaced or we will need new production facilities located in between the existing facilities. The cost will be at least 8 million dhanay over ten years.”

The number startled Yusdu. “You said biogas production is declining. Does that mean pipelines to all the villages?”

“Biogas production in the villages is declining because there are fewer work animals, but there are more meat animals being raised. Since they are slaughtered in large plants, the supply of animal manure for making biogas is holding steady, but production is shifting to Gordha, Mēdhpēla, and Melita. Biogas is also increasing in the North and South Shore provinces where there are many dairy farms.”

“And you said the main pipelines will soon be too small; will you need to replace them?” asked Yusdu.

“No, not for some time,” replied Awsu. “That’s one reason we need to complete the north shore connection between the eastern and western shores; it’ll double the

amount of gas we can move between them. The other solution is to site new gas facilities in between existing ones. Right now, Bruagras gas flows all the way to Tripola, but if we sited a production facility in southern Ora where there's thick forest, it could send gas north to Ora or south to Tripola. That way, high demand in Ora wouldn't cause a shortage in Tripola."

"And how much are these new blue water gas production facilities?"

"We have a new standard size unit that produces 100 cubic meters per day—400,000 per year—and costs 120,000. We're looking at a place in Kadakvas in southern Véspe to site one in about four years, and we'd add a new unit there every year or so."

"The largest potential site for gas production is East Tutane province," noted Chris. "The Ghéslone and Géndone have about 3,000 square kilometers of temperate high rainfall forest. We're talking about big trees and fairly rapid growth. A large-diameter pipeline from Moruagras northward to Yujdwoakwes would be 140 kilometers long and would cost 1.5 million dhanay. An extension to Réjéivika would be cheap and would provide gas to Délonga Province as well. The pipeline could feed gas to both shores. Thornton is going to Géndonatroba and Moruagras in two weeks and he'll bring up the idea."

"The other big project would be a pipeline 50 kilometers past Gordha to the land of the Mémene gone and Késtone," said Awsu. "Right now they're cutting wood and trucking it to Melwika to feed the gas plant here. That's very expensive. Melwika is our largest consumer, because of all its industrial facilities; Mèddoakwés is second. As their demand increases, gas production has to increase, and it produces air pollution. If

Melwika kept its production constant and shifted its wood purchases westward to the rest of Arjakwés province and Lɛpawsa, the Tutane wood production could go into local gas production and it could be piped to Melwika.”

“The Kaitere also need gas for their steel mill, and they plan to start making their own soon,” added Yusdu. “That would help them. But that project is five to ten years into the future.”

“Correct,” said Awsu. “We’d probably want to build the pipeline to Kerda starting in three years and that would shorten the pipeline to Moruagras by a third. We’d extend it to Moruagras by 5 years from now and start making gas there. A pipeline to Gordha can be built 3 years from now and extended to the Késtone and Kaitere by 6 years from now. The pipeline across the northern side of the Sea is almost finished; it’ll be extended from Sumiuperakwa to Néfa by next fall. Gas consumption can probably rise to at least 90 million cubic meters per year in fifteen or twenty years. The average house needs 50 cubic meters per year for cooking; if all 100,000 houses get it, that’s 5 million. If all the houses in colder climates acquire gas heat, that’s about 25 million more. Industrial use will probably be double domestic use. That’s assuming a stable population! We’re talking about 30 to 50 million dhanay of investment.”

“Which sounds huge, but most of that investment occurs when the economy is bigger, anyway,” said Yusdu. “Let’s stick to numbers over 3 years: about 3 million, if I have counted right. Of course, that doesn’t count ongoing maintenance and such. The company is prepared to invest about 350,000 dhanay in new infrastructure, right? You usually budget 10% for that, right?”

“Correct,” said Awsu. “Our biggest expense is timber, followed by personnel and equipment. We’d like to request a total of one million in investment from the palace in the form of additional stock we would release, the shares of which would go to the employee fund once the work is complete.”

“So, one third of the work would be funded by the company, one third by the palace development budget, and one third by private investment.” Yusdu considered. “I really don’t think you need that much from us. You can raise plenty from investors and bank loans. Our development funds are not unlimited; in fact, they’re rather stretched right now.”

“So, how much can you invest?” asked Chris.

Yusdu thought. “One hundred thousand per year, but I have to clear it with the Investment Council. The main value of an investment by the palace is that it conveys confidence in the project. There’s plenty of investment money available, and plenty of bank loans. The economy is doing very well.”

“It is,” agreed Jordan. He looked at Chris. “We can raise our investment somewhat.”

“So can the Kérékwes clan,” said Mitruiluku. “But my suggestion is that Mennea and Kérékwes, together, pledge to cover all of the rest, then we release a half million dhanay of new shares and see whether we can raise all of it that way.”

“Yes,” said Yusdu. “Let the stock market work for you. There are a lot of medium and even small investors out there now. Give them a chance to invest in World Gas. There’s no investment more secure than utilities.”

“I agree,” said Chris. “Alright, I think we have a consensus.”

Thornton looked forward to the expedition across the southern mountains to Géndonatroba. It had been a crazy spring, with the elections, the reorganization of the Melwika City Council, and the meeting of the provincial assembly, so an escape into wilderness was welcome. Éra didn't have much unstudied wilderness left; geological expeditions still hadn't explored the far northern Spine Mountains, the far southern Spine, and the south polar mountains. This would check off one of the three.

The expedition party came from two groups. Thornton had been running a seminar on the geology and ecology of the southern Spine to eight advanced geology and ecology students, seven of whom planned to participate. To that group, General Gelnébelu of the Army Construction Corps added himself and five army geologists and engineers. The army also provided four pickup trucks—two set up as horse trailers—with drivers and four horses to transport the tents and other gear for the twelve participants. They rendezvoused at Werontroba, where they were met by a Kaitere guide and a Géndone guide. They drove to the eastern end of Route 69 and turned onto Route 82 where the two routes ended against each other. Six kilometers north on 82 they came to the Kaiterakwés or Kaitere River and started up a hunting trail that crossed the mountains. Four additional soldiers drove the two horse trailers and two pickups across the mountains to Géndonatroba to pick them up six days later, 100 kilometers east.

“I think you would have enjoyed this trip,” Thornton said to Lébé over his cell phone, the last morning of their trip. “The scenery was absolutely incredible.”

“They would have expected me to cook. I'd rather be with you when you get to Géndonatroba; they have an incredible oral tradition.”

“Why don’t you drive over, then?”

“Well, it’s 7 a.m. for you, but 9 p.m. the day before for me. I have classes to teach, and it’s a long way. But if you meet anyone who might be a good source, maybe you can put them on the phone. So, what was the pass like?”

“Fairly high; 2,800 meters, but the other half of the team tried the other pass and it was at 3,200 meters and snowier. The Kaitakwés has two tributaries that head up the peaks. On the other side of the Spine by the northern tributary is a river that flows to Gendonatroba, the Ténsisér. The southern tributary leads to a pass and a river, the Tworkisér that flows to Gérépola, the Géndone’s southernmost village. From what we have heard from the other team by phone, the central section of their route was very steep and the pass isn’t much of a pass because the peaks are at 3,600! They had to deal with a lot of snow. The southern pass is lower, had less snow, and the approaches aren’t so difficult where building a road is concerned.”

“Assuming the Géndone want a road.”

“Yes. I’ve reminded Gelnébèlu of that repeatedly. The Kaitère are enthusiastic because it’ll improve hunting and open up a timber area, so we could always build a road up their side, at least part of the way. The pass, by the way, is only 50 meters wide at one point and has multicolored cliffs 150 or 200 meters high; really spectacular! I took a lot of photos. My team split into three or four teams at different times and explored a wide area as we followed the river downhill. One team found high aluminum anorthosite, which might be an economic deposit for aluminum mining, and another found ilmenite, which is a titanium ore.”

“So, some mining potential.”

“Yes, with a substantial investment. We also encountered a herd of mastodons, two black bears, lots of deer and elk, and at lower altitudes a lot of tworkæ or wild boars, because the forests of fir yield to oaks. Lots of acorns for them. Really good hunting; the Kaitere take several dozen visitors hunting on their side every year, and the Géndone could do the same.”

“With a road.”

“Yes. Really excellent timber; a lot of the trees are 30 or 40 meters high.”

“Well, be careful. You’ll be back for graduation, right?”

“Yes, I’m sure of it now. We’ll reach Gércpola in an hour or so. Two pickups will be waiting for us and we’ll drive to Géndonatroba by noon. I’ll keep my eye out for people who would know oral traditions.”

“Great! We’ll talk tomorrow, then.”

“Definitely. Love you! Give everyone a hug for me.”

”I will. Bye!”

“Bye.” Thornton closed the connection as a strong feeling that he missed Lébé and the kids swept over him. He walked back to camp to help pack up the tents.

Soon they were on their way down the trail, which was heavily worn because they were now fairly close to the village. The Tworkisér babbled over rocks and roared over waterfalls and through rapids. They reached the first fields cleared in the forest; cows grazed in some and corn and rye grew in others. The trail widened into a muddy lane, rutted by wagon wheels. Finally they came to the hamlet, 80 log cabins and wooden houses stretched out along the river surrounded by farmland and brooded over by a

flat-topped hill with a circle of ancient earthworks, the *gérpola* or “old fort” for which the village was named.

Géndoné came out of their houses to greet them. Most wore leather or homespun; not many manufactured clothes had reached what was probably the world’s most isolated village. Thornton noted a single telephone and electrical line came into the village down a muddy, ungraveled Route 96; the army still had not paved the road, but at least the old trail had been replaced by a wider dirt trail. He noted a single pickup truck parked outside a large house, which was next to a two-classroom school building.

The door of the large house opened and out came a bearded man in his 50s. “Welcome to Gérpola!” he exclaimed. “How may I help you?”

“I am Lord Dhoru Doma-Menneai and these are members of our geological exploration party. We just walked from the Kaitakwés over the Spine and down the Tworkisé, searching for minerals and studying the land on behalf of the Royal Geological Survey.”

“I see. Did you obtain permission from Chief—er, Lord—ɛjnokordu?”

“Yes, of course, and he sent us a guide.” Thornton pointed out their Géndoné guide. “You should have received a letter from him.”

“We haven’t, but we don’t hear from him very often. We can’t call because the phone line was broken by a fallen branch a few weeks ago.”

“And they haven’t fixed it?”

“I’m not sure they know how. We haven’t needed to use it.” He pointed to the guide. “We know Wérokordu, so his presence is sufficient proof. I am Wérs péku, head of this village, in case you do not remember, Lord Dhoru.”

“I remember meeting you two years ago at the last election, Honored.” He reached out with both hands and they shook. “We are expecting two pickup trucks to meet us here shortly.”

“What about your horses?”

“One truck is set up to carry them.”

“Really? Endro be praised, horses can now ride in trucks, too!”

“How is Gépola?”

“Thank you, Lord, we are well.” Wérspéku looked around; over half the village’s 400 inhabitants had come out to join them. “We had a pretty cold and snowy winter, but in the last week we have been able to plant our crops. We got a second pickup truck in the fall and we’ve improved some of our farm lanes so they can get to all the fields. We need to purchase another plow, and we have heard of the pneumatic chain saws that use power from the truck engine to run a saw. We want to buy one and try it. Do you know where we can get one?”

“Yes, I can tell you how to order one. They’re expensive, but well worth the money. Our expedition explored both the Tworkisé and the Ténsisé to look for minerals, timber, and other resources you can use. If the tribe wants a road, the army could build one from here over the mountains to the Kaitere side.”

“I think we would welcome that, Lord. We are the most isolated village in the world, and as a consequence we are very poor.”

“That’s why we are here and why Lord Ejnokordu gave us permission to explore your territory. We need to know what the land offers.”

Just then they heard the sounds of pickup trucks coming down Route 96 and a moment later two appeared. They pulled right up to Thornton. “Sorry we’re late! Gelnébelu reached Géndonatroba last night at sunset and that delayed our departure, then there was a large branch down in the road that we had to move because the horse trailer could not get through. Lord, it has broken your telephone and electrical lines.”

“Indeed we know, thank you, soldier. Have you no time to enjoy our entertainment, Lord?”

“Thank you, Honored Wérs péku, I am sure we would welcome some, after 9 days in the woods.”

“Then give us some of your time and we will prepare you a feast.”

It was noontime before they were able to leave G érpola, which rarely had a chance to show off their hospitality. They gathered around to hear the stories of the geologists and soldiers and looked at the rock and mineral samples that were shown to them. Thornton promised to return later in the summer with his family to explore the old earthen fort and hear the village’s folk tales.

“General Gelnébelu is counting on your help, Lord,” said the soldier, as they drove down 25 kilometers of graveled track to Géndonatroba. “The lord has not been enthusiastic about the army’s offer to build a road across the mountains.”

“I see, and I am not too surprised. They fear exploitation and loss of control over their land.”

“I am sure it will be harder for them to maintain control over it, too.”

Thornton nodded and considered what he might be able to say. When they got to Géndonatroba, Lord Ejnokordu and two village elders, Albkrisu and Andamékwu—the latter the informal development officer, a school teacher, and a Bahá'í—were explaining to a bored general the tribe's development goals. An empty bottle of brandy sat on the table and the general, lord, and Albkrisu were slurring their speech. Thornton had to wonder whether the general had decided to try getting them drunk; distilling wine into brandy was only a few years old, was expensive, and Thornton knew Gelnébelu liked it very much.

“Ah, Lord Dhoru, you made it,” said Ejnokordu, rising to shake hands with him. “I hope you had a fruitful trek across our lands. I am sure our hunter will give me a full report.”

“There is a lot to report. We found several rock outcrops with usable ores, though they would need further study to determine whether they are large enough to be worth mining. The entire forested land we walked through below 2700 meters elevation has excellent timber, fir at higher elevations and oak at lower elevations. Hunting, as you know, is excellent. Your tribe has some remarkable land, lord; you are blessed.”

“Thank you, we know that, for we love our land and seek to both enjoy it and protect it. Right now, our tribal priorities are twofold: selling hydroelectric power from our two rivers to guarantee us a steady income, and developing our agriculture. The oak forests are prime habitation for pigs, both tame and wild, as the name Tworkisér / Wild Boar River indicates. The land covered by oak forest is also good for farming if it is cleared; potatoes grow well, and rye, carrots, peas, onions, and hay. We are particularly

interested in getting pneumatic chain saws. With Route 96 open to the Polar Basin, we no longer need to haul wood uphill over the Spine in order to sell it to Melwika.

Andamékwu says we can get a contract to sell oak and fir—or even better, charcoal—to Melwika’s gas plant.”

“You probably can,” agreed Thornton. “You could get a development grant from the palace to build a blue water gas unit, which can be used to create gas, wood tar, and charcoal, depending on how one sets it up. Recently the World Gas Company had a meeting to discuss its future, and the extensive forests that the Géndone and Ghéslone have were discussed. Gas production has to double in about seven years and might have to double again after that. The easiest way to do that is to build a pipeline all the way here and pay the Géndone and Ghéslone to make the gas from their own trees.”

“But we don’t want to cut down all our forests,” objected Albkrisu immediately. “We want to preserve them, but we do want to increase our farmland.”

“We figure that we have a strip of land along the top of the escarpment about sixty kilometers long and five kilometers wide that can be farmed,” added Andamékwu.

“A lot of that is hilly, but you could use it for pasture,” agreed Thornton. “That’s at least 300 square kilometers of forest. I am sure you could extend the pasture another five kilometers back from the escarpment, also; that’s another 300 square kilometers. That’s a lot of forest. You could clear twenty square kilometers every year and replant it, and cut it again 30 years later. That’s a lot of wood. Typically, you’ll get two hundred tonnes per hectare here.”

“That’s . . . 400,000 tonnes on twenty square kilometers,” said Andamékwu. “You couldn’t use that much.”

“Don’t be so sure; demand for power is growing. That’d make about 100 million cubic meters of gas. Məlwika uses 60,000 tonnes of wood per year and is using seven or eight percent more power per year.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Əjnokordu. “If we want more farmland and we have to clear the trees, we can sell the wood. But our plan calls for farmland and pasture, not tree farming. And what we *really* want is a hydroelectric facility like Moruagras. That has been very helpful for them; very helpful. And it doesn’t damage our environment in any way at all. The Ténsisér comes to the escarpment and falls down it in a narrow gorge that no one can get into and see. Fish can’t live in the water; they are killed by all the waterfalls. You won’t even see the pipe under all the trees that have sprung up on the escarpment. That’s what we really want.”

“I have no control over the electric company, though,” said Gəlnəbəl. “The army wants to build a road. That’s what we are good for. It would be numbered Route 97. It would go over the mountains and reach Route 69, which goes to Tripola, which is just 200 kilometers from here. Your trucks could get wood or farm products there quickly; less than 3 hours.”

Əjnokordu scowled at Gəlnəbəl angrily. “And how far are we from Ora? Have you thought about that, you idiot? Build us a road down the escarpment to the piece of land on the floor of the Long Valley *that belongs to us*. The crown gave it to us, and we can’t get to it! From there, a road 15 kilometers across the valley floor will reach Route 55. Ora is about 110 kilometers away. Right now we have to drive 50 kilometers north to Moruagras, take Route 1 to the bottom of the valley, then drive 50 kilometers south, so

Ora is 200 kilometers away. We don't need a road over the southern Spine. It'll just encourage people to hunt on our land illegally."

"But what about the ore the expedition found?"

"Maybe someday we'll want to open great wounds in Mother Earth to take out the metals. Maybe. But you are talking about starting the road *now*. Why? You are looking at the map and saying 'look at all this land, and there's no road! We need to build a road there.' No you don't! It's our land. Our timber, our ore, our game. We know what we want and need. We need a road down the escarpment to the floor of the Long Valley, and we need a hydroelectric plant. If you're so worried about building a royal road, give it a Route number! A brand new number, so you can build a brand new road!"

"You are aware, lord, that the Ténsisér is about half the size of the Kostisér, so it won't make as much power," said Thornton.

"So, now you're an idiot, too? Yes, of course we know that. The Ténsisér has twenty-two cubic meters per second. Do you think we're barbarians? We understand these things now. The Tworkisér carries 15 cubic meters per second on average. That's according to your own survey, who told Andamékwu how to measure it. Lord Dhoru, I want you to stay here tonight. We can take your team down the escarpment; we have a very good trail. We can give you horses so you don't have to walk 1,600 meters back up when you get to the bottom. We can show you where the pipeline would go and where the road would go. Andamékwu and his geology and ecology students have been hiking the escarpment for several years, and they've gone to Moruagras to see the road and the pipeline there."

“Lord, please understand, we aren’t here to plan a road and pipeline down the escarpment,” said Gelnébelu, his voice rising. With both men drunk, tempers were rising fast.

“If you want permission to build your Route 97 *some day*, you must see the route to the bottom of the valley,” replied Ejnokordu insistently. “There will be no road over the southern mountains until we have a road to the bottom of the escarpment that connects to Route 55, and until our hydroelectric facility is started. There will be no gas facility here until then, either!”

Gelnébelu opened his mouth to protest again, but Thornton gestured him to stop. “Very well, Lord, I will be honored to see the route to the floor of the valley. I suggest the General stay here and rest; he has had a long walk across the mountains, and the brandy may make more hiking today difficult. But if you can provide a horse, I will be glad to do it. I’d like to see the route, in fact.”

Ejnokordu smiled. “Thank you, lord, your family is a true friend of the Géndone. I am grateful. Your fellow Bahá’í, Andamékwu, can assemble some horses and a few students and you can start down in two hours. You should be able to go down and come back up by tonight.”

506.

Graduations

Blorménu /mid June 24/642

“You *finally* made it,” said Lébe to Thornton as he came into the house. “We thought you’d miss the graduation for sure! You have just an hour to clean up and get ready!”

“I know!”

“How did you get here so fast?” asked Chris, alarmed.

“Géndonatoba to Melwika, 290 kilometers, up and down two mountain ranges, in *three* hours. We made it here from Gordha in 50 minutes. The pickup truck’s speedometer maxed out at 120 kmph part of the time.”

Chris whistled. “The Gédonε kept you tied up for three days.”

“They were firm with Gelnébelu; no Route 99 from the Kaitere lands to Gépola until Route 97 is built from Géndonatoba to the floor of the Long Valley and then across to Route 55, and until they get a hydroelectric plant. My team went up and down the escarpment *twice* and mapped the entire route. Andamékwu, the schoolteacher—he’s a Bahá’i—had already led his science students and a few other experienced Gédonε up and down and had planned where the road and the hydroelectric pipes would go, so we had to survey and record it.”

“But there’s no plan to build a hydroelectric facility there,” replied Chris.

“I know. They know. And they won’t allow Route 99 until Route 97 is completed and the hydroelectric facility is started.”

“Are they interested in a gas plant?”

“Yes, *after* those other things. But the Ghéslonɛ have forests that are just as extensive and the pipeline would get to them first, so World Gas would start there first anyway, and the Géndonɛ could truck wood there quite easily.”

“But you didn’t get there to talk to the Ghéslonɛ.”

“No; that can be done another time, or by someone else. You’re talking about a project that won’t start for three or four years.”

Chris nodded. “True. You haven’t missed too much. I think the Family Farm Commission has a good package of laws to propose. We don’t have all the details nailed down yet.”

“I heard on the news Governor Brébalu has proposed five middle school districts in the Néfa Basin and four outside the Basin, and the plan has been well received.”

“Yes, and he’ll be appointing a provincial development commission in a few weeks. The plans will be province-wide and will be run by the province rather than the villages most of the time. Everyone thinks that for now, with small villages and weak councils, provincial coordination will work best. Anyway, go wash up.”

“Yes, I don’t have much time.” Thornton ran upstairs and washed quickly. When he came back downstairs, everyone was dressed and ready to go to the génadema’s commencement. Selané’s family, who had been staying in two spare apartments in the old tomi building, were there as well, including her brother Yimu, who had now completed two years of university.

They all walked over to the génadema, where the yard was filled with chairs and people were rapidly filing in. They sat in the VIP section—a privilege reserved to the family who founded the school—and immediately had to rise for Her Majesty, Queen

Estoibidhé and Duke Kandékwes, accompanying Prince Mégékwes and Ninlilé. “Thank you so much for coming, Your Majesty, and agreeing to give the commencement address,” said Chris, bowing to her.

“I am delighted the génadema invited me.” She looked at his son. “I don’t know how he managed to earn a Master’s degree in one year while writing dozens of articles. Did he really earn the necessary credits?”

“Oh, mother, of course I did!”

“I’m sure he did,” replied Chris. “May certified the degree because he has the first Master’s ever awarded in journalism. I am sure all his articles were a major part of the degree, too.”

“Of course they were,” added Mégékwes. “I had to take six courses in writing, research, and the ethics of journalism! I had already completed one last spring and last summer and fall I completed four more, so when Ninlilé and I went to Ora for the winter, all I needed was to complete the ethics course with May and write an investigative journalism series, which was considered the equivalent of four courses. I completed two investigating journalism series instead, one on the effect of the flood on Véspe and one on the career of Albanu and its impact on Rudhisér!”

“Alright, calm down,” said Kandékwes. “Are you sure you want to get a Masters in History now?”

“No, I want to get a doctorate, father! Why not? I’ll *really* understand our kingdom, between a history degree and a journalism career. You don’t need my help with the province, and mother doesn’t need my help with the kingdom.”

“Actually, I could have appointed you governor.”

“I don’t want to be governor. Wëranobéru will do a fine job.”

“And I could use your help occasionally to represent me at events,” added the queen.

“I can still do that.”

“Where are the other children?” asked Chris, seeking to change the subject.

“I suppose we could have brought them,” said the queen.

“Will you come to our house for the reception?” asked Liz.

“We don’t want to become the center of attention,” replied the queen.

“Come anyway,” urged Chris.

She nodded. “Very well.”

They all sat and chatted with the other guests as the yard filled with graduates and their families. The actual ceremony was reasonably short; there was music as the graduates all filed in, an opening hymn and an opening prayer, a speech by Mëlwika Génadëma’s President, Wokwëstu Téknü, then the forty Masters degree students and the eight doctoral students came forward to receive their diplomas to very warm applause. The 660 uniýëris, 480 dwoýëris, 325 triýëris, and 290 kwéteryëris would all receive their degrees later at ceremonies in their departments and schools.

Her Majesty kept her speech short as well. It was full of praise of the graduates’ work, the potential for serving others they represented, and the importance of education for making the world a better place. When she finished, the audience gave her a standing ovation.

Chris turned to Selané and Yimu. “Well, you are now graduates, so congratulations! And in an hour you’ll have your diplomas as well.”

“Thank you,” said Selané, and Yimu. Chris gave them both hugs. “You’re still pursuing a degree, right?” he added to Yimu.

“Yes, this is just a dwoyeri and the Miller Engineering Institute said I should get a triyeri next year, for them to hire me full time. After that, they’ll pay for a kwéteryeri over two years, and they may even agree to a Masters if they like my work.”

“I wish you were coming back to Wurontroba,” said Yimanu.

“I know, dad, but I’m not that far away and I can get back.”

“Not that far away,” mumbled Yimanu, focusing on what once was a 7-day walk and was now a 2-hour drive. “Look, we want you to come back, get married in Wurontroba, and live here.”

“I know, dad,” replied Yimu, irritated.

“It is a long way, but he can get home a lot,” said Rostamu, trying to comfort his father in law. “Now that Selané has her Bachelors in Medicine, she can serve as a doctor and we can live in Wurontroba.”

“And you’ll both be traveling a lot,” said Yimanu. “She’s going to Awswika Dwodius, Kwétékwone villages Tridius and Penkudius, Sértroba Kwéterdius, and she’ll serve as doctor in Wurontroba early morning and late at night every day . . . that’s crazy! Plus she still has to come here to report in and review her patients on the weekends. And you’re handling development applications for most of the Tutane, so you’re traveling over a third of the world every week!”

“We’ll be watching grandchildren a lot,” said Endrolubé. She seemed happy about that.

“If they have kids.”

“Oh, dad, we’re going to have children. Give me another year to get my Master’s in Medicine. Things will quiet down by then.”

“We have to get to the Engineering School!” exclaimed Yimu urgently.

“Alright, let’s go,” said Yimanu.

“We won’t start awarding the kwétɛyɛris at the Medical School for at least forty-five minutes, so you have time,” said Lua.

“Take a taxi; it’ll save quite a lot of time.” Chris pulled out a dhanay.

Yimanu shook his head. “That’s a good idea, but I can afford it.”

Chris nodded, realizing he might have offended Yimanu. The families separated and everyone went their separate ways: May headed to the language and literature department, Lua to the medical school, Thornton to Earth and Environmental Science, Yimu’s family to the engineering institute, and Chris and Liz headed home, to prepare the house for the reception.

It was an hour before the Menneas were back home; Yimanu took his family to a nice restaurant to celebrate the diplomas of his two kids, so they were absent. When May returned home, she was pleased to see Soru and Kanawé and their kids had arrived at the reception. “Dr. Soru,” she said with a smile. She gave him a hug.

“Dr. Soru. I’ll never get used to that.”

“Only our third doctorate in education! Not bad for a poor street kid from Ora!”

He laughed. “My entire life is almost unbelievable.” He looked at Kanawé. “Our lif is unbelievable.”

“It is,” she agreed.

“And you have a Masters degree now, Kanawé. Congratulations.”

“Another unbelievable path, but this will help us run our school. I’m not pursuing a doctorate, though!”

“What are you doing over the summer? Another summer camp?”

Soru nodded. “And now we have a third bus for the western shore and we’re getting a third bus for the eastern shore, which will bring kids from Sullendha and northern villages in Arjakwés.”

“Like the others?”

“Yes; half of it is open for the kids to sit on the floor in a circle and half of it is set up like a classroom. We’ve hired a teacher who lives in Sullendha, who will come to the school with them two days a week and teach them at the local school three days a week.”

“So, you have kids from Gordha and Melwika on one bus, kids from Mèddoakwés locally, kids from Mèlita and the lower valley on another bus, and kids from Sullendha and the northern valley on a third bus. That’s great. How many?”

“We have 120 now; 12 are blind, 16 are deaf, and the rest have various learning impairments. We’re getting a fourth bus this fall to bring kids from Bèllèdha and we’re debating whether to transport them to Pértatranisér or Mèddoakwés. The latter is closer, but the time zones would make it easier to bus them to the former.”

“How many kids do you have altogether?”

Soru looked at Kanawé. “Almost 280. Pértatranisér has 150 and we’ll be getting 20 more if we get the kids from Bèllèdha.”

“But we’re helping only the most severely retarded children who are teachable,” said Kanawé. “There are a lot who are still in regular classrooms because they aren’t impaired enough to qualify for our school.”

“What we need is at least one more school,” said Soru. “Probably in Tripola, to serve the southern side of the sea. After that, we’d like a school in Belledha and one in Melita. With five schools able to serve a thousand kids, we’d be able to cover a large fraction of the population pretty well.”

“You’ll get there,” said May. “If there’s an expansion of service every year, you’ll have the capacity to get a new school. Is the Mèddoakwés school big enough?”

“No,” said Soru. “We’re badly overcrowded. We need a whole new building, probably one farther west. We’re thinking of Tèrskua, since Kanawé is from there.”

“What are you going to do with the current building?” asked Budhéstu Klènvikai, approaching them.

“Hey Budhéstu, congratulations on getting the first PhD in Psychology!” said Soru. The others echoed his words and they all shook hands and hugged. His wife Blorakwé was with him; she was Kanawé’s niece.

“Thanks, congratulations to both of you,” replied Budhéstu. “Blorakwé’s holding out, but I think she’ll pursue a doctorate too, pretty soon.”

“I got my Master’s before he did!”

They laughed. “No, seriously, what are you planning to do with your building?” repeated Budhéstu.

“Well, we want to replace it, but we have no plan for it yet. You probably haven’t seen it since the expansion three years ago. We can now house 22 kids, we have four other rooms for small meetings, six classrooms for 20 kids each, and a nice playground. But the land we’re on is too small for another expansion and the city has now expanded

around us. We were wondering whether our school could be converted into a nursing home. That's badly needed."

"It is," agreed Budhéstu. "Isurdhuna now has 300 seniors living in its senior housing complex, but people don't want to move away from their families. Every province needs a nursing home. But I have a different idea. Our mental rehabilitation facility in Isurdhuna is overcrowded and we need one on the eastern shore. We don't need to house too many; 22 may be enough, and if we converted some of the classrooms into housing we could accommodate more. We need space where we can meet with local outpatients. Mæddoakwés is the logical place for it."

"We might be able to arrange the sale, and that would give us the money to break ground for a new school," said Soru. "The Pértatranisér school was planned much better; we have a big piece of land and the lodging wing is separate from the classroom wing, so both of them can be expanded."

"I'm sure the palace would support it," added May. "The Mennea's Charitable Trust probably would as well, and then banks would provide loans."

"Let's explore the possibility then," said Soru.

Just then, Thornton arrived from a rather long graduation ceremony and reception at the Geological and Environmental Science Department. He saw May and the others and came over to say congratulations and shake hands. As he finished, Marku came over. Can you join the archaeologists?"

"Sure, and congratulations, Dr. Marku!" Thornton followed him over to Skandu, who had just gotten the first PhD in history, and Werétragéndu, the archaeologist of the

Morituora excavations, who had just gotten a Masters degree. Thornton stopped to shake hands and offer congratulations to all of them.

“We have a new archaeological site,” said Marku. “It’s a shell mound people site, but there are no shells; it’s a midden on the Majakwés River near Terskua.”

“It would have been on a marsh,” added Wérétragédu. “It’s on the edge of the farmland; it wasn’t farmed because it stuck up two meters, so the plows went around it. The Majakwés is fifty meters away, but it was right at the edge of the floodplain next to the site, back then. The farmers plowed a little too close a few months ago and turned up obsidian.”

“Obsidian? Sumilara?”

“Probably; it doesn’t look like the Obsidian Cliff material in the Polar Basin,” said Skandu. “Apparently the shell people had a trade network across the water.”

“Of course, we already knew they were on the island and the mainland, so we knew they had a way to go across,” said Marku. “But now we know they were trading, too. We’ve dug up a bit of the mound and found the typical shell mound stuff: fish hooks, arrowheads, spearheads, stone knives, and the usual assortment of mammal, bird, and fish bones. This place had a lot of fish and bird bones, though, which is why we think the floodplain there was marshland. But we’ve found something quite surprising as well; a potsherd.”

“Pottery? They had pots?”

“No,” replied Wérétragédu. “It’s a fragment of an Eryan pot. Based on Gordha’s excavations, it’s Corded Ware I.”

Thornton’s eyes grew wide. “Really?”

“Indeed.”

“Could it have gotten mixed into the midden later?”

“We don’t think so,” replied Marku. “There’s no evidence of disturbance.”

“So, it’s Shell mound *and* Eryan?”

“No. More likely, Shell Mound after the Eryan had arrived, and the corded ware was a trade item.”

Thornton nodded. “Wow.”

“That’s what we said!” exclaimed Marku. “We’re putting together a presentation for the All-Genadema Conference next week. We want to project pictures. We’ve been using the museum’s phone to photograph the artifacts.”

“Send them to me and I’ll have my secretary prepare PowerPoint slides. I’ll have my computer there. On Dwodiu evening I’m making an informal presentation about my hike across the southern Spine. I’ve got lots of pictures. By the way, Géndonatroba is built at the site of an ancient road down the escarpment to the valley. They took me down it, asking to survey it so that the army can build a modern road there. They didn’t realize the route was so easy because it was an ancient road! There’s another one at Gépola, also, and you need to explore the pola above the modern village. There are ancient defensive earthworks and I saw some artifacts.”

“Definitely, but right now we have this shell mound. When can you come down to take a look?”

“Well, there’s the All-Génadema conference, then there’s the meeting of the House of Lords and Commons, which will keep me busy a few weeks. But after that I can. Maybe sooner, if there’s a break in the discussions.”

“Good, we’ll count on it!”

507.

Rural Prosperity

Kaiménu /end of June 24/642

“All rise for Her Majesty Queen Estoibidhé!” announced Wepokester. All the members of the House of Commons and House of Lords rose from their seats as Éra’s reigning monarch entered the Royal Theater, where an additional hundred lords were present, as well as five hundred members of the general public.

“Another legislative session,” noted Thornton to Chris, who nodded. He was sitting up front with the House of Lords, even though he had no authority; the red-tipped speaking baton belonged to Thornton that year.

“It’ll be interesting to see what this one brings,” added Chris. “Her Majesty seems to have some surprises in store.”

“The lords look tense.”

The queen walked to the front of the theater and sat briefly to remove her mantle. Then she walked to the podium, where her speech had already been placed by Wepokester.

“I am pleased to meet with the Parliament in its first session for the year 642. We enter this year, the third of our Four Year Development Plan, having completed the kingdom’s third decennial census, after seeing a record harvest, and witnessing a continuing spread of prosperity. The census tells us that 85% of households now have electric light, 75% have running water in or very near the home, half the population has flush toilets, half have gas stoves, and 20% have gas heat. Forty percent of our adults

have attended some public school; 60% say they can read a newspaper. Only 20% percent of our workforce is agricultural; 55% are employed in mining, manufacturing, timber, and construction, and 25% in services. The world now has 25,000 motor vehicles; roughly one family in five has access to a vehicle, either through their work or a relative. As for our material prosperity, the average household now has an income of 3,900 dhanay per year before taxes, 2,600 dhanay after; and our Gross Domestic Product now exceeds 400 million dhanay, which is exactly ten times our GDP 25 years ago. We no longer starve and freeze in the winter; our children no longer die from illnesses. We now have choices, possibilities, and hope that we didn't have in the past."

She paused because there was strong applause. She waited patiently for it to subside. "Twenty-five years ago, a quarter of our income went to 100 families. Today, the 100 richest families receive 15% of the income, and most of it is used for investment and growing the economy, not for personal luxury. Notably, a typical aristocratic family's income has increased two or three times rather than five times, like the average. We now have a definition of poverty: an income of 2.5 dhanay per day for a family of 4, or about 1,000 dhanay per year. By that definition, only 10% of our population lives in poverty today; 25 years ago, 75% did."

She had to pause for another sustained bout of applause. "From the point of view of the values our society stands for, there have also been great changes. Half of all women are now literate and a quarter work outside the house. Ninety-five percent of children aged 6 to 12 go to school. We used to have fifty crimes that theoretically one could be executed for, and if you were sentenced to prison, that was almost a death sentence anyway. Now, because of efficient police forces and well organized courts, there

are very few capital crimes, the prisons are much safer and better run, and a parole system is used for many minor offenses. With banks, people can save; with pensions, people can enjoy a comfortable old age; with inexpensive health care, people can take care of their teeth, get eyeglasses, and maintain good health into their 70s and 80s. The census reports that our life expectancy has risen from 31 years, 25 years ago, to 66 years today, and it is continuing to climb. Because we are no longer desperately fighting for survival and the future of our families and because we can trust the system more than ever before, we can share more, be generous, and be more honest in life. This is a very important change in our society.

“I have been contemplating these changes for several months now, and have considered their implications for the future. One important change is in the nature of the people themselves. Because of education, newspapers, and the radio, they have matured in their ability to make crucial decisions for the future of the kingdom and their own communities. This has raised the issue of the role that the aristocracy should play in our society and exactly what the hymns say and are understood to say about the aristocracy. We know there should be a monarchy and an aristocracy; both are mentioned in the hymns and are admonished to maintain justice and rule wisely. But the monarch has always had the right to convey or remove the rank of aristocrat. Some fifteen years ago my predecessor, Her Majesty Queen Dukterésto, formally created an institution that had only informally existed before; the institution of Duke and his role in leading a province. Time has shown that the province has been an important division of the kingdom, but the role of Duke has been less uniformly successful. Therefore I am instituting one very important change, to start before the next provincial legislative sessions next year. First,

every Duke must nominate a governor for his province, a role he himself can fulfill if he wishes. Second, that the choice of governor must be renewed every two years, after the general election, and that the governor must be approved by the provincial legislature. Third, that the provincial legislature sets the salary of the governor and decides whether the duke receives any provincial subsidy at all. A Duke who does not serve as governor may still play an important role in a province by bringing people together, speaking, ceremonially inaugurating projects, etc., and thus may receive provincial compensation for such public duties, as determined by the legislature. But Widumaj never said Dukes had to exist, therefore it is the monarch who can determine their role and set limitations on it.”

She paused and looked at the lords, who were particularly unhappy. “As monarch, it is my privilege as head of the state to appoint a Prime Minister to carry out day to day operations and determine the ways taxation is to be used for the common good, but Widumaj admonishes all aristocracy—of which the monarchy is part—to consult with the people. The custom of seeking input about the expenditures of the palace is ancient and well established; some twenty years ago, with the official establishment of the House of Commons and House of Lords, consultation with the two Houses was formally defined. To that responsibility I now add the important task of ratifying my choice of Prime Minister. This is a very important step because the Prime Minister must work closely with the two chambers. He must have your confidence as well as mine.”

That caused a stir of surprise and some applause from members of the Commons. “As has already been noted, the monarch has long had the authority to confer the rank of lord on someone, or remove that rank and responsibility permanently or temporarily. A

few months ago this became necessary in several townships. With the creation of formal township councils in every locality in the kingdom, the relationship between the traditional lord and this new formal institution has often been strained. Therefore, I am instituting some new procedures.

“First, the amount of local taxes that can go to the lord for his personal use is subject to the same budgeting responsibility as any other item in the township budget. In other words, the council and lord must agree on the figure, just as they must agree on the amount budgeted for education, for the village manager, or any other item. If the lord and council do not agree, the issue is to be appealed to me.

“Second, the Council now has the right to remove the lord from all responsibility over the township and strip him of all rights to an income from the local taxes, subject to my veto. Essentially, I am giving the local council an advisory capacity to my authority to confer or remove rank. I do this because they are the group most familiar with the lord’s effectiveness as a local leader. I will not be easily persuaded, however; think of this as the initiation of a divorce proceeding, which is to be followed by an attempt at reconciliation. Widumaj has given the lords the responsibility to lead, but it is not an unlimited right.

“Finally, regarding the rank of lord, on this day I am opening an additional township to settlement: Arjdhuna, due east of South Ménwika. I am budgeting 100,000 dhanay per year for two years to survey the township, pave a basic network of roads, gravel farm lanes, and establish a village site, complete with water, sewer, and utility lines. I am appointing two to aristocratic rank for the township: Lord Yusdu, son of Gurwekester, and his wife Dekané, and I leave it to them to decide how to divide the lordly responsibilities for establishing the township. I call on them to appoint a council as

soon as the township has enough people to need one. There will be a formal election of a council in 644, two years from now.”

There was applause. Chris beamed. ‘That’s fantastic!’

“They are an excellent choice,” agreed Thornton.

“The Palace has begun the planning process for opening additional townships,” continued the Queen. “We want to open them in as many provinces as possible so the surplus population in each can stay close to home. If plans proceed smoothly, next year we will open Béjpéla, Beech Hill, in the North Shore Province. It is located just north of Akeldædra. Heretofore, Lewéspe has kept most of its growing population, but to give it an additional outlet, Laksisérwika, Salmon River Town, will be opened next year or the next, thereby connecting its line of settlements to those of South Shore Province. In South Shore, Gramakela, Green Shore, is still filling. Swadnoma’s existing towns are just about full, so Swaddhudra, Sugarcane, will open next, just south of Gramdhunas. Based on the recommendations of the Royal Geological Survey, the kingdom has 38 additional townships we can settle representing some 4,000 square kilometers or 1.3 million agris. We will open them gradually as needed.

“I have one more announcement about townships and provinces. The township of Médhela, as everyone knows, now has a new lord, Andamékwes, the son of Wénu. He and Lord Andruleru of the Dwobergone have met several times at the palace and they have resolved some of the tension that has existed between their tribes for decades. As a result, Médhela has now been added to North Tutane province, and that province is now divided into two sections; one west of the Mégendres, consisting of the Dwobergone and the Medhelone, and one east of the Mégendres, consisting of the Kaitere, Mémene gone,

Késtone, and Kostekhéma. With that decision, every township in the Kingdom is now a part of a province and our system of provinces is complete.

“There are two other matters for us to consider today. The first is legislation to protect the character of our farmland. It is a goal of our development plan to protect rural communities and assure their prosperity. This legislation is designed to move us toward that goal. Prime Minister Mëndhru will present the details to you in a minute. The other is a line item in the proposed budget: a royal Ministry of Forests. There has been increased concern in the last few years that the existing provincial laws have been inadequate for protecting our forests. Large areas of Arjakwés and Véspe have been deforested, producing serious soil erosion, gullying, larger floods, and smaller rivers during droughts. Precious soil that will nourish the next generation is being washed away, plugging up our rivers. The Ministry of Forests will oversee the work of provincial forestry programs, standardize their policies, and will ensure that they have adequate funds to oversee the forests. Most forests are not in the jurisdictions of the townships, and while the provinces have heretofore had responsibility over them, the palace can legitimately claim the right to delegate as little or as much responsibility over the forests to the provinces as it wishes.

“These adjustments to the order of the kingdom are important additions to the Four Year Development Plan. They will strengthen its progress and move us toward a successful completion next year. In the next month we will be appointing a commission to begin work on our next Four Year Plan. With it, we will enter a new period for the development of the kingdom, a period that will focus more extensively on spiritual goals

while continuing our material progress. Your contributions to the plans through consultation remain centrally important and I look forward to the results.”

The queen ended her speech and paused at the podium for applause. “She has packed a lot into the speech,” said Thornton. “I don’t think the lords will be pleased or inclined to support the rest of the legislation.”

“I wonder how wise it was to announce the changes to their role,” agreed Chris. “But I suspect they have no choice but to support the bills.”

The queen stepped away from the podium and Prime Minister Mëndhru walked to it with his speech. “As Her Majesty mentioned, currently a fifth of our workforce is employed in farming. Only a twentieth of them earn their living as hired hands; 95% own their own farms. However, most of our people who live below the poverty line live on farms; to be exact, almost a quarter of our farm families are poor. Some of them have chosen not to use tractors and other mechanical aids to their work and consequently must farm small areas. Overcoming a prejudice against steam power and assisting them to obtain larger areas to farm through exchange of plots must be a high priority.

“That is the first of six actions that the Family Farm Commision proposes. It will involve education and discussion with individual farmers. Currently, the kingdom has only eight agriculture advisors, three of whom are hired by granges and three by génademas. There needs to be a royal agricultural extension service with experts able to advise and assist farmers. If we had one agent for every 500 farmers, we would need 50 agents. We propose reaching this number over the next five years. One of their tasks will be to talk to farmers about the land they use and to assist in the arranging of leases. They

can also help set up granges where there are none, or strengthen granges that need full-time assistance.

“Second, we propose that the expansion of bus service that has been tried in Arjakwés be extended to the entire kingdom. The first phase, paid for by Mēlwika and Mēddoakwés, made it much easier for people to move to the cities and back to the villages. Already, we see more interest in living in the villages and commuting to the cities for work and shopping. Farmers will find it easier to hold part time jobs when their farm work is slack. The cities will feel less pressure on their water and sewer systems and utilities; housing prices will not be pushed up by high demand, making them less livable. We are looking at ways to encourage private shared taxi services as well.

“Third, the villages will need assistance to improve their services. They will need to expand their sewer and water systems and utilities. Their businesses will face increased competition from the cities, which offer more choices. A program to provide grants to villages will help. All alleys need to be paved and the central area of each village needs sidewalks so people don’t walk in the mud or on the street. The grants can even be used to plant trees and beautify the villages so they are attractive and city dwellers will want to visit to eat and shop. If we do this, the distinction between city and country will be decreased.

“The kingdom has a policy of storing at least six months of basic staples such as wheat, corn, rice, and potatoes so that we can ride out a major disruption of the food supply because of the weather or another volcanic eruption. In the years since the policy was established in legislation, the population has grown about 30%, therefore more storage is needed. This proposal can be found in the budget submitted to the legislature.

“The preceding proposals received unanimous support from the commission. The following two received a strong majority. The Kingdom needs stronger minimum wage legislation. We propose two changes: first, the minimum should be raised to 50 dontay per hour, which at 50 hours a week and 65 weeks a year, gives an annual income of 1,625 dhanay before taxes. Furthermore, the minimum wage must apply to granges as well. They may continue their practice of arranging for farmers to exchange hours, of course, but if they are hiring non-grange workers—who are often farmers outside the grange system—they must be paid a minimum wage. This will raise food prices slightly, but it will improve the lives of the poorest.

“The final proposal will guarantee the continued strength of the granges. Currently, grange farmers pay their taxes through the granges, who generally purchase their harvest for resale or storage when the price is best. Granges charge the farmers 8.25% of their crop and use the income to provide health coverage, retirement pensions, free classes, and a number of other benefits, including an end of year dividend if the grange has a surplus. Much of the money goes to purchase equipment, fertilizer, and tools. We propose that granges receive a rebate equal to 1% of the harvest from the palace, thereby increasing their budgets by an eighth. This will allow them to purchase more and better equipment and provide better services, which should increase the efficiency of the farmers further. This 1% rebate would not be available to large private farms outside the grange system. That controversial decision, which naturally was objected to by the large farmers on the Commission, is proposed because large farms have an efficiency of scale that small farms do not, and which a grange can provide only at a cost. In other words, the rebate is being proposed as a way to stabilize smaller family

farms. The Commission is not recommending any caps on the size of farms, as was proposed to various provincial legislatures earlier this year. Some granges currently have caps on the size of the farms that can join their organization; others do not. That is a matter left to the granges.

“With this set of proposals, we hope to stabilize and perpetuate not just the family farm, but a prosperous life in our countryside. It is based on a vision of a society where people can—and perhaps should—live in relatively small face-to-face communities that are close to nature, but who nevertheless have opportunities for interesting work and collaboration with people all around our world. Such a world will require legislation to direct the flow of tax money, for the cities remain the engines of our growth and prosperity. But expanding prosperity beyond the cities is an effort that improves the cities as well, for they will be less crowded, less polluted, less expensive, and more livable. In short, by taking some of the advantages of the cities to the villages, we also take some of the advantages of the villages to the cities. Ultimately, that is the philosophy behind this legislation, which we now submit to the Houses of Commons and Lords for their careful consideration.”

Mendhru sat to enthusiastic applause by the House of Commons and polite applause by the House of Lords. Some of the former even stood. “Any surprises?” Thornton whispered to Chris.

Chris shook his head. “As you can probably guess, the one who opposed the tax rebate to the granges, but not to large farms, was Mitruiluku Kérékwes.”

“His closing comments about a vision of a prosperous agricultural countryside full of prosperous villages sounds like something you’d say.”

Chris nodded. “Yes, I said that in the meetings once.” He paused. “But the queen’s speech; that surprised me. We have to think about it a lot.”

The rest of the session was devoted to general speeches by representatives and lords about their areas. The two Houses had already held their organizational meetings and had finalized their rules; the session was meant to bring them together and set the agenda.

As Chris and Thornton were leaving, they saw Yusdu and Dekané, congratulated them, and invited them to dinner. Liz, Lébé, Lua, Behruz, Jordan, and Tiamaté were present to enjoy the soup, roast turkey, rice, and carrots as well.

“I can’t congratulate both of you enough!” said Liz. “I am thrilled that the Queen recognized the great capacity of both of you. I’m particularly impressed that she made the two of you co-lords, in effect! I have never heard of that being done before.”

“There have been co-lords,” replied Yusdu. “Lord Estodhéru and his daughter Mitrané are co-lords of Meddwoglubas. But that was the choice of Estodhéru. Dhor and Mitru are co-lords with their fathers here as well. I am not aware of the monarch ever declaring a husband and wife co-lords, however.”

“Nor I,” added Dekané. “It’s unprecedented.” She looked at her husband. “It’s going to be a strange new form of service together.”

“Yes, we’ll have to work it out,” agreed Yusdu. “I have no idea how one sets up a township and a village site.”

“That’s not a problem,” said Chris. “In the last 25 years, ten new townships have been set up just here on the eastern shore. There are contractors with experience; Estanu Tritejnai comes to mind. I think Moléstu Dénujenése could do it, too. You need a

thorough map of the township and to hire someone to run your grange for the first two years; at that point, the grange board is elected.”

“We have pretty good maps already,” added Thornton. “We also have detailed aerial photography, so we can generate an even better map for a few hundred dhanay. I’ve walked it once; it’s tall-grass prairie, rich soil, with a few springs and part-time creeks except the Okbelakwés, which is a permanent stream that flows across the northeastern corner of the township and into the Majakwés. The army and the Mégendres are extending their grand irrigation ditch all the way to the top of the Okbelakwés, so it will carry water into the township and ditches can divert it to the entire area. The ground is not very hilly and it slopes gradually toward the Majakwés.”

“Where would you locate the village site?” asked Yusdu.

“Probably where the Okbelakwés flows into the Majakwés, but that’s at the far end of the townsite,” replied Thornton. “You could really put it anywhere. The township currently has no roads at all, so one will need to be built, and probably a bridge over the Majakwés will be needed as well because Route 1 is right across the river.”

“And lots of graveled farm lanes,” added Yusdu. “How many farmers will it accommodate?”

“At 50 agris per farmer—which is the size most seem to want right now—it can accommodate 700 or 800 farmers,” said Thornton. “Once they get married and have kids, you’re talking about a population of 3,000 to 4,000. I should add that the far eastern end of the township should be in the next time zone, so you’ll have to make a decision about that. The town will need an elementary school and a middle school pretty quickly. The kids could come to Melwika High School.”

“For Arjdhuna, South Ménwika, and Deksawsuperakwa, it might make sense to set up a separate high school,” said Lébé. “It would also help anchor the villages down there.”

“Good point,” said Liz.

“Here’s another question for you,” said Yusdu. “The queen said that the lords no longer have a right to any of the taxation of their villages. Do you think Dëkané and I should ask for any of it? I’m not sure we have time to serve as village manager.”

“That’s a good question,” said Chris. “And I have been meaning to bring this up with Thornton and Jordan, both of whom are serving as lords.”

“We don’t accept any tax money from Mëlwika,” said Thornton. “The Ménwika side of the city generates almost 2 million dhanay of local taxes a year. We used to accept 10% of it and poured it back into the commercial sector, but we stopped doing that a few years ago. The Millers still accept 10%, and they put most of it into expanding Miller Motors.”

“We still accept a tenth of the tax income in Mëlita, though,” said Jordan. “We’ve been devoting it to the zoo and the commercial center, lately.”

“But now we need to talk to the township councils,” said Chris. “This is new. I think we should turn the Mëlita tax income back to the council with recommendations how they should spend it.”

“But what should we do? There won’t be a village council until there are residents,” said Dëkané.

“There also won’t be any tax income,” noted Thornton.

“But you will have to devote a lot of time to planning the township and the village site, so it is legitimate to ask for some compensation,” said Chris. “If you have enough income right now, you can donate your time, and service to others is an important gift we can give to our fellow humans. But if you feel you need some sort of compensation, that’s legitimate as well. This is a decision you need to make yourselves. No one can tell you what to do.”

“Thank you, you are right,” said Dekané. “This is a very strange opportunity for both of us to practice what we preach. I am supposed to be an expert at organizing villages, but I’m terrified at the thought of having to do it myself! And Yusdu is an expert at helping decide where industries and other facilities should be sited; now he has to decide what should actually go in a new town.”

“And without looking like I’m playing favorites.”

“It’s just like raising children,” said Liz. “You might think you can do a good job, but it isn’t until you actually have a child when you know whether you can do it!”

“We have a lot to learn, and quickly,” added Yusdu, with a nod.

508.

Village Sites

Kaiménu /early July 24/642

“The House of Lords should very definitely reject the five proposals of the Countryside Prosperity Bill,” exclaimed Lord Mitrudatu of Ora, as he began his speech. “The fundamental problem is that it unfairly transfers wealth from the cities to the villages. The cities are the engines of our prosperity, not the villages. In Véspe, for over twenty years our policy has been very clear and simple: if people want to earn more money, they should move to Ora. The villages are places for farmers, and certainly we want farmers not to be poor; but village beautification? Frequent bus service? If the workers move to the cities, they won’t need to sit on a bus for an hour! How often would a villager need to go to the city if his village has a store that sells basic necessities? All that store needs is a pickup to get the supplies every day or two.

“As for a tax rebate to granges, large farms are beneficial to the kingdom because they are more efficient. That’s why the granges are so concerned; they can’t compete. Right now, large farmers pay workers during the harvest a wage based on demand. A minimum wage law will force them to overpay. It may actually make them less competitive, because farmers trading their work through the grange will work long hours without having to pay each other, but a large farm will have to pay.

“In short, all these proposals are bad for the kingdom. Her Majesty has been fooled by the granges and the Menneas. The kingdom has been drifting for years and it is time to stand up against it. So I repeat: vote no.”

Mitrudatu sat to applause. Kandékwes, who as usual served as chair of the House, looked at the list of speakers. “Lord Brébéstu of Brébetroba.”

Brébéstu rose. “I am certainly in favor of cities being engines of growth; remember that I was governor of the South Shore for several years, so I know well the importance of Tripola in that province. But I also know that a house in Tripola now costs a third more than a similar house in a village. A house in Melwika or Mèddoakwés costs twice as much. Those are some reasons those cities want to spread out their growth. I also know that the smokestacks of Ora’s factories are upwind of the city and the pollution blows up the hill over most of the houses and stores. As Ora’s factories grow, the damage to the health of the residents will grow and the increased efficiency of centralization will be offset by environmental costs. Spread people out, spread the factories out, and the burden of pollution will be less. The cost of the busing is not significant and everyone will benefit from it.”

He sat to applause as well and Kandékwes recognized Lord Molkordu of Charnéfa. “I agree with Lord Mitrudatu. Look at the trouble that we have seen in the last three days since the queen gave her speech. The Charnéfa Village Council wants to meet with me to discuss my share of the tax money! I understand that just yesterday eight councils in the Néfa Basin met to discuss the money owed their lords and that the palace asked Lady Dékané to meet with them. Most likely Her Majesty herself will have to mediate!

“The minimum wage law will make things in the Basin even worse. Large farms—if there are any left after the land redistribution is complete—will find it difficult to survive. Our workers are low paid because they aren’t very efficient. All these changes

have already proved disruptive. The late Lord Albanu contracted with Pértatraniséer Plastics to supply them with corn from 2,000 agris of Basin land, so they can make the cornstarch they need to make plastic. Now they're scrambling to obtain a supply and we will have a shortage of plastics.

“So forget all of these proposals. They just waste money on poor areas and set back any progress that is possible. I'll vote no.”

The late Duke Albanu's close friend sat and Kandékwes scowled. “Lord Dontu of Yujdwoakwés.”

The arch conservative from the North Shore rose. “This proposal is a form of theft; theft from the cities, which produce so much because the smart, capable, ambitious people have left the countryside and moved to the cities. All this bill will do is encourage country people to sit back and live an unambitious life. The exception is the bus budget; I am in favor of that because the people in the North Basin want to get to Belledha and to farms in Swadnoma. If you want to help the countryside, let people bus to Belledha and other cities where they can get factory work. As for beautifying villages, this is just a waste of money that can be used to build more factories and pave more roads. We still don't have enough roads, and many of the roads need widening. Spend money on that!”

He sat and there was scattered applause. “Lord Amosu of Pértatraniséer,” said Kandékwes.

Amos rose and all eyes turned toward the black man. He had been chosen to serve in the House of Lords once before and he had never spoken, and he was nervous. “I feel compelled to comment on something my colleague Lord Molkordu made. I appreciate—and am a bit surprised—that he is concerned about the kingdom's supply of

plastic. Duke Albanu did indeed make a commitment to raise 2,000 agris of corn in order to supply Pértatrainsér's plastic manufacturing plants. We have two such plants, and there are two more in Swadnoma, owned by the Kérékwes Tomi and the Mélite Grange respectively, and a fifth plant will open in Brébetroba next year. Duka Albanu did indeed plant 2,000 agris in corn and it is gradually coming to harvest, and it is being sold to us. Some of that land is now fallow because its ownership has not been settled. But there is no shortage of corn and there won't be. All we have to do is call the All-Grange Council and tell them we need corn and they will call around and arrange the contracts with the granges that have it. The idea that we'll have a problem or that the kingdom will suffer a crisis is quite incorrect.

“And this illustrates exactly what the Néfa Basin needs: strong local agriculture supported by strong granges that can coordinate small-hold farmers and provide them with equipment and training. Our plastics plants can buy corn from northern Véspe, Swadnoma, the lower Arjakwés Valley, and many other places; that's not a problem. But why shouldn't we be able to get it from our own cousins? Those cousins are smart and capable men and women; no, honored Lord Dontu, they are not lazy, they just don't have opportunity. The purpose of this bill is to bring opportunity to the countryside. Give them the freedom to commute to the city if that is what they want. Give them the freedom to be a successful farmer if they want. Give them the freedom to do odd jobs for large-hold farmers and in the cities if they want. Give them the chance to marry and raise a family in decent comfort, and give them the chance to live in a small community where the streets are not mud covered with manure and there are no shops. Can we not afford to do that?

The speculation that it will cost the cities is just that, speculation. In the end, we may all gain from this legislation. So vote yes.”

He sat to fairly impressive applause, perhaps because the other lords were glad they had finally heard from him. Kandékwes smiled. “Lady Mitrané of Mëddwoglubas.”

Mitrané rose from her seat. “I was struck by Lord Dontu’s comment that this is theft, because I think it is wrong on several counts. First, cities have certain natural economic advantages that put the villages at a disadvantage. We all know it is cheaper to buy items by the dozen than to buy each item individually, and we know intuitively why: one transaction is easier and quicker than twelve; it is faster to pack up twelve items than to pack each one individually; etc. This is not just the secret to the economic advantage of cities; it is also the secret to the advantage of tomis, granges, gabrulis, large farms, and wealthy men in general. What this legislation seeks to do is level the playing field. With better transportation, businesses can be anywhere, not just in cities. People can live anywhere, so the villages will not lose their young people and the educated. And the villages can be attractive, pleasant places to live. Have you been to Melwika, where the streets are paved, there are sidewalks, the streets are lined with trees, there is no trash, and the storefronts are attractive? Was it theft for the city to use its money that way? No; it’s one of the reasons people want to live there. Clearly, they have not suffered. In Mëddwoglubas we are imitating Melwika.

“So let us level the playing field; it’s the right thing to do economically. But it is also our moral obligation. Are we not all cousins on this world? When the Sumi civilization collapsed a thousand years ago, the Eryan conquered the remnants and intermarried with the survivors, so we are all part Sumi, and all Sumis are part Eryan. It is

the obligation of the government to collect taxes from all and redistribute them to all to the benefit of all. If taxation is not theft, then the decisions to distribute the taxes fairly are also not theft. The villages of L  w  spa look forward to better bus service; we all have factories and this means a person can work in other villages. Our main streets are paved, but not the alleys, and our villages could use sidewalks. We need better sewers and not everyone has running water in their houses. Half our villages have stores and a third have bakeries; all of them should have both. Our villages will greatly benefit from the legislation to improve them. We have old, well-established granges and they could use the tax rebate. All of L  w  spa says yes, vote for this bill.”

Kand  kw  s looked at the long list of lords wishing to speak. “Lord Mitruiluku of K  r  kw  s.”

“I think all of you can guess that I was one of the voices on the Commission opposed to the tax rebate just for granges, and opposed to the minimum wage. I think they are very risky, untested interventions into the rural economy. They will certainly weaken the earning potential of largehold farmers such as myself, my brothers, and my sister, Duchess Sug  . They will certainly raise the cost of produce. I am also concerned about the plan to beautify villages. Villages need factories, not trees. K  r  kw  s has a lot of factories, but it has no trees.”

He sat to applause. “Duke Wal  kw  s of Gordha,” said Kand  kw  s.

The chief of the M  gendr  s tribe rose. “I have studied the proposed legislation quite closely and asked a lot of questions of some of the Commission members, and I am pleased with it overall, not just because it will benefit my tribe, but because I think it will benefit the entire kingdom. I understand Lord Mitruiluku’s argument that the price of

food will go up. But consider: it will go up a little because some people are poor, and they won't be as poor afterward. Is that not a reasonable exchange? The poor who get the minimum wage will certainly be better off, even after they pay a bit more for food. As for large hold farmers: perhaps they won't do quite as well, but I suspect they'll do fine. The important point is that they won't be able to drive down the price of produce and impoverish the smallholders. If they are having trouble making money, they can always sell off some of their land, become a smallholder, and join a grange!

“As for expanding bus service, there are two kinds of countryside; there is the Eryan countryside, with villages every few kilometers, and there is tutane countryside, where we are very far apart. We need a lot more bus service! We welcome this aspect of the bill. We also welcome legislation to improve our villages. Gordha needs sidewalks and trees, but what we really need is street lights, because we don't have Skanda at all. All our villages need street lights. Certainly, we need farm agents as well. We are in favor of this legislation.”

Thornton wasn't sure where to find Saré's restaurant. He had been to Terskua various times, but the village had no street names, so Marku had had no way to tell him where to go. Uncertain how easy it was to get to the archaeological site, he borrowed a pickup truck from the Royal Geological Survey.

Approaching the village on Route 1 from the east, the first thing Thornton saw was the new water tower, which held three times as much water as the tower they had before the fire. He was surprised to see an entire new neighborhood of the village on the north side of Route 1; the old village had only existed on the south side, but after selling

10,000 agris of farmland north of the road, nearly 200 young farmers had moved in. Most of the house lots had prefabs, but a few had wooden or brick houses being built around them, and many had vegetable gardens behind, a sure sign that wives had moved in as well.

He turned left and descended the steep hillside the old village was built on. The burned houses—3/4 of the old village—had been completely replaced with new structures, the street had been repaved, and Terskua actually had a sidewalk on one side of the street. Below he could see yet another new neighborhood spreading out over a former wheat field. At the bottom of the hill was the grange building, which had been expanded in the last two years. After taking a sharp hairpin turn to the right, he passed the elementary school and the village council offices. After that he came to the bakery with Dénujénese Construction's large facility beyond on the left and the Terskua Gabruli building on the right. It was followed by Saré's, a restaurant well placed for construction workers across the street and a women's cooperative next door. Thornton parked the pickup and went inside.

"You made it! Thanks for coming!" said Marku, rising from his table.

"Glad to, I never miss a chance to see an archaeological site." They shook hands.

"I'm glad to hear it. You have to go to Mēdha, then; they're finding some very interesting things in the Long Valley."

"I'd love to, and I'd like to take you to Gērpola. Maybe later this summer."

"That'd be good. I'm glad you can get away from the House of Lords."

"We don't meet Suksdius and Primdius. It's hard to sit four days a week through the debates."

“I can imagine! What are the chances the legislation will pass?”

Thornton shrugged. “It’s hard to say. The Commons will vote yes. Right now, after four days, the Lords will vote no, but I think there may have been a little movement. Whether there will be enough, I don’t know.”

“It strikes me as a tough fight.”

Thornton nodded. “Maybe we’ll get part way there this year, though. My father has an idea. But, let’s see the archaeological site.”

“You don’t want coffee?”

“No.”

“Alright, let me pay. We can take my truck.” Marku walked over to the counter and paid Saré. “We drive over here for lunch every day, or I ask Saré to pack lunch for everyone. This is a nice place.”

“This is an impressive village; one of the more progressive ones.”

“Obviously.”

They went outside and got into Marku’s pickup, which had “Royal Museum” painted on its sides. They drove to a narrow paved farm lane that headed toward the river, just three kilometers away, and followed it. Marku turned off onto a muddy track and followed the edge of a field greening with its second crop of corn until they reached a low bumpy mound of ground about five meters long and three wide.

He parked and they got out. A dozen young archaeologists looked up from their work. “Welcome,” said Marku. “So, you can see the size of the camp, or maybe I should say ‘village’ because we have excavated evidence of post holes.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Marku pointed. “At least one structure over there, round, about four meters across. It may have been seasonal. I suspect it was conical, covered by reeds. Most likely the low area right behind us was marsh and full of reeds and papyrus.”

“And the rest of the mound was a midden?”

“The main part was over there. It was the highest part. But the bones and shells got spread out over time, so this structure was overlain by a scattering of midden from the mound. People must have lived here for several generations. We might find other post holes if we dig over a larger area, or maybe the ground was disturbed too much by plowing. If you walk through the corn field, you’ll find flint tools. It is also possible that most people lived in brush shelters and tents.”

“Any more potsherds?”

“We found another fragment, but it may have been from the same pot. It’s also Gordha corded ware I; the oldest layer of Eryan settlement there. But we have found a few other things. Dog bones; they had domesticated dogs, but no other animals. A fireplace with a collection of thin, flat rocks around it; they may have been used as surfaces to cook seed cakes, a sort of bread from wild seeds. But the most interesting thing of all was found over here.” He led Thornton to the far side of the mound where they were excavating an area. “There was a skeleton here, probably of a man; the Melwika Medical School will examine the remains for us. He would have been about 150 centimeters tall, based on the leg bones. His upper right arm bone had a nasty, deep cut. It was thin and straight; something made by a sharp edge, like a sword. Flint axes wouldn’t make such a narrow cut and I doubt an obsidian knife would be used that way, either.”

“So: a fight with another group?”

Marku nodded. “Eryan or Sumi; we have no way of knowing. We have found what appears to be the remnant of a bronze knife, and if we are right, it looks Sumi. The Shell Mound people were located between the Eryan, expanding westward from Gordha, and the Sumis, who had probably colonized Lilalara and were expanding eastward.”

“Interesting, and they had inferior technology, so they stood no chance.”

“But they appreciated things of beauty. We have found very nice beads made out of cowrie shells.”

“More trade.” Thornton looked down at the ground, contemplating the findings. Then he looked around at the area. To the south, the ground dropped two meters to the floodplain of the Majakwés. The river was 200 meters away, but there was a loop of swamp right below the archaeological site; an old meander of the river, now converted into a swampy oxbow lake. “This must have been a great place to live. The floodplain would have had birds and abundant plant life, the river had fish—even if it has none now!—and the rest of the valley would have been grassland and scattered trees, with abundant game.”

Marku nodded. “It would have been beautiful, if you have the ecology right. Easy living for a tribe of a couple hundred. In Gədhéma, hunter-gatherer bands are about that size.”

Thornton walked to the dropoff and looked down at the oxbow. “I wonder whether this was here when the shell mound people were.”

“It’s possible. If so, we’re talking about 4500 or 4600 years ago, based on the assumption that Corded Ware I at Gordha matches the corded ware culture in south-central Europe.”

“That’s the date people arrived here?”

We think so. The earliest Sumi artifacts match artifacts from 4600 years ago in Sumeria, also. That also matches linguistic evidence; the Sumi spoken here has a significant admixture of Eastern Semitic words, like *réb* for ‘four,’ because they were gradually being conquered by the Semites. Even the word ‘Sumi’ reflects the Semitic word for the Sumerians, *Shuméru*, possibly a dialectical variant. ”

“Interesting.”

“By the way, the oldest tablets we’ve found at Lilalara can now be partly read. The king there calls himself the king of the *saggig*, which means ‘black headed people.’ That’s what the Sumerians called themselves. But there is a tablet that refers to the *saghush*, ‘red-headed people,’ which probably refers to the Eryan. And there’s one reference that seems to be to enslaving ‘brown-headed people.’ I wonder if that’s the Shell Mound people.”

“Intriguing! If the climate 4600 years ago was the same as today—which it should have been—the prairies and woodlands of the eastern shore could have easily supported a thousand or two people, so they wouldn’t have disappeared right away.” Thornton looked out over the floodplain. “Have you heard of palynology?” He used the English word.

“Yes, of course. We call it *dhustigénta*.”

Thornton nodded. *Dhusti* literally meant “dust.” “That makes sense. I didn’t remember the translation. I wonder whether we could extract a core of mud from the oxbow and analyze the *behusti*, pollen.”

“Who would do it?”

“I have a student in the Geology and Environmental Sciences Department looking for a Master’s degree topic, and I wouldn’t mind assisting him with this.”

Marku smiled. “That would be great! And it is possible you’ll hit some artifacts as well.”

“Maybe. I’ll contact the student and see if he’s interested. If so, I’ll let you know.”

The next day—Primdiu—Thornton had another trip, to the Kérékwé brothers in Swadakwés with his father and Jordan. The three of them got in Jordan’s car with his driver and assistant, Sagéstu, a bit before 1 p.m. in order to meet the the Kérékwé clan at the site of their future tomi headquarters an hour later at 1 p.m. there. It was a rather desolate spot, a construction site surrounded by corn and wheat fields.

“We’re not moved in, obviously,” said Mitruiluku, the oldest brother. “But we wanted you to see the site. The building will be thirty meters by fifteen and three stories high. It’ll have air conditioning and a lot of glass.”

“Why here? Is this where the three townships come together?” asked Chris.

“Yes, exactly. We’ll develop an industrial park here as well.” He pointed to a prefab nearby. “Come into the construction headquarters, we’ve cleared a table for us to sit together.” He led them to the trailer and they stepped inside. It was pleasantly cool from the air conditioning.

“So, if you’re putting more factories here, how will you divide up the taxation?” asked Chris, curious.

“We’ll put some near here. Each township has to collect the taxes from the factories on its own land,” replied Mitruiluku.

“But we pool a lot of our costs,” Duchess Sugé, “We have a single high school for all three townships, a single health department and clinics for all three, and other services as well.”

“Our three townships have almost 13,000 people among them; more than Melita,” added Mitrulubu.

“So, are you relocating the industrial waste pipeline to run along the township line?” asked Thornton.

“Ah yes, the pipeline; the subject of our meeting,” replied Mitrubbaru of North Gramakwés. “That’s the idea. I’ll put my factories between here and North Gramakwés Center, which is just 2 kilometers up Route 1. Most of them are there already.”

“And the Gramakwés ones have been built around the Bluewater gas plant and the biogas digesters,” said Mitrulubu of Gramakwés. “They’re right on the border where it reaches the sea and where the sewage treatment plant is already located.”

“I’ll put my new ones along the border,” said Mitruiluku of Kérékwés. “Route 7 connects North Gramakwés and Kérékwés and parallels the border but is just two kilometers from it. We can use it for access.”

“I’m just investing in theirs,” added Sugé.

“That means the pipeline needs to be moved,” said Thornton. He pulled out the map.

“Assuming we can get the funding for it,” added Mitruiluku skeptically.

Thornton nodded and ran his hand along the border. “The total length of pipeline actually won’t change much. But we do have a different change of route to suggest. Last year the oceanography students threw 200 bottles into the sea at 10 different locations.

That allowed us to study the currents. They were what we expected. The western shore has currents that run toward the equator and then cross to the eastern shore to the north and south of Sumilara; when they reach the eastern shore they turn toward the poles. Your townships are opposite Sumilara, so there are no strong currents in the sea here. That means industrial wastes may build up in the water here, especially considering that there's a coral reef ten kilometers offshore."

"So, what are you saying?" asked Sugé, puzzled.

"It means we need to try to dilute and naturally process the industrial waste as much as possible," said Thornton. "I've looked at aerial photos of the shoreline, but I need to walk it to be sure. It appears that there's a spot in Gramakwés about four kilometers south of the Bluewater gas plant where the beach deposit is fairly wide; fifty meters or so. Older photos show that the beach there has been accumulating sand. Prevailing winds from the east push the sand northeastward along the coast and there's a rocky prominence there that catches it. If we locate the end of the industrial waste pipeline and the settling ponds there and excavate a ditch in the sand about 100 meters long and as far from the sea as possible, the waste water will seep slowly through the fifty meters of sand and into the sea. We'll have to throw lime in every week to neutralize any acidity that's left after the water has left the settling ponds, and that will cause some remaining heavy metals to precipitate out, so every five or ten years the ditch will have to be excavated and the toxic mud packed into barrels and sent to the hazardous waste storage facility near Sértroba."

"How much will leak into the sea?" asked Sugé, concerned.

“Maybe as much as a third. Most will end up in the settling ponds and the ditch and some will be trapped in the sand.”

“At the Bluewater gas plant we dredged to make a harbor for the timber ships, and you had said we could locate the settling ponds and the effluent ditch there because it’d be sufficient,” said Mitruiluku, skeptically.

“I was hoping that would be the case, but testing there shows that percolation through just a few meters of sand and mud is not sufficient, and the currents are not strong enough to dissipate any waste that makes it into the sea. I’d definitely recommend we move the settling ponds and effluent ditch farther south to the sandy stretch of the coast. That area is also farther from the coral reefs and closer to the southward current.”

“Four kilometers of pipe will cost only 20,000 dhanay to lay,” noted Chris. “And this new site is much closer to Gramakwés, so the industrial waste pipeline from Gramakwés would have to be only half as long. In that case, there’s no change in total cost.”

“True, but the hazardous waste disposal cost will be a lot more, ultimately,” said Mitruiluku. “The old system would have dissipated about two third of the wastes in the sea and we were counting on the currents to spread and dilute it. Now we will have to dig up and haul away two thirds of it.”

“But brother, we have to protect the sea as well; our towns have quite a few fishermen,” said Sugé. “Our lobster, crabs, oysters, and fish are selling well and we are planning a fish processing plant to sell frozen fish.”

“And heavy metals will render fish potentially harmful to people’s health,” added Thornton.

“The pipes won’t cost any more, at least,” said Mitrulubu. “I was planning to pipe my hazardous industrial waste to the disposal facility.”

“We might be able to get a government subsidy for it,” said Mitrubbaru, looking at his sister.

“The province probably can help,” she agreed. “We’re talking about waste from four towns and factories that generate half the province’s jobs and taxes.”

“It’s possible we can get some support from Arjakwes as well,” suggested Chris. “If we extend the pipeline 16 kilometers farther north, it’ll reach the Triwika industrial park. I’d like to see that happen eventually.”

“We definitely need to do this, brothers,” urged Sugé. “I know you are concerned about the bottom line and I understand that. That concern has allowed you to accumulate a lot of wealth. But we have to protect the environment as well. The population grows every year and its consumption increases annually. We will soon start to do serious damage.”

“We are better off taking care of the environment as much as we can,” agreed Jordan. “And that will create jobs. The hazardous waste plant will employ a dozen people. Demand for seafood can only go up. If you poison the land with wastes, it won’t be available for farming. Melita is pumping its industrial waste into the ground, but it may start to contaminate the irrigation water. We can’t continue that practice.”

“Triwika may be contaminating the Ornakwés,” added Chris. “That’ll contaminate the water supply for Ornakwés township and pollute the lower Majakwés.”

“I understand,” said Mitruiluku, though he didn’t sound persuaded.

“At least we have a monopoly on most of our products, so raising their prices isn’t a serious problem,” noted Mirubbaru.

“We can get a development grant from the palace for some of the costs,” said Chris. “We’ll need 60 kilometers of large-diameter pipe to extend the pipe all the way to Triwika. That’ll cost 300,000 dhanay. The plant, settling ponds, and effluent ditch will cost 100,000 to set up and about 50,000 per year to run.”

And we may be able to decrease the leakage of heavy metals and organic poisons into the sea even more,” said Thornton. “The chemists are working on other neutralizing agents we can add to the settling ponds.”

“Melita’s and Triwika’s share is half,” said Sugé. “We must do it, brothers.”

Mitruiluku sighed. “Look, I understand the idea, but I am not convinced that the damage will be significant enough to spend the money. Two hundred thousand is a lot for us!”

Chris had suspected Sugé was the family’s idealist. “This is very similar to the situation with the smallholder farmers, lords. We need to plan long-term to support their farms. There is a cost, but long-term there is a great benefit. We don’t want the countryside to be emptied out and have big farms surrounded by little cottages holding poor families. Those poor families won’t be able to buy the goods your factories produce.”

“That’s very true,” said Sugé immediately.

“Don’t worry about it so much,” Mitruiluku admonished his sister.

“You know, according to the census, Gramakwés is now larger than Kérékwes,” said Mitrulubu. “We have the same amount of farmland and similar amounts of factory

jobs. But I don't have any large farms; all the land belongs to smallholder farmers. I sold it all off years ago. And my tax collection per capita is a little higher than in Kérékwes. The farmers earn more money."

"Good for you."

"I only have smallholder farmers as well," said Mitrubbaru.

"And I sold off almost all of the estate you gave me," added Sugé. "I wouldn't mind selling the rest."

"Look, please drop this matter. We're here to discuss a hazardous waste line, not current legislation," replied Mitruiluku.

There was silence for a moment. "My friend Mitruiluku, I remember our discussions on the farm commission. You were gravely concerned about the rebate legislation and the minimum wage and it was partly because of your own fortune, but it was also because of the uncertainty of their effects. You have a big heart and you were swayed by concern for the smallholder farmers, too; I felt it. I also felt that you have a similar mix of concerns about this pipeline; it may just end up costing a lot of money and it is not clear that without it, the environment and fishing will be harmed. I think if we were to ask Thornton further, he'd be able to assure you that the damage will be significant, but that's not what I want to say. Rather, I want to assuage your financial concerns in a very simple and direct way." Chris paused. "If you vote to support the minimum wage, the tax rebate for granges, and the other aspects of this legislation, I will guarantee that all 400,000 dhanay of the cost of the pipeline will be covered. In other words, it won't cost Kérékwes tomi a single dontay."

Mitruiluku looked at him, startled. Jordan looked like he was ready to faint.

“You’ll pay for the whole thing?”

“No, I didn’t say that. I’ll talk to the palace about a development grant and we’ll seek support from the two provinces. Because the money is there, and this is something the government should help with. Our four townships pay over 8 million dhanay in taxes a year; 2.5 million to the townships, over 5 million to the palace, and 800,000 to the province. Half of that comes from manufacturing. This hazardous waste system is a very important investment in the future.”

Mitruiluku started at Chris. “You have never said such a thing to me before.”

“You are right, I haven’t. But the legislation is important.”

He considered. “Alright, you have a deal.”

“Will you speak out in favor of the legislation?”

“Alright, fine. I’ll vote in favor, and I’ll tell people I will.”

“Thank you.”

They shook hands, then all eight of them shook hands about the pipeline. After a few minutes of small talk, the Mennea party departed.

“Grandpa, you may have just put a huge hole in our budget!” said Jordan, extremely concerned.

“Maybe. But my guess is that we can get 200,000 dhanay from the palace and 50,000 from each province, plus some from Melita, and we can always borrow the rest. And I’ll tell you this. I was prepared to make that offer just to get the pipeline, because it’s that important. We are contaminating the Ornakwés and Melita’s ground water. What I wasn’t sure about was whether I could get his support for the legislation.”

“And if he backs out?”

“We’ll pursue the pipeline next year.”

509.

Ethical Governance

1 Dhonménu /22 July 24/642

“I’m glad to see you can ride a horse,” Yusdu said to Thornton. He mounted his steed as well and slipped his right foot into the stirrup. “Did you learn on Gædhéma?”

“No, I learned here. When we arrived here, I was 17 and had been in boarding school in Kenya—that’s the country Amos is from—for my senior year of high school. There was no horse riding there.”

“Just cars?”

“Cars, and many of the rural people had cattle, or they farmed. They lived rather like the Kwolone or Mégendres, I’d say.”

“Really? I didn’t realize there were backward parts of Gædhéma.”

“Oh yes, there was a huge range.” Thornton pointed to the rear of South Ménwika’s grange building. “There’s a farm lane back there.”

“Good.” Yusdu spurred his horse forward and Thornton followed. They rode around the side of the stable—the grange had a dozen horses for rent to farmers—and turned south along the lane that ran behind the main grange building. After a hundred meters they came to a graveled lane that went east. “This must be the one.”

“Yes, this is it. It goes 6 kilometers to the eastern edge of South Ménwika.”

“Then it’s 9 kilometers of prairie before we get to the probable village site for Arjdhuna. How much of the 100,000 dhanay will be spent, just paving the road!”

“Oh, don’t get the road that way,” replied Thornton. “I know how you get the army to pave it for free. Route 5 runs from near Melita to South Ménwika, where it ends. If it continued on east, it would run through your township, then through the next township, and then across the Mégendré prairies to Gordha. I happen to know that the Mégendré want such a road bisecting their grasslands south of the Majakwés. I can write Duke Walékwes and get that in writing, and then you make a formal and urgent request that the army extend Route 5 to your townsite in preparation for its extension across Mégendré territory. They have a budget for their road work, so they won’t charge you.”

“Good, because I’ve been looking at the budget and it’s hard to start a town with 200,000 dhanay!”

“You have to plan the roads carefully. If the army completes Route 5, then you’ll need farm lanes every kilometer. You build them as the land is opened to farming; that way the mortgage payments pay for the new roads.”

“That makes sense.” Yusdu admired the fields on both sides of them. “This must be rich land.”

“Yes, and the farmers have been practicing crop rotation and using fertilizer, and if there is drought they can irrigate. South Ménwika has a series of irrigation ditches, with a pipeline to take water from the river up to a reservoir in one of the township’s highest spots. Once the Mégendré complete their irrigation ditch, we won’t have to pump water up and that will save money.”

They passed one field, full of growing corn—the second crop of the season—and reached a fallow field. Thornton pointed. “See the roofing tile in the field? There was a house there, once.”

“Really? Out here? How long ago?”

“I don’t know, but if we dismount and poke around, we could probably find some broken pottery. That’d tell us whether it was Sumi or Eryan. My guess is that it’s Sumi from the time of maximum population, before the drying up of the sea. They had a series of forts across this area to guard against Gordha. Just about all of South Ménwika is inside their old frontier.”

“Do you know how to recognize the pottery types?”

“No! Marku’s the expert. They have reconstructed a whole series of pottery styles and roughly dated them. Who would have known that pottery could be so distinctive? If they find them mixed with old coins, also, they can determine the exact date if they can figure out which king minted the coins.”

“Ah, I see. It’s amazing we can figure out so much about the past.”

“It is.”

They rode on through fields of corn, winter wheat, vegetables, hemp, flax, and occasional orchards and vineyards. When they reached the end of South Ménwika, the graveled lane abruptly ended, but there was a beaten down trail. “Hunters,” said Thornton.

Yusdu nodded and looked at the land that was his new township. “This is beautiful land. The grass is tall; this is fertile and well watered land.”

“It is. I’m sorry Dëkané couldn’t make it.”

“She is, too, but the queen asked her to come with her to Rudhisér. They’re starting there, to assist with the land redistribution, then will backtrack to the north shore provinces. I’ll join them in two days.”

“An unusual itinerary for Her Majesty’s annual tour of the kingdom, but Rudhisér needs attention right now,” said Thornton, nodding. He pointed to a low rise a few hundred meters away. “Lions.”

“I see them. They won’t bother us, but I suppose the farmers have to protect their animals.”

“They have been a problem. The hunters have killed a lot of the game, so they must be hungry. Of course, once this area is farmed, the lions will have to move to the prairie south of here.”

“Now that I have seen part of South Ménwika, I can see that the land here is basically the same. Once the sod is broken—which is the hardest part—it’s good farmland.”

“Exactly right. It’s not rocky, it’s fairly flat, it has a good slope except for occasional ravines, it’s fairly easy to irrigate, and it’ll yield two crops per year. The South Ménwika Grange would be glad to contract with you to survey the township, mark the major lanes, and draw up maps so the land can be sold.”

“Good, I’ll ask them.”

They continued across the township, talking about the news and other items. It took two hours to reach the Okbelakwés, a small ravine barely two meters across with a trickle of water. Yusdu was disappointed that it was the biggest watercourse in the township, though it’d be much larger once the irrigation ditch reached it in the fall. They followed it northwestward until they reached the Majakwés.

“So, here we are, 20 kilometers east of South Ménwika.” Yusdu looked around. The grassland where they were standing was almost three meters above the floodplain of

the Majakwés, all of which was property of the Dwobergone tribe; Yusdu's township ended at the dropoff. The Okbelakwés, as it approached the floodplain, excavated itself a deep ravine. Otherwise, the ground was flat except for a low rise across the creek. "I suppose this is as good a townsite as any. It's a long way from South Ménwika, but with a pickup truck it'd only be 15 or 20 minutes." He pointed. "We could put the town square here, with space for buildings all around it."

"You'll need room for a school for grades 1 through 8 that can be expanded, with a playground and a soccer field, and a grange. Until the place has close to 1,000 people, it won't have any stores; after that it'll get a store, bakery, and barber shop first. That's the usual pattern, anyway. The contractor will lay out a grid of streets that can be expanded as the population grows."

"We'll want a bridge to Route 1."

Thornton looked across the floodplain, a kilometer-wide stretch of marsh and woods full of birds. "The Dwobergone will have to agree to it, which they will, especially if you make it clear they are welcome to visit and shop. Keeping your people off the floodplain will be a real headache; people will want to hunt, fish, and gather herbs and vegetables."

Yusdu nodded. He seemed lost in thought. "I don't know how we'll do this."

"What do you mean? It's been done many times before!"

"I know, but this is different. Dëkané is the head of the village support consultancy, so she has to be enlightened and just. And I'm the Queen's close cousin; I have to do it right as well. It's a very heavy responsibility."

“Especially now that village councils are going after their lords for neglect. It can be difficult. I attend all the meetings of the Melwika city council and the South Ménwika village council and sometimes they get difficult.”

“Were they criticizing you or your family?”

“Not usually. It was just politics. People have egos.”

“Yes, of course.” He sighed. “*Demokrasia*.”

“Exactly.”

Yusdu looked around the site another time. “I’ll have to ask Dekané what businesses we should encourage, how to lay out the village center, and how quickly it can grow. She probably has a pretty good idea; she has visited a lot of villages. Your father would have a good idea about the timing of the growth, too. And I should contact Mitrésu Méndhig; he designed New Square and Grand Avenue.”

“He’ll cost you a lot, and he may not know how to design a village!”

“But I think he’ll be worth it, long term. Who do I hire to build the village center?”

“My father suggested Estanu or Moléstu. Estanu has built Wëranowika, Orntroba, and Gramdhunas. Moléstu designed the expansion of Terskua and it is nicely done. He’s also honest and a very creative builder.”

“I see. I’ll ask around and see what others say. Let’s head back now. I’d like to ride along the northern edge of the township where I can look down on the floodplain. Maybe there’s a better spot for the village center.”

Queen Estoibidhé rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she headed for the large assembly hall in Néfa's old palace. She much preferred staying at the Palace Hotel in Pértatranisér; it was much more comfortable and modern than the old, drafty, and poorly air conditioned palace of the late Duke Albanu. But staying in the palace was the only way she could get Awwskandu expelled from his living quarters, which he no longer had any right to. He was settled into a rented house, in Pértatranisér ironically enough, and appeared likely to stay out of the palace permanently.

She stopped outside the hall, which was full of people, to talk to Wépokester, Mégékwes, and Judges Wérgéndu, Krénanu, and Rudhékwwu. They quickly reviewed the issues she would have to deal with, all of which she had read about in detail already. Nodding, she led them inside.

The crowd of several hundred rose as Wépokester announced her. She entered the side door and walked to the stage. "Please be seated." She paused. "Thank you. I am very happy to be here in Rudhisér, somewhat early and for several extra days, in order to assist the province with its healing. A lot has happened in the last few months. A new era has dawned. The province is now organized by its assembly and governor. It has a duchess who advises and supports the people and their efforts and organizations. I understand that paving has started on roads to six villages that still have no good access to the outside. Graveling of farm lanes has expanded.

"The Basin has been divided into five school districts and prefabricated classrooms have been ordered so that five schools for 5th through 8th graders can open this fall. Bus routes are being devised to move the kids from the villages to the schools;

thanks to the new legislation expanding bus service, the entire province's bus service is being redesigned, and the schools will be used as transfer points.

“Néfa has no lord right now; there will be no announcement about Aws кандu Doma-Néfa's status while I am visiting the province. Meanwhile, it has a city council and a very capable mayor. Rudhisér has a lot of farmers who want land, and our three judges, here, have been awarding it. That process is almost finished; as soon as the current crop on the land is harvested, it will be turned over to the new owners. The granges in the Basin and those right outside are dedicated to helping the farmers in the Basin to use their land effectively. One of my tasks today is to handle the appeals to their decisions. One particular appeal tends to represent many of the issues and principles. The first is . . . Arvarjú from Váranúagras. Arvarjú, are you here?”

A thirty year old man rose from the audience.” “I am here, Your Majesty.”

“Come forward and state your case, honored.”

Arvargú walked to the front of the hall and stood at a spot on the side where he could look at the queen and the audience at once. “Your Majesty, my request is very simple and direct. Currently, I am farming 200 agris of land that belonged to the late Lord Albanu. I did this as a sharecropper using his equipment, which I also helped to maintain. I planted it in wheat because with a tractor to harrow and plant, and a thresher to harvest, one man can farm 200 agris without practically any help if he staggers the planting. I earned only 2,000 dhanay per year from the job, too; the Lord kept the rest. I applied for title for the whole thing; I've been farming it eight years and I want to continue. Judge Kréнанu awarded me only 80 agris. I am appealing his decision to you, Your Majesty.”

“I see. How much can you earn per agri?”

“Fifty or sixty dhanay, Your Majesty.”

“I see.” She pulled out a piece of paper. “But I am told that when Ornpétru interviewed you, you said 60, and that if farmed properly, the land could yield 100.”

“One hundred is a theoretical number, Your Majesty.”

“But you said your cousin in Lepawsdomas managed 100 dhanay per agri on his land.”

“Did I? I don’t recall.”

“If you had 200 agris and earned 100 per agri, that would be 20,000, right? Assuming half goes to taxes and grange fees, you’d take home 10,000, wouldn’t you?”

“I would. Even at 60 dhanay per agri, I’d manage 6,000. But why shouldn’t I? The judges are banning large incomes and they have no right to do that.”

“You are correct that legally, they can’t ban large incomes. But we have 60,000 agris for redistribution and farmers have requested 85,000 agris. Much of that land had been farmed by those families for more than one generation. Therefore, they have decided to set a maximum settlement of 80 agris.”

But with that, I can only earn 2,400, Your Majesty. I used to earn 1,500 as headman of Váranúagras, too, so I had a decent income between that and the 2,000 I earned for farming 200 agris. Now the village council has decided that I will get only 500 dhanay.”

“Why is that?”

“They decided that I only do that much work, Your Majesty.”

“Is that true, do you think?”

He hesitated. “I only do a few hours of work per week, so I suppose it’s fair.”

“I see. It sounds like Duke Albanu and Lord Váranúbárú had a scheme to pay you for your farm work out of the tax portion, so they could keep more of the harvest. If you farm 80 agris efficiently, harvesting at the right time and applying fertilizer, you’ll earn about 4,000 after taxes and fees, right? Add 500 to that and you’ll have 4,500.”

“Ah . . . correct, Your Majesty, *if* I can farm the land efficiently. Equipment shortages have been a problem.”

“Well, the granges now have development grants to purchase more. Your appeal is denied, Arvarjú. But I will remind you of this: the cap on acquisition of farmland applies only to the judgments of the court. If you have the cash, you can go out tomorrow and buy more land. My recommendation to you would be to farm your 80 agris very efficiently—you can probably get 3 crops a year on it, maybe even 4—earn extra money, and buy more land. Meanwhile, the grange for Southwest Rudhisér is small and inexperienced and needs leadership. You are in the position to serve it with your ideas and management skills. I would urge you to become active in the grange.”

“I will take the idea into advisement, Your Majesty,” he said, disappointed.

“Excellent. The next case is Mitromaju of Charnéfa.”

He rose; he wanted to appeal a similar decision to limit his land. Mitromaju rose.

“I... withdraw my appeal, Your Majesty.”

She glanced at the information and nodded. “A wise decision, Honored. Anér of Nénaskaita, seeking 140 agris rather than 80; what say you?”

He rose. “Well, Your Majesty, I’d really like to continue farming 140 agris, but with better equipment and more efficient planting, I suppose I can manage with 80.”

“Very good. Please do, honored, and assist your neighbors to farm the land more efficiently as well. I have fifteen more cases here of men wanting 100 to 300 agris of land instead of 80. Do any of you have a reason I should consider your appeals?”

No one rose or spoke. She remained silent for ten seconds to give everyone time to speak up. “Very well, I will deny all your cases. I appreciate your willingness to accept this decision of the court. We need to provide farmers with land. Many of them have asked for only 10 or 20 agris, which is enough to feed one’s family and earn a little spare cash to supplement a factory or service job. That is fine, if that is what they want. It is particularly notable that 500 families in Néfa itself wanted between 3 and 15 agris each. We were able to find land near the city for them; all of them. We still have a series of cases to resolve where people are requesting different plots of land than the one they received, or two families are both requesting the same field. We will now turn to those cases.”

When Queen Estoibidhé entered the conference room and the audience rose to applaud her, she was immediately struck by an unexpected feeling of excitement; a thrill of solidarity and love she had never felt from an audience before. Of the over 200 human beings in the room, no more than 2 or 3 were men.

She had never experienced an all-female audience before. It was amazing and it made her wonder why such a thing had never occurred on Éra before.

She strode to the stage and walked to the podium. Melitané Dénujenése, Chair of the All-Gabruli Council, bowed to her, as did two other members of the council and representatives of the Néfa, Pértatranisé, Lepawsdomas, and Luktrudema gabrulis. The

Queen responded by offering each of them a hand; a most unusual response, which thrilled them and caused an even stronger swell of applause from the audience. She walked to the podium.

“You may all be seated.” The audience sat and she looked over the 200 women gathered before her. They were all thrilled to see their queen, but clearly they were also thrilled to see each other. “How many of you are from the city of Néfa?” Sixty hands went up. “From Pértatranisér?” Fifty more. “From the townships east and north of the Basin?” Twenty. “Basin villages?” Seventy hands. “Wow. Fantastic. The entire province is here. We have the women’s leadership of Rudhisér province right here.” She paused and applauded them; they responded by applauding enthusiastically.

“A gathering like this is not unusual for Melitané and other members of the All-Gabruli Council, but I have never been in a large gathering of women before. Maybe it is time for us to call a women’s conference for the entire kingdom. Wouldn’t that be amazing?”

A wave of applause hit her in response. They felt it, too. The queen turned to Melitané, who was surprised by the idea and nodded. The queen reached into a pocket and pulled out her notes. “Today is the fifth day of my visit to Néfa. The first four were occupied with appeals of land judgments and other legal issues every morning. The appeals all came from men. There was also a three-day conference about ethical governance for the village and city councils of the province, an excellent conference chaired very ably by Dekané—” She pointed to Dekané, “—who, I should add, was usually the only woman in the room. There were no women at all on the elected councils of this

province. None. That needs to change in two years, and you are the people who will do it.”

She paused for another wave of applause. “And the way to do that is to advance through the formation of gabrulis. We have here the members of the councils of all four gabrulis in the province: in Néfa, Pértartranisér, Luktrudema, and Lɛpawsdomas. These are all relatively large places. We’d like to see gabrulis form in groups of villages and eventually in each village, so women can help each other to get ahead. In Terskua, where Melitané is from, there are now 400 households, and just about every woman has joined the gabruli. It has its own large building, it has a large kitchen where women make jams and sauces together for sale to Home Improvement, they sew and knit together, and they make perfumes together using thousands of kilograms of flower petals every year. The gabruli helped a group of women open a bakery, then a laundry with washing machines, then a beauty salon and barber shop. You see how the gabrulis can work? Everyone in Terskua has benefitted and women have gained two things: they have the pride of doing something that benefits everyone, and the fruits of the effort produce income that allows them to do more for their children.

“Of course, it is not easy to create a gabruli; it takes time to learn how to work together and make the effort pay for itself. It needs some literate women who can learn bookkeeping. Melitané started as the bookkeeper for her husband’s business and gradually learned the system. The literate women can teach everyone else and over a few years, all the women in the village will be able to read and help their children with their homework. It has to start simple and grow.

“As I understand it, the plan is to start one gabruli in each of the five middle school districts of the Basin. Each would be based in the village where that district will get a school for 5th through 8th graders. There will be frequent bus service to those schools, so a gabruli building nearby can serve women in a lot of villages. Then gradually, women’s groups can emerge in the villages and become gabrulis of their own. Overseeing this effort will be a Rudhisér Gabruli Council, the first provincial coordinating body for gabrulis to be created. The four existing gabrulis have all appointed a representative to that council, and they have hired a very capable Director, Stéré. Please rise, Stéré.” She stood and nodded to everyone, who responded with applause. “Duchess Albesé has agreed to participate as well, and I am appointing my daughter in law, Ninlilé, to be my representative.” Ninlilé and Albesé rose as well and were greeted by the crowd. “I have pledged the funds to build gabruli buildings in the five districts of the Basin and in Lɛpawdomas and Luktrudema, once the local gabruli councils are prepared to oversee the construction. The palace will also consider development grants for the gabrulis so they can buy kitchen equipment, furniture, washing machines, and other necessities, once they have demonstrated they are ready to use them well. We are not talking about an immediate creation of a fully-developed gabruli. The money is the easy part, but being ready for the money and the development it can bring about: that is the hard part. It requires experience and growing confidence. That work falls on all of you! But if you are willing to work together, learn together, help each other, and help your sisters and cousins who aren’t here today because they didn’t think this gathering would be effective, then the women of this province will advance together and they will show each other and

show their men that they should be elected to the councils and provide leadership to everyone in the province. That is how we will get women elected to the councils.

“A new era has dawned on this world. Women no longer must just be mothers and keep house. They can work during the day when their children are in school, or they can cooperate through gabrulis. How many of you are school teachers?” She paused and about fifty hands went up. “Thank you for your work on behalf of all of us, and on behalf of the next generation. Many women work in factories and in stores, too. But women can also be nurses. Doctors; we need women to be doctors. Women are moving into business, some have become farmers, they are becoming researchers and lawyers, and we need women judges. Nowadays, the only thing that is closed to women is the army.

“If you can’t read, decide you will learn. If you want to get a job but circumstances prevent it, decide your daughter will have better opportunities than you have. The day is coming when women will make many wonderful contributions to our world in the arts, science, medicine, and service to others. We can and must hasten that day, not just for our sake, but for the sake of men as well. So have confidence, imagine the possibilities, and make a plan to pursue them. I look forward to hearing the results. Thank you.”

The queen stepped down from the podium and the audience rose as one and gave her a standing ovation. She paused and nodded in thanks to the audience, then headed out of the room. As she passed Dekané, she said, “can you step out for a moment?”

“Of course, Your Majesty.”

Dekané followed the queen into the hallway, where Wepokester waited. “I was very impressed by the conference for the councils. You looked very tired when it was

over, so I must thank you for all you are doing, and ask you to preserve your energy for many more such gatherings! We have 16 more provinces to go, after all.”

Dëkané smiled. “Thank you so much for your concern, Your Majesty. This one was the first one and that made it the hardest, but I think the others will be easier, and most will be smaller. We got an excellent turnout, just as this gathering of women has worked out well. It was wise to offer to pay the council members 5 dhanay per day to attend. Free transportation for them and for any women coming to this women’s gathering was also effective.”

“Good, I’m glad our plans worked. I’m glad we spent some money on these meetings and made them effective. But you looked particularly tired and that worried me.”

Dëkané smiled, embarrassed. “Your Majesty, I’m also pregnant, so I am quite tired in the mornings. But don’t worry, I’ll manage.”

The queen smiled. “I am so happy for you and Yusdu! You’ve made my day! We need working women who are also mothers; otherwise, the men will be opposed. They must learn to assist us with housework. Think of the potential that will be released!”

“I know, and when I meet young women who are doctors, playwrights, and occupying many other professions, I am so thrilled; there’s so much we can do for this world. Yes, Yusdu and I have wanted a family; perhaps 2 children. But probably not more, because this world is in danger of overcrowding, if our population keeps growing at the rate it is.”

“Excellent, we must be responsible, but having children is also an expression of hope and optimism for the future. I will pray for you and extend my best wishes and

hopes to you. And I am delighted you are working so closely with me. Strengthening the village councils is very important, so your work is extremely significant.”

“Thank you, words like that are very encouraging when progress seems so difficult! You can count on me and my team, Your Majesty. Within a year I hope to have twenty full-time staff advising councils and assisting each other, and at that point we should see progress.”

“Excellent. The members of the councils, by and large, strike me as sincere and good people, but they often don’t know what to do or how to do it. Certainly, we can do a lot to assist them develop skills and policies. Your work is important, but so is your marriage and family. Let us talk more about how to balance the two.”

History

late Dhonmènu /mid Aug. 24/642

May heard a knock on her office door. She glanced at the clock; he was late, and she had another meeting to attend. “Come in.”

The door opened and Prince Mégékwes entered. “I apologize I’m a bit late. I wasn’t sure where to park and ended up parking at the shopping center and walking over.”

“It is confusing. The campus has parking, but you have to know how to get to it. How is Her Majesty and Princess Ninlilé? Please sit, Your Majesty.” May pointed to a chair and she got up and walked to another chair in front of her desk.

“Thank you, we are all well. Her Majesty is now in Jérnstisér. She heads for Isurdhuna the day after tomorrow for the annual pilgrimage to hear the hymn cycle. Are you going?”

“No, not this year; we go every 2 or 3 years because it is so crowded. I hope she was pleased with her visit to Rudhisér.”

“Yes. Overall, everything has been going well over the last month or so. The Parliament was close, but all the legislation we wanted was passed and Mèndhru was strongly endorsed by both Houses. Then we came to Rudhisér and she resolved the land appeals; many of the appellants were unhappy, but the public overall was pleased. Then we backtracked to North Shore and Jérnstisér, and at both of those places the village council conferences have gone well, as have the meetings with business and factory

leaders. After the pilgrimage we go to Véspe, and they are arranging a large women's conference there as well."

"I heard great things about the women's conference. The five new gabrulis are growing in membership quickly thanks to Her Majesty's promise to pay for a facility for each."

"Yes, a prefab: very quick and easy to obtain, and if the gabruli doesn't work out, it can be sold and moved somewhere else. She plans to make similar promises in Véspe and South Shore. The hope is that this will revolutionize the involvement of women in the society. The granges did the same sort of thing for rural men."

"Yes, that's true. I'm thrilled to think about it!"

"So are Ninlilé and I. We may not be Bahá'is, but we understand the principle of equality. It is foundational for the kingdom's future. And in a way, that relates to the subject I wanted to talk to you about. When I graduated with my Masters in journalism two months ago, I mentioned to you that I was interested in pursuing history next. I have talked to my mother about the matter further and she has agreed to be supportive of the plan. I told her that if I understood the history of our peoples well, I'd be in a better position to lead them into the future. She wants me to acquire skills that will help me to lead as future king, and I pointed out to her that she is just 53 years old and will certainly be queen for at least 10 more years, maybe 20 or more, so I have plenty of time to gain the experience she wants! So I want to pursue history. As I understand it, so far we have three people with Masters degrees in history; only one with a Ph.D. How is a Ph.D. even possible? There's practically nothing to read."

May thought about the question a moment. “I agree, there’s not much to read in Eryan, but remember that the Sumis have been writing biographies, chronicles, and historical memoirs for over a thousand years. There are also historical documents—tax records, treaties, diplomatic correspondence—in the library of Naralon the Great and in Anarbala. They’ve been studied some; Skandu’s doctoral dissertation focused on them. How’s your Sumi?”

“I can read, but I’ve never tried to read old documents.”

“They’re very difficult because of the script, vocabulary, and grammar. Then there are inscriptions in Mēdha in an old alphabetic script that we are beginning to be able to read; hundreds of them were photographed. I have also heard that the old palace in Isurdhuna has some very old records that were found recently. Finally, there’s archaeology, which is reconstructing our history in surprising ways; the archaeologists are digging up a Shell Mound people’s site in Terskua, for example.”

“Yes, I heard about it. Fascinating. You are right about history. I had been conceiving of it too narrowly. Archaeology, text study, and many other things are part of it.”

“Exactly. History is reconstructing the past and determining its meaning to us and to future generations. Many different disciplines can be part of that quest. My brother, Lord Dhoru, has become interested in palynology. You can extract ancient pollen from the mud of an ancient lake and determine the vegetation that grew in its vicinity. On Gēdhéma they can tell you when an area was cleared for farming, for example, because tree pollen yields to pollen from farm crops.”

“But how can you date the change in pollen?”

“They can; there are techniques. I don’t think we can use any of them yet, though.”

“Perhaps in the future. This is quite interesting. I have wanted to learn more about archaeology, and the study of ancient Sumi documents would be good for various reasons: it would greatly improve my grasp of the language, would give me a positive reputation with Sumi intellectuals, and would give me a voice in the effort to create a single historical narrative for everyone on this world.”

“Exactly. That’s very important. The archaeologists have developed six courses on archaeology, two on the techniques and four on the results of archaeological study so far, and they require the equivalent of two courses participating in digs and the equivalent of two courses in writing a thesis. I don’t know what has been created to study ancient Sumi texts, but they have taught some courses in that. As I think you know, I am planning to teach a course in history this fall at Mēlwika Génadema and I want to focus on linguistic data; how the modern Eryan language developed from what appear to be two different dialects. There needs to be a good one-semester course on world history; one was developed six or eight years ago and has been taught every year since, but it’s out of date and needs revision.”

“So, there is enough material to create a strong PhD in history.”

“I think so. Consider my brother’s PhD in geology: he created and taught five of the courses that he ‘took.’ There were no courses on the geology of Era when he started. There were no geology courses in Eryan at all. But now there’s a major and a Masters and there have probably been a dozen different courses created.”

“So I might have to create some of the courses.”

“Exactly. And since you already have a Master’s in journalism, you are qualified to teach.”

The prince nodded. “This is intriguing. I’ll be on the eastern shore in the fall, so I could take some history and archaeology courses. And I wouldn’t mind at all spending the winter on Sumilara studying ancient texts.”

“That would be a good plan. By the way, there’s a mini archaeology gathering in Mēdha in a week. Marku invited Thornton, he accepted, others decided they wanted a tour as well, and the next thing you know, a dozen decided to visit at once.”

“Really? I’d like to see Mēdha. It’s after the Isurdhna pilgrimage?”

“Yes, it starts two days after the pilgrimage ends.”

The Prince nodded. “I could attend that. I don’t need to be in Vēspha with mother.”

“You’d be welcome, I’m sure.” May glanced at the clock. “Perhaps we can resume this discussion there? Because I have to be home at the top of the hour; we have an important guest.”

“Oh, certainly! You’ve answered my questions, and I have to go find Ninlilé in the shopping center anyway. I am very grateful for your time, Goodlady May. Very grateful. This confirms my plans quite strongly. Who do I write about the trip to Mēdha? Marku?”

“Yes, write to him and he’ll let you know what the plans are.” She rose. “I am delighted that you are so interested in the field. I agree with your assessment: history will equip you well to serve as king. The archaeologists and historians feel a bit neglected, so your interest will greatly encourage them.”

“I’ll be glad to do that! Thank you!” He offered a hand and they shook. Then he headed out of the office.

May was right behind him; she just grabbed a few papers and put them in her satchel, then hurried down the stairs. She had just ten minutes to get home, and it was usually a 12 minute walk. Fortunately, Awasandu Doma-Néfai had not yet arrived; he was late as well. But they did have a guest: Budhéstu Doma-Widumigi, Skandé’s father in law. He was showing Amos a manuscript on their dinner table. May glanced at it. “The old script.”

“Not quite; the modified, phonetic revision. I was part of the committee that worked on it, twenty years ago.”

“You are too modest, Budhéstu: you chaired the committee.”

“I did. I was young and pushy. But we did good work.”

“You did; with the accent marks, it’s fully pronounceable, in both dialects I should add.” She looked more closely. “The life of Widumaj.”

“This is an entirely new work, not a new edition, too, drawing on the hymns, the oral traditions, and some old written texts in Isurdhuna. I’m not the author, but I did spend two months editing it. Wherever there are contradictory accounts, we kept them both. We offer harmonization of the accounts sometimes, but it is still clear what each account says. We were very careful.”

“Good. I know there are sharp disputes about some events.”

“Exactly. We didn’t take sides; we kept everything.”

“He was asking me to support the printing of the book,” said Amos. “They need an advance of five thousand.”

“Are you going to print it in modern script as well?” asked May.

Budhéstu nodded. “That’s the next project. We have a typist who can take this manuscript and retype it in the new script, so it won’t take too long. But it’ll sell well and cover its own costs, which the old writing system won’t.”

“Why print it in the revised old system at all?” asked Amos.

“Because it was the system Widumaj used, so it is sacred.”

“Of course.” Amos nodded and looked at May, who nodded. “Alright, we can do that. It would be an honor to do so.”

Thank you, lord, we are very grateful. We will include an acknowledgement of your patronage in the back. I am sure it will bring you many blessings.”

“Thank you, but the blessing is to serve our people by providing them with the life of the Great Prophet,” replied Amos.

Just then they could hear the doorbell ring on the other side of the house. “That must be the guest we are expecting: Lord Awwskandu.”

“Why call him lord? He has been disgraced.”

“He still has the title,” replied Amos.

“That’s true. I had better go then, Lord. Thank you so much for supporting this effort.” Budhéstu rose, shook hands with both of them, and headed out of the salon.

“I’m glad we can support his effort,” said May. “I wish the old alphabet would go away, but on the other hand, the revised spelling system is quite good and we could just have easily used it.”

“It’s too late now,” said Amos.

Just then, Awwskandu entered the salon. Amos rose and walked to the door to shake hands. “It’s good to see you, lord! I hope you are well and are comfortable in your new place.”

“Yes, it is quite comfortable. It is actually more comfortable than the palace because the plumbing works better and it is air conditioned. But I’d still prefer to be in the palace.”

“I’m sure; it has been your family’s for generations. Would you like coffee? Tea? Something cold?”

“Cold; yes. I know you don’t have wine.”

“We don’t, but we can get you some grape juice.” Amos turned to Fithu, who nodded and headed for the kitchen. Amos pointed to a chair and Awwskandu sat. “So, what have you been doing in the last two weeks?”

“Reviewing Néfa Génadema’s plans for the fall semester. The Albanu Foundation is granting 100,000 dhanay to the génadema for a new classroom and office building for the Business School. The palace is matching it. We’re hoping to start construction in two months and have the building ready by spring.”

“That’s excellent. The business program is Néfa Génadema’s strength; your father was willing to support it, and the city has benefitted from the training.”

“Agreed. Melwika’s program is better, but ours is the best on the western shore, so we’ll strengthen it. The other 300,000 dhanay that the Albanu Foundation is giving away is going to the high school and the five new middle schools. The latter will have about 400 students each; that’s fourteen classrooms each, a library, offices, an auditorium, and a playground. The plan is to use prefabs for the classrooms, library, and offices, and a

big tent for the auditorium until proper school buildings can be built. Our 300,000 can build one complete school and half of a second of brick and concrete; permanent and much better than prefabs. I think the palace will come up with the rest, but I don't know what their plans are."

"I'm sure you're right," said Amos. "The village schools will be so much less crowded after this. We anticipate that Pértatranisér High School will grow a lot as well in a few years when the middle school students graduate to high school."

"Néfa High School as well; the foundation grant will be used to build a new wing there."

"So, no money to encourage agriculture or granges?" asked May.

Awskandu shook his head. "No. Education is my area. Father gradually came around and allowed an investment of tax money in the school system. But the pain of what we have lost is too great for me to support the granges."

May nodded. Just then Fithu returned with glasses of grape juice and some pastries. They paused to take some food and drink. "So, lord, what are your plans?" asked Amos.

Awskandu shook his head. "What I really want to do is recover my privileges as lord of Néfa at least, including the income and a right to give input to the City Council. I know Her Majesty has a high regard for both of you. If there is anything you can do, please, I beg you, to assist me."

"I think you have probably put yourself in a difficult position by refusing to leave the palace until Her Majesty showed up and threatened to call the police to remove you," said May.

“She also modified the amount of the family fortune going into the trust,” noted Amos. “You can be thankful she changed her mind and left you in charge of the trust. And none of the money has gone into efforts to support the farmers.”

“She even let you keep the title of ‘lord,’” added May, knowing the queen had threatened to take it away and give him the purely honorary title of “Count” instead.

“These are empty accomplishments. I want to be a *real* lord! She can’t blame me for my father’s decisions! I tried to moderate him, too. I was successful in getting him to give money to the schools.”

“Auskandu, Rudhisér was still spending less money per pupil than any of the other major provinces,” said Amos. “Rudhisér used to be rich. Now, without Pértatranisér, it’s the poorest major province.”

“But you can’t exclude Pértatranisér. As you know, my father invested in its factories, too. If Pértatranisér hadn’t come into existence, Néfa would probably be twice as big.”

“Perhaps,” replied Amos. He decided not to point out that Pértatranisér was founded by refugees from Néfa.

“So, you can’t help?”

“We’ve offered you advice about how to spend funds from the Albanu Foundation, but you haven’t liked it,” said Amos.

“Can you give some to gabrulis?” asked May. “That would help the Basin immediately as well.”

“I suppose they are better than the granges, but all the money is allocated.”

“How about a personal contribution? How much income have you retained; 50,000? Give some of that to charity, too,” suggested Amos.

“Perhaps.”

“Have you talked to Wërétrakester?” asked May. “He’s here in town most of the time, so he’s easy to see. I think you should talk to him.”

“And Budhéstu the priest,” added Amos. “He’s a good man.”

“Are you suggesting I need spiritual guidance?”

“Lord, yes, I think you do. I hope you accept the suggestion as a friend’s, because we have known each other for many years and I think we are friends. We are suggesting to you ways you can be a servant to the people, and that is what Wërétrakester says Widumaj wants the lords to be. You can disagree with his interpretation; many lords do. But the queen has accepted his understanding. Perhaps you should explore that interpretation, meditate on it, and find in your heart more ways you can follow it.”

“I agree lords should be servants of the people! That’s why I focused on education! Do you think I made any money off that effort? No, not a dontay!”

“Excellent,” replied Amos, glancing at May to make sure she didn’t say something that would raise the temperature of the conversation. “That is true servanthood. But granges need service as well. The people have a sense of grievance and that needs to be healed. If you make a move to heal it, they will come around as well. Right now, how many people in Néfa want you to be their lord? Demonstrate to them that you are worthy, and you will have demonstrated it to the queen as well.”

“Well . . . that’s true.” It was the first time Awskandu had conceded anything.

“Could I, perhaps, announce some donation jointly with you? You make donations, don’t you?”

“We do, but we don’t announce them,” said Amos. “Usually the recipients announce the donation, though. It’s their way of saying ‘thank you’ and we are controversial to some people, so the disclosure protects the recipient from later trouble.”

“Besides, Lord, if you made the same donation as us, people would think you are trying to ride on our reputation. You need to build up your own reputation,” pointed out May.

“Can you make some recommendations?”

“We have been; granges and gabrulis,” said Amos, patiently.

“Alright. I will indeed talk to Werétrakester and Budhéstu; they live very near me. And I will . . . rethink some things. Thank you, perhaps this has been a useful discussion after all.”

Thornton had never driven into the Long Valley from the new northern route. It was actually the same distance as Route 1 via Gordha, Kostekhéma and Moruagras—275 kilometers—but it had the advantage of driving the entire route in daylight and avoiding the world date line. There was no way to get to the Long Valley without going up over two mountain ranges, but one could drive north on Route 21 from Melwika to the polar basin by climbing up only 2,000 meters, and the trip out of the polar basin into the Long Valley was only 2,259 meters. If the aliens hadn’t reopened the Glugluba, in a few

decades Long Lake would have started to spill over the northern pass and create a new river into the North Polar Basin.

To be sure he had enough time, Thornton left home at sunset. By the time he reached the Polar Basin due north of Mēlwika almost an hour later, twilight was strong. The next 130 kilometers took him westward 220 degrees or 14 time zones, to the full daylight of noontime and then to dawn twilight in just over an hour and a half. There, Route 21 ended and Route 92 began, which ran southward to the Long Valley. Four hours after he left Mēlwika he drove into the parking lot of the Palace Hotel in Réjéivika. It was 8 a.m. and he was just on time.

“I was afraid you wouldn’t make it,” said Marku. “Do you want breakfast?”

“No, I ate supper a few hours ago. I’ll need coffee soon, though; it’s 10 p.m. in Mēlwika.”

“Don’t fall asleep on us!” said Prince Mégékwēs. “Did you come via Kostekhéma?”

“No; the polar basin. It’s a bit faster, you only have to go over two mountain ranges. The northern entrance is really pretty and they built the road on a long, straight slope into the valley, so it’s quick.” He looked around. “This isn’t much of a hotel.”

“Well, Réjéivika’s not much of a town,” replied Marku. “It has only 4,000 people. The entire Delonga province has only 12,000. A big, beautiful valley that once had 100,000 or 150,000, and we can’t seem to fill it!”

“It’ll fill up eventually,” said Thornton. “How far south does the settlement go?”

“All the way to Mēdha,” replied Marku. “Including Réjéivika and Nu Mēdha, the valley has six townships. Nu Mēdha now has almost a thousand people.”

“But it still has no place for us to stay, so we have to stay here every night,” added Wërétragéndu. “We need to fund a guest house next to the museum, so we can stay on site.”

“Good idea,” said Mégékwes. “Are we ready to go?”

“Let me register, real quick,” said Thornton. He rose from the table, walked to the front desk, and got his room key, which allowed him to drop off his belongings in his room. He went out to the small hotel’s parking lot where a pickup truck with “Medha Museum” painted on its side was waiting. He climbed into the back where six of them were sitting; everyone except the driver, a student, who put the truck into gear. They headed across Réjéivika’s very large central square, which was lined with stores, large houses, and government buildings, and back onto Route 92.

It was 44 kilometers to Medha. The road passed through farmland that extended from the North Branch of the Delongisér to the base of the escarpment several kilometers to the east. Every kilometer there was a cluster of a dozen houses; about every 8 kilometers stood a larger village of about thirty houses, a store and a barber shop or bakery or restaurant, and an ancient bridge over the river that had been repaired. A road along the other bank—sometimes dirt and sometimes with ancient Eryan paving—connected hamlets of farmhouses together and gave access to the nearest bridge, village center, and Route 92. “I’m impressed that so much of the valley floor has been settled,” said Thornton. “If the average farm is about 60 agris or 20 hectares, and if the valley has 2,000 farmers, that’s 40,000 hectares or 400 square kilometers. That’s about a fifth of the valley floor.”

“That sounds about right,” said Marku. “The settlement extends one third the length of the valley, but only about half the width. The western side belongs to the Géndone and Ghéslone.”

“A thousand years ago, with non-mechanized agriculture, it could have had as many as 50,000 farm families,” said Migyusu, the archaeologist in charge of the Mēdha excavations. “It depends on how many woodlots they had; hauling wood down from the highlands would have been very difficult. If you add Mēdha and the three smaller cities and assume households of 5 members, you can easily estimate 150,000 people lived in the valley.”

“Are you finding villages?” asked Mégékwes.

“Yes; most of our new villages are on the sites of old ones, because we sited them next to the old bridges over the river. But most families lived on their land. We’re finding a lot of scattered house sites,” replied Migyusu. “They were reasonably prosperous; we’re finding a lot of glass and pottery, coin hoards, beads, and other consumer items.”

“How much repair work did the army have to do on the bridges?” asked the prince.

“A lot, after 600 years under water,” replied Migyusu. “But what’s interesting is that most bridges had an inscription naming the monarch who built it and a year. Some had an inscription who built it and another indicating who repaired it. Most were built or repaired by Mitros V. Most likely, he was the last king before the valley flooded.”

“I am pretty sure he’s mentioned in the Sumi records,” said Skandu. “We still haven’t gone through all the records that might relate to the western shore.”

“How well can we read the inscriptions?” asked Mégékwes.

Migyusu nodded. “Pretty well, now. The syllabary is a modification of the Sumi system, with some brand new symbols. We can mostly read the Gordha syllabary now, also. It’s a different, independent spelling system, though, and we have very few examples of it.”

“I’m guessing we’ll find some letters and contracts in both Eryan scripts on Sumilara, though,” said Skandu.

They continued down Route 92 and soon came to Nu Mēdha, which was built on the east bank of the North Delongisér three kilometers north of the spot where the South Delongisér merged with it and the joint stream turned east to enter the Glugluba. The town was built where Route 55 entered the valley after crossing the Snowy Mountains from Ora. They crossed Nu Mēdha, with its High School, half dozen stores, and two hundred houses, quickly. Route 92 narrowed and continued south three more kilometers to a grand stone bridge over the river. They drove over and stopped at the edge of the ruins of Mēdha where there was a museum and a collection of houses.

“I suggest we walk the town first, before it gets hot,” suggested Migyusu as they jumped out of the truck. “Then we can go inside the museum for lunch and to rest. There’s a lot to show you there as well.”

“Good plan,” agreed Mégékwēs.

Migyusu pointed to the street that ran westward from where they stood. “This is the *korodha*, the town’s main street; it runs 1,200 meters to the central square and palace, which is on a mound in the middle of town. It continues another 1200 meters to the far end of the two. We’ll walk down it to the central square and the palace mound. There’s a lot to see.”

They started down the road, which was about ten meters wide. “I remember walking down this street sixteen years ago in half a meter of muck, with walls falling down from any loud sound,” said Thornton. “I’m glad you’ve been able to remove the mud.”

“Yes, it has a good pavement underneath,” replied Marku. “Fortunately, the walls have stopped falling down. The brick walls that are still standing are in pretty good shape. A lot of stone ones collapsed because the cement deteriorated.”

“How did they get stone here in the middle of the valley?” asked Mégékwes.

“The rivers; they all flow to this point. If you look under the old bridges you’ll see a towpath on the left bank, facing upstream. The boats floated downstream and were towed back upstream. Brick would have required firing, which required wood.”

“Wood lots,” said Migyusu. “A major limitation on the population down here.”

“So, how big was Medha?” asked the prince.

“It had about 9,000 dwellings,” replied Migyusu. “Assuming 5 or 6 in each, 45,000 to 54,000. Food came down the rivers from the farms as well. It had a lot of artisans; weavers, potters, iron workers, etc. We think we’ve identified a school next to the palace, and the temple, too.”

“And it all would have flooded within two months of the landslide that blocked the Glugluba,” said Marku. “An enormous, irreversible, sudden catastrophe.”

They continued down the street, which was delineated by stone and brick walls that usually were at least a story high, with open doorways and windows that showed interiors still full of half a meter of hardened mud. In one, men were cutting down short trees; the museum had a full time crew of ten men who did nothing but control vegetation

in the site. As they approached the central area, the surviving walls were two or even three stories high, sometimes with fancy arched doorways. The central plaza—now cleared of its mud—still had statues and was surrounded by proud ruins. On the west side was a mound about ten meters high, topped with a temple on its southern half and a palace on its northern half. Marku led them up the steps and right into the temple, which still had half its domed stone roof intact. They stopped inside the door in the open part—the collapsed stones had been hauled away—and gasped at a statue of Mitro seven meters tall.

“Incredible!” said Mégékwes. “It looks as fresh as it was when it was dedicated!”

“We had to clean it up,” replied Migyusu. “And we did some restoration of the paint job, which had suffered from a millennium of water. We’re more worried about the roof; this half collapsed a year after the lake drained and the other half is not very stable. We need ten thousand dhanay to stabilize it.”

“Yes, of course! Show this to Her Majesty!” said Mégékwes.

“So far, she has said she’s too busy, but if you could help with that, we’d appreciate it,” said Marku. “One argument worth remembering: Nu Mēdha would benefit immensely from the jobs this place could give. It could be a major tourist attraction, just like Lilalara can be, if enough money were spent on them to make them safe and accessible. The history here is precious.” Marku pointed to the inscriptions on the back wall. “This temple was dedicated by Mitros III; that’s what the inscription says. He praises the god Mitros, ‘source of truth and defender against the lie.’ Any high school kid who studies the old script in school for a day or two could come here and puzzle through

the text. The Eryan is very strange, but it is recognizable with help.” He pointed and read the text aloud to everyone, who nodded; they understood about half of it.

“How many inscriptions have you found, now?” asked Thornton.

“Including grave markers, about two thousand. The painted ones have all washed off the buildings, but we photographed them when they were still visible. But now we have found something else; I’ll explain when we get back to the museum.”

They exited the temple, walked around the building to see how it was used, then walked across to the palace and stepped a bit inside the monumental entrance. Migyusu wouldn’t let them in beyond a few meters and told stories of collapsing walls and ceilings, snakes, and trees growing in unreachable places. But then he got serious and described the number and sizes of the rooms, which indicated the palace was slightly larger than the queen’s palace complex in Meddoakwés. The grand, pillared entrance was enough to see the magnificence of the complex.

They walked around the outside of the palace and up the Korodha a bit farther to what clearly had once been a day market, then returned to the central square and walked around the edge, looking at the remnants of the buildings. Then they followed a network of alleys back to their starting point.

“How are you doing, Lord Dhoru?” asked Marku, as they approached the museum.

“Well, I’m awake. It’s the middle of the night in Melwika, but with the bright sunlight, so far I’m awake.”

“We’ll take a siesta after lunch.”

“I don’t think I can get to Gépola today!”

“We can go tomorrow. But Werétragéndu and I got there several days ago and explored the mound. It’s a fascinating place that predates the Moruagras fortress. It’s a gigantic earthen defensive ring; it has no stone wall. That suggests it’s maybe a thousand years older. If they were defending the valley from intrusion, they could have only been defending it against Gordha.”

“Yet another place to excavate,” said Mégékwes.

They walked the remaining hundred paces to the museum. “The museum is built on the foundations of an old villa; the house of a wealthy man, probably a merchant,” said Migyusu, as they entered. “We’ve reconstructed the first floor and used the rooms for the museum and its offices. It has a mosaic and a very nice central garden, which we have also reestablished as well as we could.” He led them into a room with magnificent gold jewelry and glassware on display, then through another room with undamaged pottery. “What coins have you found?” asked Skandu.

“Quite a few,” replied Migyusu. “People had time to take their essential property, so they didn’t leave their coin hoards, but we found a few small hoards and scattered coins. They are for Mitros III and V. We haven’t found any for Mitros IV, probably because he had a very short reign. We’ve also found some for Dumuzid VI and Etana III of Anartu, who lived 540 to 522 before Widumaj, or about 1160 years ago. The flood appears to have occurred in 527 BW.”

Skandu nodded. “That’s consistent. How well can you date the kings here?”

“We need Sumi records to be sure of the dates. We have the order roughly reconstructed.”

“I had no idea we knew so much of this ancient period!” said Mégékwes, excited.
“It’s quite amazing!”

“Give us ten years, twenty years, and we’ll know a lot more,” said Marku, pleased by the prince’s interest. “We have 2,000 inscriptions to read and understand just here. There are hundreds more in the villages and towns of the valley waiting for us to find them, and possibly hundreds in the highland fortresses guarding the entrances to the valley and elsewhere, such as Kerda and the western shore. Isurdhuna has hundreds of clay tablets that we have been ignoring—we didn’t even realize they were there—and they’re probably in an Eryan form of cuneiform, so once we can read the Sumi cuneiform better we’ll probably be able to decipher the Eryan ones as well. Even the Gordha excavation turned up some clay tablets! But at the time we had no way to read them. I didn’t even mention the tablets in the palace here; we haven’t even begun to dig them up and count them, but we know there are tablets in the mound under the palace, which probably represents the debris of earlier palaces and temples.”

“And we have to show them the new find,” said Migyusu.

“Yes; right now.” Marku walked to another room; the others followed him. He opened a door and cold air poured out. He pulled out one of a dozen jars on a shelf and brought it to one of the tables. “Come gather around.” Marku lifted the lid and they looked in at a pile of ancient, blackened, rotted leaves.

“What are they?” asked Mégékwes.

“This is a *berwona*; a book in a *bérwono*, jar. That’s the old fashioned way we made books; we wrote on leaves and stacked them in jars. When the palace flooded, the leaves in the jar did not rot because the water trapped in the jar had no oxygen. So these

are 1,100 year old palace records of some sort. We found that if we shone a bright light on the top leaf, we could photograph the writing.” He opened a drawer and pulled out a print. They gathered around and nodded; the text was visible.

“What does it say?” asked Mégékwes.

“It’s a tax record for a village. We have no idea where it was, but if we can read all these records, someday we’ll figure it out.”

“How much do you have here?”

Migyusu smiled like he was going to burst. “Forty-six intact jars. The archive had over 100 additional jars, but they had broken and the leaves had rotted away. Each jar has about a thousand round leaves cut to fit the jar, which were made to a standard size.

We’ve already drained this jar of its water and tried to pull the leaves out of the jar intact. There were fifty leaves on top of the one you can see; we managed to separate them, but half broke up into fragments. We managed to photograph 33 of the leaves usefully. We need money and staff to develop a technique to pull them out intact and photograph them. If we can manage that, we’ll have close to 50,000 pages of records.”

“All tax records?” asked Thornton.

“We don’t know, but we hope not!”

They all laughed at that. “The archive had intact jars from all over the place, so most likely there was a section with tax records, a section with legal records, a section for diplomatic records, etc.,” continued Migyusu. “With any luck, we’ll find out soon!”

“I’ll be sure of it,” said Mégékwes. “Her Majesty has to come and see Mēdha.”

Ideas for vol. 29:

Liz (76): Gabrulis, growth of the Faith, spiritualization

Chris (78): Focuses on sustainable development. Wants hydroelectric potential of Long Valley developed. Talks to John about sustainable development

May (51) is focusing on; Amos (53) is focusing on engineering; Lua (56) is busy with a rapidly expanding health system; Behruz (60) is working on the Institute; Thornton (41) is busy running Melwika; Lébé (41).

The children: Rostamu Shirazi (23, summer); Skandé Keino (22, 2 Dhébelménu/April 22); Jalalu Mennea (21, c. 15 April); Kalé Mennea (19, June); Marié Keino (same); Jonkrisu (16, Aug.)

Tiamaté (29-30) Jordan (29-30) Andru (6 on 9 Dhébelménu). Lubaté (born in very early Blorménu 20/638): continue with development, raise a baby

Prince Mégékwes and Ninlilé: 21 years old in Eɣnaménu (22 later in the spring? Andranu, too?)

Tomasu and Sulokwé is raising their baby, born in mid-late Belménu 17/635

Primanu and Gramé Miller: have baby

Budhéstu and Blorakwé (28) start psychiatric facility; Melitané and Moléstu:

Soru, Kanawé, Blorané (17-18), Isuru (13):

Rébu:

Perku and Sharé: kids Mitribu (30) and Avásé (25)

Queen Awster/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 Mégékwes (21, late April)

Ideas for Vol. 29:

Melwika is seeing rapid growth of the Faith; Melwika development commission completes its work and it shapes the thinking of everyone in town; Prince and Ninlilé clash over the simpleness of their new house, which embarrasses her; Ninlilé becomes an advocate of children's books and teaching reading, goes to schools and reads to the kids. Prince and Ninlilé decide not to have a child right away.

Lord Albanu discovers he has an incurable case of pancreatic cancer and will die in about 3 months. Meets with Werétrakester, Amos, and Chris. Eventually he repents of his greed. When he dies, the Queen calls for the provincial assembly to approve a governor.

Lomu becomes a popular and charismatic leader, gets elected to Pértatranisér's city council.

Start planning the census, which comes in Eĵnaménu. Chris introduces the polling guy to the statistics dept and he becomes central to the planning.

Menneas and Kandéwes discuss regional planning, especially zoning and construction codes and strong public transportation to keep the population from moving to cities.

Grange wants protection of small farms and small businesses and tax incentives to break up large estates. Very controversial.

More on Dekané and Yusdu and their efforts. June: The Queen opens several townships and makes them lords. They decide to have a child?

End of Eĵnaménu: election, and the villages do a separate vote for their councils.

Albanu's death sparks demands for land reform in Rudhisér, which the Prince's article reinforces.

Before and during the March election, a lot of discussion of values. Werétrakester and legislators work together to define a reform agenda. Budhestu and other priests participate as well. There is an intense spirit of spiritual transformation.

Ridván Convention in Meddwoglubas dedicates Shrine.

Army proposes a new southern highway and the Gédone say no, they want a road to the valley floor and hydroelectric power first.

New Consultative Assembly has a long agenda: The granges propose laws to limit the size of farms in order to preserve family farms, which is opposed by the lendhapotus; parks are finalized; minimum wage and 34 hour work week passes; hunting regulations and forestry regulations tightened; small businesses get tax breaks

Queen's round the world tour in mid summer stresses conferences on ethics; Dekané tellw the queen she's pregnant; Tour of Era; preliminary plans for the next four year plan; Thornton and Yusdu visit Arjdhuna townsite; Thornton and Philos talk; Thornton visits Medha and Gépola; ground broken for pipeline; irrigation water reaches Arjdhuna; Terskua pursues beautification grant; Soru plans a larger school there; demand for cars and pickups plateaus; Prince goes to Rudhisér to see land distribution, talks to May about history;

Estodhéru dies. Miller dies?

Prince and Princess want to separate and the Queen calls in Budhéstu to provide marriage counseling; expand psychology program

Werétrakester announces that there will be no more widus because there is now a popular check on the monarch.

More about "the Sumi guy"? He's elected head of the Gramdhunas grange?

Dhébelménu: April 21-May 20 (month of planting)

1/21

7/27

13/May 3

19/9 Melwika spring term 1 ends

25/15 Melwika vacation

Blorménu: May 21-June 20 (month of flowers)

1/21 Consultative Assembly (next 4-6 weeks, ending at Grand Court); Melwika spring short term 1 begins

7/27

13/June 3

19/9

25/15 Melwika spring short term 1 ends

Kaiménu: June 21-July 20 (hot month)

1/21 Meddoakwés: Harvest; Graduation, All-Génadéma Council and Conference; Thornton heads for
Medhpéla

7/27 Grand Court and Harvest Festival

13/July 3 Meddoakwés: second planting; Melwika summer short term 1 begins

19/9

25/15

Dhonménu: July 21-August 20 (month of grain)

1/21 Queen visits Morana, Lepawsona

7/27 Queen visits Belledha;

13/Aug. 3 Queen visits Jérnstisé (from Belledha), Rudhisér (from Ora); Melwika 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

Abelménu: August 21-September 20 (month of apples)

1/21 Queen visits Long Valley (from Ora), Ora

7/27 Queen visits Ora, Lëwésa (from Ora)

13/Sep. 3 Queen visits Tripola, Wurontroba for one day; Mëlwika summer short term 3 begins

19/9 Queen visits Endraidha, Kwolona, Kwétékwna (from Endraidha)

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 Mëddoakwés: Second harvest; Mëlwika vacation week

19/6 Mëlwika Harvest Festival; Mëlwika 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 Mëlwika fall term 1 ends

Prusménu: November 21-December 20 (month of frosts)

1/21 Mëlwika (short) fall term 2 starts

13/Dec. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16

Bëlménu: December 21-January 20 (white month)

1/21 Mēlwika 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 Mēlwika short winter term 2 starts

7/26

13/Feb. 1

19/6

25/11

31/16

Ejnaménu: February 21 -March 20 (30-day month) (month of sacrifice)

1/21 Mēlwika school vacation (all month)

7/27

13/Mar. 3

19/9

25/15 Primdiu: world and Mēlwika election (odd years)

Bolérenménu: Mar. 21-April 20 (month of greening)

1/21 Mēddoakwés: planting; Mēlwika spring term 1 starts

7/27

13/Apr. 3

19/9

25/15

Started 10 Feb. 2020; edited and proofread, 10-13 July 2022.