

THE PIONEERS

Vol. 7

Prisoners

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137.

Surprise Plans

The phone persistently rang; unusual, since the operator had to make every ring happen by turning a crank. The fourth or fifth ring finally jolted Chris out of his sleep. He stumbled about the bedroom and felt for the light switch, then walked down the stairs to the phone, located just outside his office. It was probably after midnight, but he hadn't heard the town's clock bells ring, so he wasn't sure.

“Hélo?”

A pause and lots of static on the line; it was a call from the western shore. That explained the late hour.

“Hélo, Mennea? This is Lord Albanu in Néfa. Is that you?”

Chris was surprised; he hadn't realized the line to Néfa was finished. “Indeed, Lord, it is. How can I help you? Do you know it is after midnight here?”

“So the operator informed me. Mennea, the Bahá’ís of this area met yesterday at Honored Ejnu’s house. I hear they conducted an election or something. Is this true?”

“Ah, I think so. I believe yesterday was the unit election, to choose one delegate to represent the Néfa area Bahá’ís in the election of a world-wide coordinating body. It’ll take place this spring.”

“Mennea, what’s the meaning of this? Are the Bahá’ís out to take over or something? Or to undermine time-honored institutions like the monarchy, aristocracy, and priesthood? Because nothing like that will be tolerated for even an instant.”

“Of course it wouldn’t be. Bahá’ís are forbidden to interfere with a nation’s politics; we stand utterly aloof and clear from them. My Lord, we have no priests or temples. Instead, we gather and choose a council of wise members to organize and coordinate us. The Bahá’ís of the Néfa area met to choose the one person who would represent them in choosing the council that will coordinate the Bahá’ís throughout the realm. That is all.”

There was a pause over the phone. “Why would you bother to do that, when you are the only Lord in the religion and thus are the obvious leader. Besides, they’ll just elect you and your family to the leadership, anyway.”

“My Lord, this is our custom. We believe in working together in groups; it educates and elevates everyone, involves everyone. And the work we will do will be good work, such as charitable and educational efforts and projects to improve morals. The meeting yesterday was a step toward strengthening the realm and improving your region, not harming it or your rule.”

There was a pause. “Clearly, we will have to continue this discussion before the Réjé herself at some point, my Lord, or perhaps in the Consultative Assembly. I will not

allow Bahá’í activities in my area. Period. Any Bahá’ís here are free to move to Mélwika; let them practice their ideas there.” And the phone went dead.

Chris looked at the phone, then hung up. He went back upstairs and back to sleep, though it was a worried sleep. At breakfast, he told Mary and Liz about Lord Albanu’s angry call.

Mary looked quite concerned. “He probably could ban the Faith if he wanted to,” she said. “We really don’t know what Lords can or cannot do, where religious freedom is concerned.”

“This is a world without nonprofit religious or service organizations,” added Liz. “So any organization apart from the local Lord looks suspicious.”

“Especially if another Lord is involved,” added Chris, thinking. “Maybe the solution is to do the good deeds that you said Bahá’ís do,” suggested Liz. “We need to take this matter to the Spiritual Assembly. The Mélwika Bahá’í community is well established and accepted, but even here we could enhance our reputation by doing good deeds. That’s even more true on the western shore where the communities are small.”

It was just before 4 p.m. when Chris, Amos, and Behruz arrived at the conference room in the science building for their meeting. Yimu and John arrived just as the bell rang four times.

“Congratulations, John!” exclaimed Chris, shaking Miller’s hand. “I just heard.” “Oh, was the baby born?” asked Behruz. “I’ve been out of the house all day.”

John nodded. “A boy; three kilograms. We weighed him at the hospital because Térémér had a hard time with the labor and decided to go there after delivery.”

“What’s the name?” asked Chris.

John hesitated; Yimu smiled. “Akanu.”

“The last one?”

John nodded. “Térémér gave the name; she said no more. So that’s the end of my brood, I guess, since Awsé and Kalé are too old.” He sighed. “I can’t complain; Akanu’s number forty!”

“Forty?” said Amos, surprised. “That’s downright biblical in scope.”

John smiled, pleased with himself. “The strategy made sense when I was young. Thank God I had taken so many shop classes in high school and had been an auto mechanic for a couple of years; I was able to figure out how to make a waterwheel and grind grain. That gave me the surplus I needed to invest in children, and the children gave me the resources I needed to irrigate land and build a safe house on the edge of civilization. But when you all arrived, the investment strategy changed, you might say. Now I can sit back, enjoy my wives and children and grandchildren—don’t ask me how many I have—and make a little money as well.”

“No more wives?” asked Yimu, amused.

“If one of them were to die? No, I think I’d be satisfied with two, then.”

Yimu raised an eyebrow, surprised. John just shrugged. He turned to Chris. “Who’s the other person coming?”

“Brébéstü Aywergui, representing Tripola and Meddwoglubas. You’ve probably met him; he’s the older brother of Dr. Stauréstü Aywergui. He’s a merchant from the Tripola area; scrupulously honest and discrete.”

“Good,” grumbled John. “I’d prefer we keep this Technology Center a family affair.”

“What about Modolubu, Rudhu, and Isuranu?” asked Yimu.

“They don’t want to be directly involved,” replied Behruz. “If they need something, they’ll approach us and pay for it.”

Just then they heard steps on the stairs. A moment later Brébéstü, “God’s lion,” appeared in the door. “I apologize; I went to the old classroom building, and they directed me here.”

“No problem; we just arrived,” replied Chris. “Do you know everyone? Perhaps not Yimu.”

“No, I’ve met Yimu, also.” Yimu nodded, smiling. He now remembered Brébéstü, and obviously had a favorable impression of the man.

“Let’s get started,” said John, pointing to the table. They all walked over to it and sat; several men poured cups of ready-made mint tea for themselves. John pulled out some plans. “It was suggested we describe our needs in terms of a building that could be attached to or associated with the buildings of others to make one big Technology Complex. The Miller Mechanical Engineering Laboratory would be one hundred doli long, thirty wide, and three stories high, though the first story would take the height of two; thus it would really have only two levels. The ground floor would have all the best

fabricating machinery we have; lathes, metal cutters, drillers, wire makers, etc. The top floor would have two classrooms or conference rooms, a commercial art studio, and offices for ten engineers. There would be another ten support staff and they'd have office space as well. Twenty workers, total, with five telephones. I'll devote fifty thousand to the building."

The others were startled by the size of the investment. The twenty workers would cost at least twenty thousand in annual salaries, too.

"What I need from you is more machinery from the aliens," added Miller. "We need more precision machinery made of special hard steel. We'll give you a list."

"That may be hard," said Chris. "Lately the aliens have stopped talking to us. We communicate by e-mail only. They initially refused half our fall order of medicines. When we wrote back and said that without the medicines, about fifty people would probably die, they came around and agreed to drop all of it, but when it arrived three weeks ago we figure we got about 95% of it."

"On the other hand, if they want us to make medicines instead, they have to give us the equipment," said Behruz. "Because it'll be decades before we can make many of the medicines at the rate we're going."

"Use that argument on them," agreed John. "My goal is to continue improving manufacturing efficiency. Right now we're making iron and steel with about ten or twenty times as many man-hours per ton as currently on earth; at least according to information found by someone in one of your courses. The steam wagons, similarly, are much more expensive to make. But with better steel rolling and cutting equipment we can

increase our efficiency quite a bit. With an assembly line we can assemble everything much more quickly. I'm willing to invest quite a bit. You guys get the equipment from the aliens and I'll contribute twenty thousand dhanay toward the electrical and chemical labs. That sounds like a lot, but I'm already making a lot of money and if I have to invest it somewhere, it's in this facility. It'll make me money, too."

Amos looked at Chris. "We do need to try getting a lot of equipment from the aliens," he agreed. "I've put together a design for an electrical engineering facility employing ten, but I'd rather design something with better equipment."

Behruz nodded. "Me, too. I've put together a more modest plan for a six-person chemical research facility, which is already more than I can afford. But I'm ready for much better equipment, and if I had it I could design and create much more sophisticated things."

"If we're going to make the argument that we're ready for a whole new generation of equipment, we also have to promise the aliens that it'll be shared with the entire world," said Chris. "They have always been concerned about enriching a few and creating terrible social and economic disparities. We need to consider assistance not just to Tripola and Meddwogoras; we also have to consider the impact on Ora. Lord Mitru's making steam wagons because he has lathes made here in Melwika using lathes the aliens gave us. But if Melwika can make steel and steam wagons for a quarter the cost as Ora, Ora goes out of business; or Melwika makes a bundle of money."

Miller scowled. "If that's the cost of the new equipment, so be it; but don't offer to share with Ora! I'd rather avoid it."

“They’ll ask,” replied Chris. “Believe me. But I think there’s one thing we can’t share with Ora anyway: the cultural attitudes toward work that yield efficiencies. They have the same equipment as you and they’re about two thirds as efficient.”

“But they’re improving,” said Amos. “And that’s an important point, too. I’d also cite the bank, the Consultative Assembly, and the progress here in Mélwika in creating what can only be called a middle class. We’re in a social, political, economic, and legal situation that’s different from three years ago, when we got the first shipment of engineering equipment.”

“You’re right,” agreed Chris. “Okay, we’ll give it a try. John, it sounds like your proposal has forced a complete rethinking of the proposals by Amos and Behruz. We’ll have to meet again in a few weeks; meanwhile, let’s all put together wish lists of things we’d like to get.”

“I would hope that you can include items affecting the plans of Tripola and Meddwoglubas,” interjected Brébéstu. “It would strengthen your argument if you can say the Technology Center represents the planning of several cities in several regions.”

“Including Ora,” added Chris. “I really should make a call to Lord Mitru. But we can discuss that later. What did you have in mind, Brébéstu?”

“The two cities have particular projects in mind. Tripola wants to start manufacturing something. The product that everyone has started to talk about is sewing machines. We understand a woman with one can sew much more, much more quickly, and can produce more complex patterns with them easily. We’d like to be able to produce this magic device for one hundred dhanay each; we think women could buy them via the

local banks, which will make loans as small as one hundred dhanay, they could pay back such a loan easily with the machine, and if they failed to pay, the bank could seize the machine anyway. But sewing machines have a lot of small moving parts that require specialized equipment to make if they are to be made cheaply. We need someone to design and make the equipment; we'll pay for it.

“Meddwoglubas has four projects. First, we've actually started to design a prototype sewing machine, but it doesn't work very well; in that sense we're ahead of Tripola, which dreams about making a sewing machine without having any capacity to make one. Second, the power looms are working pretty well and we now have twelve of them in operation, but we need to improve them. We're willing to set up a team of three or four men just to work full-time improving the looms. Our third project is a desktop clock. We need small springs of very hard steel; that requires special equipment. We would like to hire two or three men full time to develop clocks. Finally, we're thinking about making a cotton gin. One reason cotton cloth is so expensive is because of the cost of picking out the seeds. The gin will do it for us. It's a simple, practical project.

“Meddwoglubas would like to keep its research and development team in Meddwoglubas, for obvious reasons. But we would be happy to be part of the Melwika Technology Center anyway, as a sort of branch. And I suspect the Meddwoglubas branch would be better able to help Tripola, because of proximity, than Melwika.”

“John, eventually this Technology Center could have an Ora branch, too,” said Chris. “Think about the idea. I know you don't like it, but it would strengthen the argument to the aliens.”

Miller frowned. “Why not say that every génadëma would be free to establish affiliated centers, except when the military places restrictions, such as Anartu and probably Gordha.”

“Okay,” agreed Chris. “I think that would work well. Every city can invest in its own people, but with overnight steam wagon transportation they could come here to use the advanced equipment pretty easily for a reasonable service fee.”

“I could live with that if it gets us some pretty sophisticated stuff,” exclaimed John. “Let’s put together a really good wish list and negotiate for as much of it as possible. One other matter: location. I’d like to put the technology center in the proposed new eastern addition at the base of the mountain.”

“Right in the path of expansion of your plant?” asked Chris. “Surely you plan to expand your facility.”

“I do,” replied Miller. “We’re planning to move to a new facility for steam wagons within a year, and convert the old one to making tricycles. Well, if not there, then south of the expansion.”

“Floodplain,” replied Amos. “With the Pëskakwës dam, floods are unlikely, but I wouldn’t take the chance.”

“Alright; the Ménwika eastward addition, then,” conceded Miller with a growl. “I guess that’ll work.”

“It’s even more inconvenient for me,” Behruz reminded him. The chemistry facility was in the industrial park in the northern addition, even farther from a site near the génadëma.”

“We need to approach the city council about the proposed addition pretty soon,” said Chris. “I’d like to get the city to agree to pay for the necessary services; the new city wall, water lines, sewer lines, and concreted streets. With all the new farmland opening up in Ménwika and Mélwika next spring we might get quite a few more residents, so we’ll need the additional housing.”

“The new addition will make us larger than Meddoakwés in area, even with that city’s new addition,” noted Amos. “This area will grow a lot if it keeps getting migrants from the western shore villages that are being flooded by the sea. Nénaslua, Béranagrés, and Boléripludha all gained some.”

“And Meddoakwés gained fifteen hundred,” added Chris. “All possible because of improved grain storage, canal-digging techniques, dam building technology, cheap and fast transportation, a postal system that lets people write home, a banking system that lets people send money home, and an economic structure that encourages people to earn money.”

“Lewéspa has gained some, too,” added Brébéstu. “Five hundred who settled in Lewéspadéma and now more are coming to work the silver and gold mine starting in the spring. The southern region has stayed stable. Ora, Néfa, Isurdhuna, and Belledha have been the biggest losers.”

“In spite of our efforts,” agreed Chris. “On the other hand, our medicines are now saving about a thousand lives a year—almost ten percent of the usual mortality—and that number will sharply increase in the next few years. No region will lose population for very long.” Chris looked at his notes. “Okay, to wrap up; can everyone give me a

technology wish list in ten days? I'll talk to Thornton and we'll start to plan how to get it to the aliens."

A few days later, Chris walked into the Mélwika town hall to visit Judge Wérgéndu. The bells were ringing 3 p.m. as he entered the building; it was the end of the court session. He peeked into the courtroom and saw a line of five petitioners waiting to see the judge.

"I'm sorry, Honored, but I have no power to compel the other parties to come to this court if they are in Gordha," Wérgéndu was saying. "You will have to take the case to Lord Walékwes. We can help, however, by writing up your case in thorough and clear language as a petition to him."

"Honored Judge, I have no ability to go to Gordha and no means to remain there. Besides, I would not feel safe going there."

"Honored sir, I am telling you what I can do. I know two other merchants here in Mélwika and the vicinity who have similar complaints about merchants in Gordha. Perhaps all three of you could go at once. You may also wish to consult with Honored Mitrejnu of the House of Orngéndu, because he has many commercial ties with Gordha and knows the people there. He may be able to advise or even help. The alternative, sir, is not to sell to merchants in Gordha."

The man looked defeated. "Thank you, Honored Judge." And he headed out the door.

Chris sat in the public viewing area, fascinated. The next petitioner had the opposite problem; he had paid for goods that had not been delivered. But the alleged

offender lived in Méddoakwés, so after five minutes of detailed questioning Judge Wérgéndu agreed to summon the man to court in the capital, since the petitioner was willing to go there. He set a date and sent the petitioner to the court clerk with the details.

The next case was a woman complaining about the excessive affections a neighbor had for her teenage daughter. She even said he had touched the girl inappropriately at one point. Wérgéndu listened sympathetically, asked questions about the woman's family and that of the man, then set a date to hear the case when the offender could be notified. There was little he could do other than publicly embarrass or reprimand the offender, unless there were witnesses.

The fourth case was a man complaining that his neighbor had stolen a basket from him. Wérgéndu sent the man to Commander Aisu, saying the garrison had to investigate the matter first.

The fifth and last petition was a man who complained that his business partner in the marketplace was not dividing the proceeds of their business equally. Wérgéndu listened carefully, asked about the business, then told the man what sort of evidence he needed to make a case, for everything he claimed was unsupported. Without accounting procedures to keep track of purchases and sales there was little that could be done unless there were witnesses to theft. The man replied that his partner did not like to keep books, so Wérgéndu recommended he find a different partner, especially if the man was stealing his share. The man left disappointed.

Wérgéndu rose. "I apologize, Lord Mennea, for keeping you waiting. I never know how many people will show up to court. Come into my chambers." He turned to

the clerk, who, like the assistant clerk and the guard, were preparing to leave. “Please bring us tea.”

They retired into Wérgéndu’s office, where tea arrived almost before they were able to sit. “The work is fascinating, but it grows every day,” said the judge. “Most people still solve disputes informally or drop them, but more and more people are realizing that I am here to render justice. The same in Meddoakwés; I have now opened the court there three days a week.”

“Three? How can you do anything else, sitting in court two days here and three there?”

“The third day is an open court; the only day we have open court in Meddoakwés. On that day my chief clerk sits instead of me, sorting through cases and deciding which should be pursued and how. He does a good job, too.”

“I’m glad you have found good help.”

“He’s a second son from an aristocratic family and has taken many courses in the two génadémas; he still takes one every term, too. He writes well and quickly; he takes excellent notes in court. Grandfather Yusdu sits in court one day a month, when I am here, to hear appeals to my decisions.”

“How is he?”

Wérgéndu shook his head. “He fell last week. He didn’t break anything, fortunately. But he’s getting old. If it weren’t for the medicines he probably would be dead by now, or completely incapacitated.” He put down his tea. “That’s the reason I wanted to talk to you. The time has come to establish a school to train people in law. The

crown is spending lots of money on the new palace and the new génadëma is considered part of the complex. The old one has already grown way too small. If I propose a school of law, they'll spend the money to build it and staff it. I'm sorry such a school won't be here, but it will be close and part of the Gésélékwës Maj Génadëma.

“I want to see the school established while grandfather is still around to help. We won't accept anyone unless they already have had a year of courses at a génadëma; I suppose eventually we will raise the requirement. I want students who can already read, write, and count. I want to train twenty judges and twenty clerks in five years, and twenty more judges and forty more clerks in another five years. Based on my experience here, we need a minimum of twenty judges as soon as possible. This area needs two already and will need three pretty soon.”

“And that will be true in Ora, Néfa, Anartu, Belledha, Tripola, and Isurdhuna as well; not to mention Gordha and Mëddwoglubas. Yes, twenty is a bare minimum.”

“People rarely take their daily grievances to their Lord because he is not trained in law and has little time for it, so he is often arbitrary or incomplete in collecting the facts. That's why we are flooded when the Réjé makes her annual circuit, and even then we only get the most determined petitioners or the worst cases. Even murder and severe theft is not punished very systematically. And business relationships are very unpredictable because you can't enforce contracts.”

“I know, believe me. This is excellent news. It is badly needed, Wérgéndu. Any society must be based on the rule of law; otherwise it is not fair and just. What can I do?”

“I’ll write up a proposal that I’ll submit personally to the Réjé; I’d appreciate your advice about the draft. The fact you support it will carry weight with her; she trusts your judgment. I plan to talk to Werétrakester as well.”

“Perhaps the harder task will be setting up the system; it’ll cost fifty or a hundred thousand dhanay. And the regional Lords will want to be involved, since you’re taking authority from them. They’ll have candidates for judges you’ll have to consider and sometimes reject, and they won’t want to pay.”

“The Consultative Assembly will have to get involved.” Wérgéndu smiled. “I appreciate your help.”

“There really is little I can do; I’m doing too much already.”

“I don’t know how you get so much done. The summer trip to the Western and Southern Shore was quite something. An incredible leap in literacy. And I gather your Bahá’í numbers went up as well.”

Chris was surprised by that comment. “Yes, even Bahá’í membership increased, but that was more from my mother in law Mary’s trip.”

“I gather she organized some elections as well.”

“Yes; how did you hear about that?”

“It’s a rumor I heard.” He paused. “At the palace.”

Chris nodded, wondering whether he should ask more, but he decided to drop the matter.

Lua was surprised to see both her sister, May, and her sister in law, Lébé, the same afternoon at the hospital, and for the same reason. They both had brief announcements at the family's early dinner that evening.

“Amos and I are expecting another baby,” exclaimed May. “Probably mid Blorménu.”

“Really?” exclaimed Thornton. “How remarkable.”

“Because that’s roughly when we’re expecting, too,” added Lébé.

“How exciting!” said Liz. “Congratulations to all of you. The clan grows by two more.”

“Even if it is unexpected,” added May.

“With all its moves and side trips, this was a bad summer for the rhythm method,” added Lua, wryly.

“This raises the issue of space again,” said Amos. “Our area has no room for another child. Thornton and Lébé’s space is limited, too.”

“That is a problem,” agreed Chris, thinking.

“We could build a new house,” suggested Behruz. “This place was fine until a year or two ago, but the scale of our operation is now much bigger.”

“And there are a lot of more impressive houses around town now,” added Thornton.

“There are,” conceded Chris. He looked at Behruz, wondering whether this was the start of a request to move out. If anyone moved out of the house, it would be Behruz

and Lua. “But our house makes a statement about modesty, too. We have plenty of space if we rearrange it.”

“I’ve been thinking about our use of space in the last few months,” said Mary. “If we move the balconies outward over the garden, we’d gain some space, and we could make them wider; they’re rather narrow right now. They could be supported by iron beams and could look elegant. The building surface facing the courtyard would need a new façade, and that would make this place look a lot less rustic.”

“That would add a lot of space,” agreed Lua. “About thirty square meters; plenty for new bedrooms.”

“Or larger rooms, since we’re talking about a long, thin space that’s being added,” replied Behruz.

“We could also eliminate one of the two garages because we could always park one rover overnight in the garden here,” added Mary. “Half the time they aren’t even in Melwika, and they’re rarely in the garage more than six hours a day.”

“We could move them out entirely,” responded Chris. “We could build a garage attached to the dormitory in the new génadema space. The students could watch them.”

“You know, if we built a special garage for them at the new engineering school with lots of space to work on them, we’d have a classroom to teach mechanics,” said Amos.

“I’d worry about them being at a Miller facility,” objected Thornton. Chris shook his head. “It won’t be a Miller facility. The engineering school will go just east of the new génadema and will be part of it.”

“We need more bathrooms here, too,” noted Behruz, returning to the problem of the house. “One toilet and one shower stall for all of us is ridiculous, considering how easy it is to get them made, now.”

“I think it’s time for a redesign of our interior space,” suggested Mary. “We could convert the garages into new servant’s quarters; we need that, too.”

“Here’s my suggestion,” said Chris. “Give May and Amos the entire top floor on the eastern side, Lua and Behruz the entire bottom floor on the western side, and Thornton and Lébé the entire top floor on the western side. That way all of you will have 100 square meters; plenty for three bedrooms, a parlor, a kitchenette, and a bathroom. Liz and I can have the entire ten by four meter space over the entrance and garages. The entrance area and garages can be rearranged to make a larger kitchen and rooms for our two servants. This area here—the bottom of the eastern section—can be rearranged, too. My old office can become the computer room and library. We can even put in a first floor full bathroom that can be used by guests and servants, and by Mary.”

“I can make some floor plans,” said Mary. “We’ll have all winter to do the remodeling. We should replaster most of the rooms, too; we now have access to real plaster. I’d like to see the wall between here and the garden court replaced with a folding system, like Liz and I saw in Néfa. And we need a more airtight covering over the courtyard, so it’ll be warmer in the winter.”

“More windows,” added Behruz. “They can incorporate a set of tough iron bars.” The foundry bell began to ring and they all stopped to listen. “Seven bells,” said Chris. “We’re late for the Spiritual Assembly meeting. We’ll have to talk about this later.”

Two days later, Chris and Stauréstü took a rover to the palace in Méddoakwés. It was a beautiful fall day in early Génménu, “the month of hunting,” corresponding to late October. There had been another frost the night before; frosts now occurred regularly as the season shifted toward winter. As they left town, they passed a long line of men with longbows waiting for the steam wagon that would take them up one of the tributaries of the Arjakwés, ten or even twenty kilometers into the mountains north and east of Melwika.

The fields of Miller and then of Nénaslua were fallow except those greening gradually from sprouting winter wheat. A steam wagon had just gone through to pick up passengers, so the road was fairly empty. In a few kilometers, however, Chris passed the passenger wagon; easy, considering his speed on a concrete roadway was much faster. He made one stop to pick up an old farmer with several sacks of grain who was heading for the capital; he had met the man before and they chatted briefly on the twenty-minute drive. After dropping him off, Chris headed for the postern gate and a place to park the rover. They were escorted into the palace and soon waited for their audience with the Queen.

When they entered her private office and bowed before her, she was surprised Chris wasn’t alone. “You may sit on the pillows in my presence. Lord Mennea, I thought you had asked for a personal audience with me.”

They sat on the floor in front of her; she sat on a low chair rather than on her throne, making her a bit less distant. “I apologize, Your Majesty, but I thought I should invite Stauréstu Aywergui of Snékhpéla to come with me.”

She looked him over, head to foot. “Snékhpéla; you’re a long way from home.”

“Indeed I am, Your Majesty.”

“And you’re a blacksmith?”

“No, Your Majesty, I am a physician. ‘Aywergui’ has been our family honorific since my great grandfather was a smith.”

“And you are a physician of the new knowledge?”

“Indeed, and a surgeon.”

“Ah, I’ve heard of you, then. Béndhu was telling me of a surgeon of great promise. You have opened people to remove diseased parts, like an appendix?” She said the last word carefully; it was a neologism.

“I have, Your Majesty. So far, I have performed fifteen operations, and twelve have survived. I have also assisted Dr. Lua in about thirty operations. Now that we have telephones, we take the operating team to the patient.”

“Yes, this is something we have paid for. It is a good service to all the people.”

She was pleased to meet Stauréstu. “Lord Mennea, what is your request?”

“Your Majesty, our request is not about medicine. Honored Stauréstu is a Bahá’í, and—”

“A Bahá’í?” The Réjé looked at Stauréstu differently. “So, do you still say the hymns and sacrifice?”

“I do, Your Majesty, for my love of Widumaj is greater than ever before. He is a true prophet.”

“Then why accept Bahu?”

Stauréstu spoke slowly. “Because, Your Majesty, I believe that the new knowledge creates a new situation and we need to add new teachings from Esto to those of Widumaj.”

She looked at him. “The new knowledge certainly changes many things. But you aren’t here to convince me about Bahu.”

“No, Your Majesty, we are not,” responded Chris. “But our business relates to the Bahá’í teachings. As you have probably heard, two years ago the Bahá’ís of Mélwika elected a *spiritual assembly*, nine persons to organize and coordinate the Bahá’ís of our city. Bahá’ís have no priests or Lords. Instead, we come together and pray and each adult writes down the names of the nine he or she thinks should be on the Assembly. No one can interfere or seek to influence the vote; each person is to vote after the inspiration of prayer. This system often elects people who are very honest and wise; it is difficult for the ambitious to dominate.”

“This is the system used in Mélwika to elect Estanu to the city council,” she added. “In that case, it worked well.”

“Indeed, Your Majesty. A Spiritual Assembly is a council, like our city council, but it is purely spiritual; it seeks no power. Last spring, Spiritual Assemblies were also elected in several other villages in this area. This coming spring, more will be elected. Consequently, the Bahá’ís now wish to elect one Spiritual Assembly for all of Éra, to

coordinate the village and town Spiritual Assemblies. We plan to proceed to elect that body in the spring. We have asked the various Bahá'í communities to elect one or two delegates to come to Melwika in the spring and elect the Éra Spiritual Assembly. But two days ago the Melwika Spiritual Assembly discussed the election and decided we should ask your permission first. We do not seek controversy and we are not secretive. We are absolutely obedient to your command, hence we seek your approval before we take this next step.”

“I see.” The Réjé considered. She cast a glance at Estoiyaju, who was silently taking notes. He was clearly concerned by the matter. “I have heard about these elections, a Lord has written to me to complain about one in his region.”

“I was not aware, Your Majesty,” said Chris, which was true, though he was pretty sure Lord Albanu of Néfa would complain.

She looked at him. “Perhaps not. How many Bahá’ís are there, now?”

“Two or three hundred, your Majesty.”

“And how many spiritual assemblies?”

“Three.”

“How many new ones will there be in the spring?”

“I think six more.”

“Then your believers are growing in number, as I have heard. The controversy can only grow, especially because of the priests. I have not met many Bahá’ís, but they seem to be good people. If they are following the same example as your family, they are an asset to the realm.” She paused. “Tell you what, Lord Mennea. This is an excellent

example of a matter requiring wide consultation. Some will support you; some will be opposed. The Consultative Assembly meets in two weeks to charter the gold and silver mine in Lewéspa. I have also asked them to review and approve the borders for that region; let Lord Mitru and Lord Gugéndu have their say. You should draw up a bill to give your Éra Spiritual Assembly a royal charter. Let them discuss it. If they approve it, perhaps I will as well.”

Chris was startled by that. She was setting an almost impossible condition, but it was also a remarkable opportunity. “Thank you, Your Majesty,” he finally said, uncertain what else to say.

She smiled as if she was pleased at his discomfort. Have you anything else?”

“No, Your Majesty.”

“Your Majesty,” said Estoiyaju. “The newspaper.”

“Thank you, Estoiyaju. Lord Mennea, yesterday I had a long audience with Lord Gugéndu. He begged to have his printing press back, promising all sorts of restraints on Kameru and others who wrote inflammatory articles. We have agreed that Tripola can have its press, but henceforth any newspaper or other publication can be sued for slander. Furthermore, we reserve the right to fine presses for offensive language. Lord Gugéndu has paid five thousand dhanay.” She looked at Chris intently. “The new knowledge is bringing changes and freedoms, but the freedoms can come only so fast, and some freedoms will not be allowed.”

Reread and edited 5/19/13, 7/27/17

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Sacrifice

Chris and Stauréstu drove straight back to Mélwika; they didn't stop to pick up any passengers. The family had supper without any guests that night and he summarized the audience to them.

“This is bad. Very bad,” said May, shaking her head. “What's the chance of getting our Central Spiritual Assembly incorporated by the Consultative Assembly?”

Chris considered. “Ten percent, maybe?”

“That low?”

He nodded.

“How many Bahá'ís in the Assembly?” asked Liz.

“Well, last year there were two: Sliru and Brébéstü, but the new Assembly will have forty-two members rather than twenty-six. We also had a lot of friends, like Mayor Weranolubu, Albékwu of Gordha, and Yusbérü of Isurdhuna.”

“We do have a lot of friends on the Assembly,” agreed Amos.

“We also have some strong enemies, though,” pointed out Chris. “Like Lord Spondu of Belledha and now Lord Albanu of Néfa. And there's no guarantee our friends, who favor development, will also support the Faith.”

And there's the matter of press censorship,” growled May. “If they support us on freedom of the press, they'll be less inclined to support the Faith.”

“I wouldn’t expect a law guaranteeing freedom of the press,” replied Chris, looking at his journalist daughter. “This world isn’t able to think that way, yet. They want some freedom, but they don’t want Lords questioned or institutions undermined. Kameru went too far and now all of us will suffer.”

“You know, I think we’re looking at this in the wrong way,” said Mary. “The Faith will do fine; we know that. Whether we form a Central Spiritual Assembly this year or not is really not that important; the Melwika Assembly can always continue coordinating things for a few more years. The important consideration is that the planet’s legislature is going to debate the Faith. Forty two of this world’s most important people! That’s a huge victory for the Faith by itself!”

Liz nodded. “You’re right, mother.”

“And we may manage more than debate,” noted Chris. “I’ll have to make another trip to Meddoakwés to get advice from Werétrakester, Wérgéndu, Kandékwés, and anyone else who might have ideas. We have to draw up a bill, which means defining the Central Assembly’s bylaws, and then we need to run them past the Melwika Assembly. We have a lot to do.”

“Overall, I still think this was a good idea,” said Mary. “You don’t want to form something that will get the Faith banned.”

That seemed to settle the matter. Chris took another bite of supper. “Amos, did you walk the proposed new wall?”

“Yes, John and I went out with Weranolubu, Aisu, and two surveyors and set up a few stakes to mark the wall. We had planned to add two hundred doli to the town,

east-west, but Aisu looked at us and said ‘I don’t want to have to move the walls again; add four hundred instead’ so that’s what we’re doing. We can have workers remove the old wall and build the new wall all winter. Right now there’s no danger of Tutane attack, especially in snow season, so Aisu and Weranolubu both felt it was alright to do both at once. It’s a good time to lay out the streets, too; come spring when people will want to move here, we’ll be ready for them.”

“I think I’ll ask General Roktekester about that. How many more housing lots are we talking about?” asked Chris.

“If half the new space is reserved for industrial and educational expansion, then we’re talking about three hectares of residential areas. That could accommodate about 300 house lots. Add a hundred or two lots at Deksawsuperakwa and we’re talking about a big potential expansion; eventually another 2,000 people.”

They considered that. “Well, if the Lords of Ora and Néfa continue their course, their surplus has to go somewhere,” said May. “Serves them right.”

“And that might not be the end of our expansion,” added Chris. “Because we’re now utilizing the entire watershed of the Arjakwés and Péskwés all the way to the mountains; that’s a big increase in land. And at some point we may want to talk to the Médhelones about the land just south of the Majakwés; we may be able to irrigate it as well.”

The Consultative Assembly began its special autumn meeting two weeks later with a two-day orientation for the new members and informal discussion, followed by a day of

reports about road building, schools, and public health. They then turned to the least controversial matter: a charter for the Royal Gold and Silver Company of Lewéspa. The text had already been drawn up to give ownership of the company to a council of representatives of the “towns and villages of Lewéspa” and it was debated briefly, then approved.

The next matter was more controversial: the question of the boundaries of Lewéspa. Lord Mitru wanted to get out his side of the story and spent most of a day explaining why the southwest belonged to Ora, the history of the area’s conquest, the various shifting boundaries, and finally why he ordered the Ora garrison to raid Lewéspadéma. Lord Gugéndu felt compelled to repeat his claim and Lord Estodhéru then repeated the claim of the area to be an independent and separate region, a claim echoed by both of the region’s other representatives (one of whom was Trisunu, Lewéspadéma’s unofficial chief). Trisunu, speaking as a former resident of the southern regions of Ora, insisted that everyone in the area recognized the Trinénasisér or “Three Elephant River” as the border of the regions and of their hunting rights.

The wrangling over right and wrong, however, shifted greatly in character when Rudhisuru, chief geologist for the army and head of the new *ɛndra Genadéma*, presented the report of the border commission, which recommended the Trinénasisér as Lewéspa’s northern boundary and an arbitrary line as the southern border, with the peaks of the Snowys as the western border and the sea as the eastern border. Gugéndu had no objection to the southern border and Lord Mitru never offered an alternative to the

Trinénasisér other than claiming the entire area, which was plainly unacceptable. The borders were approved.

Debate then turned to newspapers and three days were spent bashing and praising the power of the printing press. In the end a resolution was passed calling for the printing presses to be used wisely and authorizing both lawsuits and fines against publications that “published inaccurate or inappropriate information.” Other than making publishing more difficult and uncertain, it ws not clear what the law either permitted or forbade.

Finally, almost two weeks after the Consultative Assembly began, it turned to the Bahá’í question. Chris drove to the palace early on a crisp autumn morning to present the case to the body. When he was ushered into the chamber, the steely stares immediately told him that the audience was not in favor.

“Welcome, Lord Mennea,” began Lord Kandékwes, who was chairing the body. “You have been invited to this meeting of her Majesty’s consultative assembly to explain your request that the organization of a Bahá’í Spiritual Assemby for all of Éra be permitted. We will then ask you questions and even debate the request in your presence. You may begin by making a brief three-minute statement summarizing the request.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” replied Chris. “Our request is very simple and is an expression of respect for her Majesty and her assembly. Our prophet, Bahá’u’lláh, did not establish a priesthood. Instead, to ensure that his teachings be taught to the followers and that they come together to make the world a better place, he said that in every location the believers should chose nine persons of great integrity, capacity, and nobility to serve as their spiritual assembly to guide them, encourage them, and sometimes admonish them.

We already have spiritual assemblies in several towns and villages across Éra. To coordinate, guide, and encourage the Spiritual Assemblies, every year we elect one central assembly of nine believers. Every area elects one or more representatives and they come together to elect the Central Assembly. The election of this assembly should take place early in the month of Dhébelménú. We do not know whether we need permission to elect our central assembly, but we have decided to seek it anyway out of respect, to honor her Majesty. We also request that our Spiritual Assemblies, local and central, be exempted from paying taxes, just like génademas, hospitals, and temples, and for the same reasons: the assemblies exist to promote all good things and do not exist to make money themselves.

“I should add that we do not actively pursue believers for the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. People hear of our teachings and ask us for more information. They memorize Bahá’u’lláh’s words, just like they memorize and recite the words of Widumaj. We regard Bahá’u’lláh and Widumaj as two great prophets and seek to honor, respect, and love both. The people who have become Bahá’ís are people of honesty and integrity, who seek to love and serve others. Not all are students in génademas; many are humble village people, farmers and craftsmen. We have nothing to hide; our teachings are available to all. I will be honored to answer your questions.”

The brief presentation stirred several to raise their staffs. Kandékwes called on Mayor Wéranolubu. “My Lords and Honoreds, I am not a Bahá’í, but I wish to speak out in favor of this request. I have known the Lord Mennea and his family for almost four years. They work to serve people tirelessly, day and night; most of you have witnessed

this as well. They are not enriching themselves as they spread the new knowledge, nor have they profited from the spread of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor have they taken advantage of the new knowledge to push Bahá'u'lláh on others. In Mélwika we have a Bahá'í Center and a community of some one hundred Bahá'ís. Sulanu, editor of the Mélwika Nues, is a Bahá'í. Consider the great care and respect that newspaper has shown for our world; it has not been a source of trouble. Modolubu the paper maker is a Bahá'í; many of us have met him and know him to be a good and honest man. Stauréstu the doctor, who has assisted many of us, is a Bahá'í. This Faith has improved the morals of those who have accepted it. Its gradual spread is an antidote to the dangers of the new knowledge and not a danger to our traditional ways. These assemblies are not centers of trouble, but centers of love and service to help people. I think we all benefit from permitting the formation of spiritual assemblies." He sat to the murmurs of others present.

Kandékwes recognized Lord Albanu. "The Bahá'ís have already elected representatives to form this Central Spiritual Assembly. Lord Mennea seeks permission because he knows the elections have already stirred controversy. The spread of this Faith takes away from the lovers of Widumaj. The Bahá'ís say they love Widumaj and his hymns, but the fact is that they love Bahá'u'lláh more and follow him rather than the Great Prophet. This is yet another manifestation of the so-called new knowledge from Gédhéma, and a dangerous manifestation at that. I have told Lord Mennea that I will not permit Bahá'ís in Néfa. I have no control over Mélwika; they can go there."

Chris, among others, raised his staff, and Kandékwes nodded. “If I may comment on Lord Albanu’s words. I respect Lord Albanu very much, but wonder how he can stop people from loving something and someone? For a Bahá’í is a lover of Bahá’u’lláh, a lover of Widumaj, and a lover of people. Lovers are not dangerous people to banish, but people to praise and thank Esto for, because they seek to do good and make life easier for others. It is true that in late summer my mother in law, Mary, traveled the western shore and explained Bahá’í elections to the Bahá’ís in Néfa, Ora, Isurdhuna, Léwéspa, and Tripola. She was there and available to explain these matters before the weather grew cold and prevented her from traveling. And it is true that Lord Albanu objected to me about the election of two persons from the Néfa area to represent the Bahá’ís of that region in the election of a Central Spiritual Assembly. But if we do not have permission to elect the Central Spiritual Assembly, the representatives will never meet and the election will not occur.

“As for diminishing Widumaj, we have absolutely no desire to do this. I am a singer of his hymns and I sacrifice to Esto in the manner he prescribes. I support the temple to Esto in Melwika. Have you seen our temple? It is truly beautiful and we are proud of it.”

“Thank you, Lord Kristoféru,” said Kandékwes. “Lord Spondu.” Spondu rose and there was fire in his eyes. “These are beautiful words, but the fact remains that when someone becomes a Bahá’í, they no longer give their primary loyalty to Widumaj. If an entire city or town became Bahá’í, would it have a temple to Esto at all? And what of the teachings that contradict those in the hymns? The Hymn of

Marriage calls on women to be obedient to their husbands, but Bahu says they are to be equal to men! This teaching is already deranging our society and threatens to undermine our families and our morality! There is grave danger in permitting these teachings to spread. Let us acquire the science of Gedhéma and not its superstitions.”

Kandékwes turned to Chris. “Lord Spondu misunderstands the intent of Bahá’u’lláh,” Chris replied. “Bahá’u’lláh teaches equal respect for men and women, meaning that men must love and honor their wives, not beat them. Bahá’u’lláh also teaches that women must have training so that they are able to support themselves and their families if, Esto forbid, their husbands die. For this reason my wife has started a group of widows in Melwika and teaches them useful skills. Some of these skills have proved so useful their husbands have been pleased to let them continue, even after they remarry, because they are happier, and are able to serve their families as well. We have found that Eryan women are excellent at many things, and you know this is true because they have always done these things: they are healers and teachers already. The widows cook and sew, skills they already had as wives.

“As for the question whether a Bahá’í town would have a temple to Esto where sacrifices are performed, of course it would, for this is our way here. Bahá’ís sacrifice at temples, like everyone else.”

Kandékwes pointed to Sliru, who rose. “When the Honored Mary came through Tripola in late summer, I was one of those surprised by the privilege of being elected a delegate to the convention to elect the Central Spiritual Assembly.” He paused because his admission that he was a Bahá’í caused murmurs and surprised looks. “I accepted

Bahá'u'lláh because I saw him as part of the new spiritual knowledge we need. Because the new knowledge has started to spread across this world, and it does indeed undermine the traditional ways at times. The Mitrui Génadema in particular is a place where science is studied, but the hymns are not. I do not say this to criticize Lord Mitru, but to state something most people know. I learned more hymns of Widumaj while studying at the Melwika Génadema than I ever learned from my blessed parents or from a priest. I share Lord Spondu's concern that the traditional ways are being endangered by the new knowledge; but this is not because of the Bahá'ís. They are promoting the hymns and seek to bolster the old wisdom against new foolishness."

That stirred quite a loud conversation. The priest Jésunu rose without waiting to be called on "Lies!" he exclaimed. "It is easy to recite a few hymns or purchase a cow for sacrifice. Lord Mennea has plenty of money and can afford to do that occasionally. But the hymns of Widumaj must also be set in the heart, and we do not see him do that! This new knowledge is immensely dangerous. The teachings of Bahu are not part of the solution. Génademas must include priests who are properly trained who can teach the hymns and help the students *live* them. Sacrifice is a natural response to living the hymns, not a convenient thing to do to buy good will. At Isurdhuna we see that the génadema has been opposed to the priests. The Géselékwes Maj Génadema largely ignores priests in favor of the philosophers. And the Mitrui Génadema ignores both priests and philosophers in favor of a new kind of scientist priest who has no need for Widumaj or even for Esto! Therein lies great danger for our people and their future. We most certainly cannot permit Bahá'í Assemblies. It is unthinkable."

Kandékwes glared at the priest as if to emphasize that he was out of order, but all eyes fell on Chris. “Honored priest, I will not attempt to see what is in someone’s heart. Your words make it clear there is nothing I can say to persuade you otherwise. As we know, the meaning of sacrifice has long been a subject of debate on this world and I will not get into that now, nor is this the time to debate whether we should have génademas.”

“You do not have any of the hymns of Widumaj memorized; none. You cannot hold hymns in your heart if you do not know them, nor can they change your heart.”

“Honored priest, I was not a child here; that is when most Eryan learn the hymns. I have rather few prayers of Bahá’u’lláh memorized, too. My son has memorized many hymns, as most of you can bear witness to. He is a better example than I.”

“Many of us know few of the hymns by heart,” added Walékwes of Gordha. “In my lands there are many old believers. In Sumilara there are even fewer followers of the hymns. The followers of the Sumi customs are allowed to live their lives and have their temples.”

“We are not talking about a temple here!” replied Jésunu.

Kandékwes raised his staff. “Stop! Raise your staff first; we must have dignity in our deliberations.”

A dozen staffs went up. Kandékwes recognized the men, one by one, most of whom were opposed to legalizing Spiritual Assemblies; they did not want the Bahá’í Faith to spread further in their areas. There was little Chris could say about that.

Jésunu spoke passionately again against legalizing Bahá’í assemblies. As he sat, the clock in nearby Market Square rang out twelve bells. “We should adjourn,” exclaimed

Kandékwés. “We will return after lunch to continue our deliberations, but Lord Mennea will not be present. Are there any further questions for him?”

“When will you return to Gédhéma?” quipped Jésunu.

“That is inappropriate!” exclaimed the Lord Mayor of Méddoakwés. “This meeting is adjourned.” He banged his staff on the floor twice. Everyone rose to walk out.

Chris noticed that few were looking toward him, though many seemed extremely uneasy around Jésunu as well. Chris walked slowly toward the exit as well. Sliru came up to him and they walked silently out of the building.

“Where are you going for lunch?” Chris asked him, as they stepped outside.

“I didn’t have a plan, Lord.”

“Come to the génadéma with me, then.”

“Gladly.”

Chris looked around. “You were a brave man to announce yourself as a Bahá’í like that.”

“If the Bábís could sacrifice their lives, should I not sacrifice as well? And I did not sacrifice much. I don’t do business with any of these men.”

“Still, this may come back to haunt you.” They headed toward the main exit of the palace, down the monumental stairs and into Market Square, where they turned right and headed toward the génadéma on Arjakwés Rodha. “How do you think the session went?”

Sliru paused to consider the question. “I think you made the best possible presentation. But I do not think we have the votes.”

“I don’t think so, either.”

“I wish Lord Estodhéru would speak up in defense of the Faith, but he said nothing at all.”

“Perhaps he will. This is his first time in the assembly; he sent Mitrané last time.” Chris sighed. “How’s your family?”

“Oh, fairly well. Now that Aréjé is pregnant, Kérdé wants another child! But I am not yet established enough to stop traveling for my business, so I worry about that. It is hard to have a family and be away a lot.”

“Indeed. How old is your son?”

“Two.”

“And they are so cute at that age. I remember Thornton when he was two.” Chris smiled.

“He asks for me every night. Kérdé and I talked on the telephone last night for a very short time. He wants more stories about Rostu the dragon slayer. I’ll have to read Lébé’s book again!”

“It has some marvelous tales,” agreed Chris. They were just a few meters short of the door of the génadéma now; he looked up because several students were coming out, so he had to slow down to let them out first.

“Die, Bahá’ís!” someone suddenly shouted from behind. Chris began to turn when suddenly a knife was plunged into back. He gasped from the shock.

“My Lord!” shouted Sliru and he turned as well, but the second assassin was already approaching him and plunged his dagger straight into Sliru’s chest.

“Stop!” shouted a student, and immediately three students set upon the assassins, one of whom didn’t even have time to pull his blade from Chris.

It all happened in a split second. Chris fell to his knees from the shock, gasping, and caught a glimpse at the two assassins dashing away, some students in hot pursuit. Another knelt, covering a gash in his right arm with his left hand. Other students started to pour out of the door.

“My Lord!” exclaimed one of them.

“Take us to the hospital,” Chris gasped. He saw Sliru collapse completely to the ground, blood pouring from the dagger wound on the left side of his chest. His heart must have been hit, Chris thought.

Then he blacked out and sagged forward.

A student caught him. “Call Wérétrakester!” shouted someone.

“Help me lift him!” exclaimed another, pulling on Chris’s left arm. A student came around to grab Chris right arm while another came around back to grab the knife.

“No, leave it! Don’t touch it!” exclaimed Lujrukta, “Black Bear,” a medical student and a Fish Eryan. “We’ll get it out later, but right now it’s slowing the flow of blood!” He turned to Sliru, who was very nearly dead. “Help me with this one!” he said to another student, who immediately grabbed Sliru’s feet while Lujrukta grabbed his arms. The four of them moved the two stabbed men immediately into the génadema and from there into the hospital wing, where the lone doctor, Mitretu, had already been alerted.

Three other medical students were there almost immediately as well. Mitretu felt for Sliru's heart beat. "He's almost gone; there's nothing we can do. He was stabbed in the heart."

"But Lord Mennea?"

"Dr. Lua will have to come. Lujruktu, call her immediately and find out what kind of blood the Lord has. Where's Wérspéku? Péskgéndu! Go find him! He's type O. We'll need a liter of blood from him immediately."

Everyone dashed off to do their tasks. Mitretu took a deep breath; he was only twenty years old and suddenly had an immense responsibility, but he had no time to worry about that. He had Lord Mennea moved slightly on the bed where they had placed him, chest downward so that the knife stuck up into the air, and directed someone to cut off his toga. Meanwhile he put on his stethoscope and listened. Fast, labored heartbeat. Fluid buildup in the lungs; probably internal bleeding. Heavy breathing. Little blood was coming out, at least; the knife was preventing that. His surgical experience was limited; he would have to keep the patient alive until Dr. Lua could arrive.

The door opened and Lord Kandékwas hurried in. He stopped, shocked, to see the two men lying on beds side by side, covered with blood.

"Are they dead?"

"This one is. We are trying to save Lord Mennea. We can give him a blood transfusion until Dr. Lua arrives."

“By Esto, the assassins will not escape!” vowed Kandékwes. He stormed out of the room, furious. Werétrakester stood outside the door, looking in, not wanting to interfere.

“Dr. Lua says give him type O or A!” exclaimed Lujruktu from the telephone.
“She and Stauréstu are on their way by rover!”

The sound of hymns chanted to Widumaj rose from a large classroom nearby. People had begun to pray for Lord Chris.

For Lua Mennea Shirazi, the next twelve hours were the worst in her life. She had not been trained in emergency surgery, though she had seen it in an emergency room in Johannesburg. The last four years had refined and deepened her instincts as a doctor, since she had no one to turn to for advice, except occasionally a website Thornton managed to find. But never had she expected to be called on to save her own father’s life. Four different hospital beds were filled with students giving blood and it went out of him almost as fast as they put it in. When they finally removed the knife it poured out, and the wound still had to be cleaned and closed. All afternoon and much of the night they worked to stabilize him and control the bleeding. Finally in the wee hours the bleeding slowed dramatically, then all but stopped. At least that battle was won. But he still had a partially collapsed lung and an enormous danger of infection; the ivs pumped antibiotics into him. It wasn’t until mid morning the next day when she let her mother in to see Chris, and then only briefly, for he was conscious, though unable to understand much because of the morphine.

“We have a very good chance that he will live,” said Lua to her brother and sister while Liz was in the room. “Dad was healthy and strong, Mitretu did a good job stabilizing him, and the surgery was successful. The next few days will tell.”

“Do you need to move him to Mélwika?” asked Thornton.

“We won’t move him until he’s well on his way to recovery. There’s no reason to take the chance. This hospital has the basics and anything we need at Mélwika can be brought down in half an hour.”

Just then Amos came into the room. “How’s dad?”

“Stable and probably on the mend, but it’ll be slow.”

“How long?”

“Six or eight weeks at least before he can resume activities.”

“I just visited with Lord Kandékwas. They’ve captured one of the assassins and he claims he was paid by a priest.”

“I’m not surprised!” exclaimed May.

“Kandékwas seemed to be. I’m not sure he believed the information. He said the Réjé would not be pleased, but didn’t elaborate.”

“Have we heard anything more about Sliru’s funeral?”

“It’ll be this afternoon in Market Square,” said Amos. “We have a burial place for him in the city cemetery. The consultative assembly will not resume its deliberations until tomorrow. Modolubu and Sulanu are planning the funeral.”

“We should pay for a very large tomb for him,” suggested Thornton.

“I agree,” said Amos.

Just then Liz came out. “He’s resting.”

“How does he look?” asked Thornton, his voice breaking a bit.

“He’s very weak,” Liz said, her voice filled with emotion as well. “He needs to sleep.” She looked at the others. “He asked about Sliru, then about his widow, then asked how our génadëma was doing!”

“He shouldn’t worry about these things,” said Amos. “But if he asks about Kérdé again, tell him she and her son are now here in Mélwika with Stauréstu and Aréjé.”

“We need to hire some people to help us with Chris’s work,” said Liz. “The grange is pretty quiet this time of year; maybe Kérdu can visit businesses and collect reports for us.”

“Sérstélu,” replied Amos. “He visits the businesses every two days anyway to do their bookkeeping. He knows how they’re doing. We can increase the time of some of our business students to make up for his time.”

“What will Yimanu do?” asked Thornton.

Amos shrugged. “It’s time the bank was really managed by him and not by Chris anyway.”

It wasn’t until the next afternoon, two entire days after the assassination of Sliru, when the Consultative Assembly met again. Kandékwës began the session with several chanted hymns in memory of Sliru. Jésunu was happy to provide one of the hymns; he was known to have one of most beautiful chanting voices in the city.

“Let us resume our deliberations about the matter of Bahá’í assemblies,” said Kandékwes. “Two days ago we had finished asked Lord Mennea questions and clarifications, and many had stated where they stood. The passage of time may have changed our views, not because of the shocking crime, but because we have a chance to reflect. Who wishes to speak?”

Jesunu immediately raised his staff, so the Lord Mayor nodded. The priest rose. “The events of two days ago were indeed shocking. I spent much of the night in prayer for Lord Mennea. I mourn for the death of Sliru, who was an articulate and calm voice in this assembly. Thanks to Esto, our prayers appear to be answered and Lord Mennea is gradually recovering from his nearly fatal stabbing. This act of cowardice in no way represents the will of Esto or of his priesthood.

“But this crime is not related in any way to the subject we have been deliberating: permission to establish a grand spiritual assembly of Bahá’ís. Éra is the world where Widumaj is the great prophet and the source of infinite wisdom. Perhaps Bahu is fine for Gédhéma, but he is not needed here. Indeed, some of his teachings simply are not fit for our world, where women have their rightful their place and sacrifice is loved and respected. Day by day we learn how the new knowledge, properly understood, completes the knowledge of Widumaj.

“The honored members of the Assembly know this; it was clear that the majority felt the truth of this position as our deliberations drew to an end, two days ago. I am confident that the Assembly will protect our customs and ways from the spread of this new teaching.”

There were murmurs as he sat and Kandékwes recognized Awskandu, son of Lord Albanu. “I have nothing against Bahá’ís and have met the ones in Néfa,” he said. “They are good people. But they do not need to be encouraged.”

Kandékwes nodded to Estodhéru, who had calmly raised his staff as well. The Lord of Mèddwoglubas rose. “First, I must introduce Aréjé of Mèddwoglubas,” he began, nodding to Aréje, seated next to him. “She is the sister of Sliru and a true born Lewéspan. I cannot imagine a better replacement for Sliru on this body, so I have appointed her as one of the three representatives of Lewéspa.” He paused because that caused quite an undercurrent of comments. Mitrané had represented Lewéspa at the last assembly, but she was Estodhéru’s heir; to appoint a woman to the Assembly who was not of lordly birth was shocking.

Kandékwes nodded. “She is welcome.”

“Thank you, Lord Kandékwes. I regret that she missed the deliberations of two days ago, and I regret even more deeply the circumstances that have brought her here. We have just been treated to a remarkable speech by Jésunu. I cannot help but think back on his words two days ago when he complained that Lord Mennea sacrificed half-heartedly or possibly for the wrong reason. Honored priest, the rumors, whether true or not—I am not now saying they are true—accuse the priests of paying these assassins to act. I wonder where is your generosity, in response to the crime and to the accusation? Why have you not given the poor widow and her two year old son a gift?”

He paused and looked intently at Jésunu, who rose reluctantly. “Such a gift has been authorized.”

“‘Has been’? You are remarkably swift, then.” He paused for laughter and Jésunu did not respond. “I am also struck by your heartfelt prayers for Lord Mennea’s recovery and your attribution of his recovery to them. I am wondering, Honored Priest, if you can explain something to me. The assassins, just before they struck, said ‘die Bahá’ís.’ They used the plural and one intentionally stabbed Sliru in the heart. There were six or seven students of the génadëma present; they have all sworn to this. Yet Sliru was not known in this city as a Bahá’í. He was barely known as such in Meddwoglubas, because while he is from that town, he lives in Tripola. Someone in this room informed the assassins that Sliru was a Bahá’í and ordered him to be killed as well. Someone here who saw Sliru and Lord Mennea leave this room together issued the order. The one assassin who has been captured says he was paid by the priests to do the deed, and he is known to be a member of a gang that is often in the pay of the priests. Honored Jésunu, can you shed any light on this situation?”

Jésunu rose, red faced. “You are accusing me of a crime; how dare you do this!”
“I never accused you of anything, I merely asked a question. Why don’t you calm down and just answer it.”

“I know nothing about Sliru’s killing and Lord Mennea’s stabbing!”
“Thank you for answering, priest. My Lords and Honoreds, Lewéspa has never had a temple or priests, yet we keep the hymns in our hearts, and now we have added to them the new knowledge. This spectacle of defensive hypocrisy—”

“How dare you!” thundered Jésunu.

“I will say my piece,” replied Estodhéru, raising his voice only slightly. “Honored priest, you are supposed to know the rules of this chamber, and if anyone should have the discipline to follow them, it is you. It is hardly a secret that the priests in this city have long been the biggest enemies of the new knowledge. All those who have attended the Grand Court know this. Hence I cannot think of another word to describe a speech claiming to pray for, and save, Lord Mennea than ‘spectacle,’ and hypocrisy is if anything a weak description of its type. It is well known that a close friend of the priests accused Dhoru of witchcraft when he came to help save this city from a major fire three years ago, and a member of the gang in the priests’ pay stoned Dr. Lua a year ago and scarred her face in a way one still can see.

“So, what kind of teachings are we preserving, when we seek to prevent the spread of the Bahá’í beliefs? Teachings that permit one to say nice things about people while one plots to kill them?”

“How dare you!” Several others shouted in defense of Jésunu as well.

“I will speak! I am not accusing Widumaj of supporting immorality, I am pointing out that some of those who claim to be his representatives have fallen far short. This is why the philosophers and widus are so badly needed; they are a check on the influence of the priests. And now the new knowledge comes along and the priests see their influence suffering yet another blow. We *need* the Bahá’ís, my friends, for they are yet another check on the priests. Furthermore, they do not have priests; they elect their leadership and if the leaders become rotten they are not reelected. Some of you have noted that you have met Bahá’ís and generally they seem to be good people. I probably have met almost half

the Bahá'ís on Éra, for Lewéspa has many, and Mélwika many more. I have seen people accept the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and change their lives. He says to stop drinking; I have seen a man who often is drunk stop drinking wine. He says to care for others; I have seen people become Bahá'ís and spend days at the bedside of the ill. Indeed, I was so moved that over the summer I declared my faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Since then I have said Bahá'í prayers every day alongside the hymns of the great prophet." He had to pause because the chamber was filled with murmuring all at once because of his announcement. "And I should add that as a result of becoming a Bahá'í, before I left Meddwoglubas I spoke to my cousin who owns land next to our old fort whether he would be willing to sell it so that a temple to Esto could be raised there. He agreed to it. But now I have to ask myself, do we really want priests in Meddwoglubas? Perhaps we need to build a Bahá'í temple of praise to Esto next to a temple for sacrifice to him.

"Anyway, my Lords and Honoreds, I have to ask myself what all of you fear when you oppose the establishment of this Bahá'í Central Spiritual Assembly. Sliru, Honored Jésunu tells us, was articulate and calm. Was he not a wise man, for twenty three years? Yet he was one of the nineteen delegates elected to choose the Assembly. So is Lord Mennea and Dr. Lua. So is Aréjé's husband, Dr. Stauréstu, whom some of you trust with your bodies and your health; a man of great integrity. And I am one of those elected as well. Are we dangerous people? No, we seek to make this world a better place. We seek to serve our Queen, like everyone else. We do not hire thugs to stone or stab others. So my Lords, I only ask one thing: give us permission to elect our Spiritual Assembly.

We have heard a lot about sacrifice in the last few days. Sliru has made his sacrifice. Let us honor him.” Estodéru sat to a silent assembly, knowing he had won the vote.

Reread and edited, 5/19/13, 7/27/17

Revolt

It was two weeks before Chris was strong enough to go home. As Lua and Amos drove him through Meddoakwés, people saw him, waved, cheered, and followed behind the vehicle, producing quite a spectacle. Someone called ahead to Mélwika, where the throng was so large Aisu's troops had to clear a path for the vehicle. When Chris weakly stood up from the rover and waved, the crowd applauded. Then he turned and slowly walked into the house.

“Amazing,” he said to Lua.

“Father, a lot of people love you! It’s not just a question of you being their bread and butter; they’ve felt your concern for them.”

“And now a brush with death adds to the myth,” he said wryly.

He went into the house, sat to have tea with the family at his own dinner table, then went to bed; he and Liz had moved into Amos and May’s bedroom on the ground floor so Chris didn’t have to go up and down stairs. The trip and the visit exhausted him that day.

But day by day he grew stronger. Five days later Mitru stopped by to see how Lord Mennea was and was invited to see him. Chris was sitting up in bed, a pile of pillows behind him, papers resting on a small tray on his lap.

“Mitru! How are you!” he exclaimed.

“I’m well, but how are you? Your face has color in it, at least.”

“Yes, I’m feeling a bit better, but I tire easily. It’ll be months before I can resume a normal schedule, if ever. I think I’ll probably recover the way Werétrakester did; about ninety percent.”

“Oh, I hope better than that. I’ll pray for you. How’s the génadéma?”

Chris smiled. “I’m out of commission and Lébé and May have morning sickness every morning so they can only teach in the afternoon, so we’re not doing so well. But the school’s small this season, and this is a chance for the more advanced students to teach classes, and they’re doing a reasonably good job. How’s Diné and Jonu?”

“They are well, and Diné is pregnant again.”

“Then your relationship with her can’t be too bad!”

“We’re doing alright. We have our ups and downs.” He looked at the paperwork on the tray. “Is this the expansion of the town?”

“Yes, they started on the new wall the other day. We’re also taking advantage of the warm weather to lay out the streets and start paving work, and we’ve broken ground on the new Miller Engineering School. The town’s hopping with activity; I think 250 are employed on one project or another.”

“I noticed, plus people are cutting a lot of timber in the mountains, and there’s still a lot of hunting. This is a strange winter. I just returned from Gordha, and before that I went around the sea. The mountains east of here have almost no snow; Gordha has none, not even rain in fact. This entire valley, the Pénkakwés region, down to Endraida has and farther south—the entire eastern shore—is having a warm and dry winter. We had

that about ten years ago and we had a famine the next year because there was almost no spring flood. Thank God we have so much water stored behind the dams. But the other side of the sea is the opposite. There is cold air pouring down on Belledha and Tripola from the North and South Poles. Both cities had massive snowfalls in the last few days; I was delayed a day getting back here. The passes to Isurdhuna are totally closed by snow and I doubt we can plow them open before springtime; it's the deepest in memory. Ora's been getting a lot of rain and has been reasonably warm."

"An unusual pattern, but if there is a strong east wind, it makes sense; the western shore gets all the warm, moist air coming off the sea and we don't get it until it has gone over the Spine Mountains. What's the situation at Kostakhéma?"

"Snowy, I hear, so there will be some spring melt."

"How are they doing in Belledha and Tripola?"

"In Tripola they tried to plow the royal road to keep it open for steam wagons, but their equipment couldn't do it, so they phoned here and my office sent down three steam wagons with plows to open the road. We plowed a few of the city's main streets as well. I'm paying half to keep the royal road open and plan to remind the palace that if they want to charge me a road use fee, I won't do it for free next year. Otherwise people are wading through the snow. Belledha must be suffering; they have bitter cold and few have iron stoves or coal. The road there is not plowed at all. I had to turn back because the snow was so deep. I ended up going around the sea via the southern route."

"Any news of Sliru's widow?"

“I talked to Brébéstú, Sliru’s business partner, when I was in Tripola. He married Kérdé right away, so she has a husband to take care of her. But she is a second wife and I haven’t heard whether that’s working out.”

“I hope she’s alright. She’s a Bahá’í as well, and the community there has pledged to help, but they’re not rich.” Chris considered a moment. “You should open the northern route, too, if the people in Belledha are suffering. It’s a good market for coal and stoves.”

Mitru smiled. “I know your concern is for suffering, but you appeal to my business sense! Don’t worry, I’m not such a tight wad as my father. You’re right, I should open that route, even every two or three weeks.”

It was two weeks before Mitru attempted to get through to Belledha. Demand for transportation always shrank in the winter, and because of the weather he preferred to send at least two if not three vehicles together; under those circumstances, one route to the western shore was easier to maintain than two. The Tripola route reached a much larger market and because the area was closer to the equator, it tended to get less snow than Belledha. As a result, it was the equivalent of mid December when he finally headed for Belledha with three heavily laden steam wagons, all equipped with snow plows and lots of coal.

The plow-equipped steam wagons were different from Mitru’s usual vehicles; they had a different series of gears that gave them more power at low speeds but less ability for high speed. As a result the wagons moved down the Royal Road at only thirty-five kilometers per hour. It took two hours to reach Nuarjora, then two hours more

to reach Akeldedra, where the Penkakwés exited the hill country and a crude gravel road went up to the seven villages located on its five tributaries. One of Mitru's drivers had been to Akeldedra just two days earlier—there was still a weekly cargo run up the Penkakwés, which mostly hauled timber back to the capital—and the report that the road was closed by snow had not changed. The village was right on the edge of the weather change; clouds dominated the sky to the northwest, occasional flurries swirled, and the windblew steady and chilly.

The next hour the road surface gradually became snow-covered, but the thin coat was not a deterrent to forward movement. The next hour the plow came down and they moved at half the speed. One cargo trailer was left at a village where they trusted the headman and the other two were attached to the third steam wagon, which stayed way behind the two clearing the road; the two needed the ability to back up, which the trailers would have made difficult.

The hour after that the snow became deep and it was difficult even to find the road; they chugged along at eight kilometers per hour. Fortunately they had a lot of coal and they were moving in the same direction as the sun; Belledha was seven time zones behind Mélwika. Even so, the remaining twenty kilometers of road were immensely difficult. Soon they were moving at barely five kilometers per hour; walking speed, because the snow was a meter deep. When they passed through a village people came out and cheered, thrilled to see a source of relief. The cargo-pulling steam wagon had to stop to sell items. Horsemen followed behind them as they cleared the road to the regional

capital, staying so close that at first they got in the way when the steam wagons had to back up and bulldoze through snow drifts.

It was mid afternoon Belledha time when they began to approach the city; the trip from Akeldedra had taken eight hours and a surprisingly large amount of coal had been burned. Ominously, a huge column of smoke was rising from the city, raising the question of whether an overly hot fireplace had started a major conflagration. When they came within five hundred meters of the city wall, dozens, then hundreds of people began to pour out of the East and South Gates and wade through the snow toward them, waving their hands frantically and shouting. Mitru thought it was quite a welcome, possibly a kind of rescue from the disaster.

Then the first man came very close. "Stop! Stop!" he shouted. "The city has been taken over by the prisoners!"

Mitru looked to the field to the left of the road; it was flat and frozen. Rather than stopping he turned the wheel sharply right to plow a turnaround. He shouted to the fire tender "Help the man on board!" and the tender walked to the right edge of the steam wagon to reach down and pull the man up when he reached them. He was cold, ill-clad, and frightened.

"What happened?" demanded Mitru.

"Two days ago the prisoners rioted and took over the prison! Then yesterday they came out of the prison to loot part of the city closest to the prison. This morning they came out again and in the struggle a fire started and the city's burning down! You have to help us!"

“What about Lord Spondu?”

“Killed yesterday when the palace was attacked!”

“Okay,” said Mitru. “We’ll turn around and drive back to Meddoakwés to inform the army. There are only four of us on these two steam wagons, so there’s not much we can do.”

“But hundreds of people are homeless!”

“They can flee down the road to the villages; but then, so can the prisoners, until the army gets here!”

One of the horsemen who had been following rode up. “What are you doing?”

“The prison has been taken over by the prisoners and they’re looting the city! We have to tell the army! Organize these horsemen to stay behind us, we don’t want to be attacked by the prisoners!”

“They don’t have horses anyway!”

“Maybe they do by now. But they don’t know where the army is. For all they know it’s a dökent behind us. So you guys have to look like a cavalry unit; disciplined, macho, you know?”

“Yes, Honored.” The man spurred his horse through the snow and back onto the road, where he talked to the dozen horsemen there.

Other people ran up; while plowing snow to make a turnaround the steam wagons could not move very fast. Mitru let them hop on board. Then the turnaround broke back into the road. Mitru straightened out the steering wheel and let out more steam, then shifted to a higher gear. They began back down the cleared road and soon they were

moving close to the speed of a galloping horse. The horsemen fell behind in a kilometer or two; their horses could not compete with steam power.

It was a long ride back to Mèddoakwés; one hundred twenty kilometers in about five hours, which got them to the capital after midnight. They had to stop at every village on the way to warn them of the events in Belledha because both refugees and prisoners might come their way. They had to stop in Akeldèdra to stoke up with coal from the cargo of the third steam wagon.

The two dozen who had jumped on board continued all the way to the capital. But when he got to Mèddoakwés, Mitru was unable to get anyone to open the city gate and let the steam wagons in. He finally continued to Mèlwika and at 1 a.m. woke up the Mennea household to seek their help. Amos got on the telephone and got the city operator to connect him to the army's switchboard, where someone agreed to wake Roktekester. Within a few hours the army was alerted and began to get ready.

The next morning the Mennea's breakfast table became a planning session. John, on Mitru's insistence, agreed to come; Mayor Weranolubu was invited; Aisu was there as well.

"Honored Lords, this really is not a matter for us," exclaimed Aisu. "This is, first of all, a matter for the Réjé, and second for the army. The army must go pacify the city before the prisoners escape into the countryside, then her Majesty will decide how and when to help."

"You are right," agreed Chris, gently, for he knew Aisu was much less flexible than Perku had been. "We can do nothing at all until the city is secured and the prisoners

pacified. But at that point, could not charity be extended to the poor of the city? If your neighbor's house burns down, should you not help?"

"This is not a neighbor's house, but an entire city," replied Aisu. "And the palace has ample resources; there is Crown Prince Meméjékwu's 'Peace Corps' for example."

"Have we any idea whether the Peace Corps has actually been organized?" asked John Miller, skeptically. "Mitrū, have they ever given you any contracts for anything?"

"No, they've never even asked to rent a steam wagon."

"And they haven't bought any from me."

"I think the Crown Prince's plans are still in rudimentary form," replied Chris, without adding anything about them being nearly a year old. "Perhaps, however, we can give them some stimulus, or perhaps we can provide aid that the army can help distribute."

"What can we do, Chris, from a practical point of view?" asked John. "We're talking about a city of five thousand people."

Chris looked at Weranolubu. "If we called on the residents of Melwika to donate old clothes, blankets, and such, do you think they would respond?"

The mayor considered. "They wouldn't anywhere else because they'd wonder how the supplies would be delivered, and the typical city has so much poverty not much could be donated. But Melwika is the most properous city in the world and its residents trust the Lords to come up with a way. I think if we sent out the town criers and put up posters about donating things, some people would."

“The hospital will have to send a team,” said Lua. “There will be injuries, burns, and frostbite. We’ll need to rent one or two steam wagons and put together a mobile hospital.”

“I’ll provide a steam wagon for free,” offered Mitru. “If there’s no place in Belledha that’s safe, I’d suggest setting up the hospital in Akeldedra, where there’s no snow, or at Manuagras, which is the region’s village farthest to the southeast; it’s the first one on the Royal Road. Manuagras is about an hour from the city by steam wagon.”

“We’ll have to see what the city’s situation is,” agreed Lua. “There may have to be an evacuation of hundreds of people, if their houses have burned down.”

“The students in the génadema can help, too,” said Chris. “The fall semester is over and the winter semester has been badly disrupted by my injury, two pregnancies, and all the construction work here. All we have are the full-time students, and they could spare a week for an emergency like this.”

“This is a task for the women’s college too,” replied May. “We’ve got thirty young women, mostly from the region’s richest families. If you want to raise cash and used clothes and blankets, they’re the ones to do it. The wives of those families have always patronized various efforts, and this is one they’ll get behind.”

“Great idea,” said Chris. “I’d get started today.”

“The widows can help, also,” said Liz. “They can’t go to Belledha, but they can donate items.”

“I am intrigued by your ideas,” said Aisu, slowly warming to the idea. “But there’s not much I can do. We have a garrison of only fifty soldiers and at the moment we

have a partially built new eastern city wall and two holes in the existing wall! In fact, I think the city should be in a state of emergency. If 250 prisoners were to stay organized and escaped in this direction—which makes sense, since there's only one plowed route out of the city—then Melwika is vulnerable.”

“I'll move the city's street and sewer construction crews to wall construction immediately,” exclaimed Weranolubu, alarmed. “I suggest we patch the holes broken in the old wall and speed up construction on the new wall.”

“We should change the way we've been working on the wall,” added Aisu. “So far we've been working on several sections of the new wall at once, north and south of the Péskakwés. We should repair the existing wall, then complete the northern half of the new wall. Once it's done, we can dismantle the existing wall north of the Péskakwés and use the stone to build the stretch of new wall south of the city, then dismantle the wall there and use its stone to build a few new towers or sell the stone to builders. I'll make those changes today.”

“Yes, our safety has to be a priority,” exclaimed John.

Just then the telephone in Chris's office began to ring. Behruz walked over to answer it. He popped his head out of the door a moment later. “It's an aide to General Roktekester. He was trying to reach Mitru because the army needs steam wagons, but I think we all might want to talk to him.”

“Definitely,” agreed Chris, and the adults at the table all rose to walk over to the office. Chris picked up the telephone. “Hello, this is Lord Kristoféru.” Then he pointed the ear piece toward the others so they could hear as well.

“Lord, I seek to speak to Mitru Miller, we need four steam wagons.” It was Roktekester himself, and he was in a hurry.

Chris decided not to ask a lot of trivial questions. “Honored Lord, will the army need a mobile hospital? Dr. Lua is preparing a team.”

A long pause. “We may have a few casualties, so yes, the medical team will be welcome if they go only where we permit and do not interfere. There will be no prisoners to treat when we are finished. I suppose you’re thinking of the people there, also. Once we have secured the city, they will need doctors.”

“We will send the hospital, with your permission. We are also collecting clothes, blankets, and other necessities.”

“Really? I’m sure they will be welcomed. I must speak to Mitru and to Lord Miller about snow plows for our armored steam wagons.”

“Tell him we can make four plows in two days,” said John, who was close enough to hear the General’s request. “Oh, let me tell him.” John took the phone and repeated himself.

“Not by tomorrow? We want to leave by noon.”

“Then we’ll drop everything if we have to, Lord General, and we’ll get the plows to you tomorrow morning.” Miller knew better than to keep the army waiting.

“Make them heavy so they can break down a city gate if necessary. Mitru must send two steam wagons with plows to the western shore immediately and two to the palace by tonight. One should have a plow. We need them to move supplies.”

Mitru took the phone. “Can we load the two for the western shore with cargo?”

A long pause. "You figure it out. They have to pick up one hundred soldiers at Endraida. I want them at Néfa no later than dawn. An hour before dawn is better. We're leasing six steam wagons on the western shore to move 100 troops from Anartu and 100 from Ora to Belléda."

"Sophisticated strategy," commented Amos, as it meant the city would be attacked from two directions.

"Who said that? How many people are listening in?"

"That was Amos, and this is Captain Aisu, Lord General. Nothing will leave this room."

"Excellent. I would not want to chop off any heads. Lord Mennea, I want a phone strong enough so that many can listen at once."

"Amos will supply you one, then," replied Chris, after taking the phone.
"Anything else, General?"

"I assume the steam wagons will lease according to the usual terms and the plows will be reasonably priced, but I won't worry about that now. Thank you to everyone.
Good bye."

"Good bye," replied Chris, but the click at the other end was so swift he was uncertain whether it was heard. He put down the phone.

"The General's moving fast," said John. "Aryornu would have waited a week."
"In the pre-steam days, the army would have had to wait a week, and the trip to Belléda would have taken another week," noted Amos.

“Let’s talk about the mobile hospital I need in twenty-four hours,” said Lua. “Can we get two long cargo trailers and enclose them, like covered wagons?”

“We have three parachutes from the last supply drop,” said Amos. “If we had some metal hoops, we could convert them into long covered wagons.”

“Tell Yimu what the hoops should look like and he’ll make them today,” said John. “No charge.”

“I have some ideas for improving the covered wagon design we’ve been using for passengers,” said Mitru.

“Give me the dimensions, and Lua and I will figure out the interior space,” exclaimed Mary.

“Any way we can have power?” asked Lua. “Not much; enough to light a surgery area.”

“We can add some batteries, and can wire the wagon bed while we’re waiting for the hoops,” replied Amos. “Otherwise you’ll want to use some of those nice glass lanterns for candles they’re now making at Meddwoglugbas.”

“You’ll want some built in beds and probably a bathroom,” added John. “We’ll get Ménu to assign some carpenters.”

“And we’ll get students to help move stuff and collect stuff,” added Chris.

They all turned to their tasks. Thornton was a bit disappointed that his contribution consisted of serving as substitute teacher for one of Amos’s afternoon courses so that his brother in law was free to work on the mobile hospital, but his pregnant wife didn’t want

him to go anyway, and everyone was leery of the idea of someone once accused of burning part of a city via witchcraft going to a burning city. Mitru had the really big adventure. Within two hours he had two steam wagons on their way to the palace and drove one of the other two south and west to Endraidha; the sooner he set out, the more time he had to handle cargo and make a little extra money.

In spite of Lua's protests, Chris got into a rover and drove to Meddoakwés so that he could talk to Werétrakester, Kandékwés, and anyone else available about relief for the people of Bellédha. The Lord Mayor was not available right away; neither was Crown Prince Méméjékwu; but the widu was.

“My Lord Kristoféru, it is so good to see you!” exclaimed Werétrakester, shocked to see his old friend. “I didn’t realize you were up and about! You look almost as good as new!”

“I wish I was. I am sure I will be exhausted tomorrow; in fact, I may need to return here and take a nap before driving back to Mélwika.”

“Of course! You are always welcome! Praised be Esto that you survived! Did you know they executed both assassins last week?”

“I heard.”

“Did you also hear that two days ago, Jésunu abdicated as chief priest of Meddoakwés?”

“What? No, I didn’t hear that!”

“Yes. He has been succeeded by Weranodatu, his son, who is barely twenty-five years old.”

“He was in your class when Thornton first came here.”

“Yes, and they had some fascinating debates! Weranodatu will be dominated by the older priests for a few years and won’t be able to do very much, I suspect, but then he will be alright. At least he won’t be hiring poisoners and assassins.”

“Is there evidence the priests hired the assassins?”

“I think so, but no one’s talking.” He reached over with both hands and they shook, a warm, friendly gesture. “I am so happy to see you, I can’t begin to tell you. How do you feel?”

“Twenty years older, but Lua says I’ll get stronger.”

“I think I felt ten years older, after I recovered from the poisoning. Or recovered as much as I am able. Come, sit, have tea.” Werétrakester gestured and Chris followed him across the courtyard and into a sitting room. A servant was already pouring them hot tea.

“What brings you here?”

“The situation in Belledha.”

“It is terrible. I hope the army can end the prisoner revolt quickly.”

“I’m sure they can. Roktkeester is sending a lot of troops. The armored steam wagons can probably crash through the city gates and roll right in.”

“I’m sure that’s true, and they have the latest steel swords and longbows. The perpetrators will suffer the most extreme fate. *Poganto* is a terrible way to die.”

“‘Poganto’?” It meant “nailing” in Eryan.

“Yes, they take a timber, nail a cross piece on it, then nail the prisoner’s arms and legs to it. It seems to me it was done to a great widu on Gedhéma; Mosu or Budhu—”

“Jésu.”

“One of them, I can never remember. Gruesome. I think we learned of the punishment from some gedhému. It is used only for insurrection.”

Chris reflected on Wérétrakester’s words and thought that on Earth it was used primarily for insurrection and resurrection, but decided not to try to translate that. “Dr. Lua asked me to ask you about Lujruktu. She is putting together a medical team to travel with the army to Belledha to treat the wounded and any injured among the city’s inhabitants. It’s possible we’ll have to set up a camp near Akeldedra, and since Lujruktu’s from there we thought it would be good for him to come along, and it would be good medical training for him anyway.”

“I see. Alright, it sounds like a good idea. I’d avoid camping Belledhans too close to the Fish Eryan villages; the latter might think their land will be taken by squatters. It’ll look threatening.”

“If possible, we’ll leave everyone in Belledha, or move them to villages in the region. But Akeldedra is on the edge of the snow belt.”

“I see. Be very careful. The Lord of Belledha is very powerful in his area and regards the villagers as his. If they flee to Meddoakwés he has at times demanded their return. They have not been returned, but consider that the Lords of Ora, Néfa, or Tripola would never even make such a demand. That area is very Sumi. Spondu’s family, the

korus or former warriors, the *ejerus* or priests, and the *wekus* or cattle herders are lighter skinned than the farmers or *érwergus*, who are dark.”

“Thank you, I was unaware. I assume no one will object to supplying everyone—regardless of class—with blankets and spare clothing?”

“How will you get enough? How can you afford it?”

“I don’t know that we can get enough, but in Melwika the town crier is going door to door asking people to give anything they can spare, and the women’s *génadema* students are all going home tonight and asking mom and dad to donate charitably.”

Werétrakester’s eyes lit up. “Brilliant! That would have never occurred to any of us. Sometimes the temple asks people to give things to the poor, but usually in *ejnaménu*, and of course by then the worst of the winter cold is far past. And the medical team can oversee distribution.”

“With the help of soldiers to keep order, and maybe a few volunteer students. Just before I left to come here, I heard several talking excitedly about going up with the doctors to see the action!”

“They love a thrill. I’ll excuse any of my students from class, if they can help. Glad to do that.” He thought. “We can’t ask the temple here to get involved; they’re disorganized because of the transition. But you must go back and ask your temple to organize the clothing and blankets. That will be very good for them, and for you politically.”

Chris's eyes lit up. "Why didn't I think of that! Our priests will love the challenge and will do an excellent job."

"And it will shame the priests here into action. It might even shame the Crown Prince into doing something with his 'Peace Corps.'"

The next twenty-four hours were exhausting for everyone. In Melwika, workshops were illuminated all night to build and furnish two mobile clinics. In Meddoakwés, the army loaded up steam wagons and trailers with supplies and weapons. And Mitru led three steam wagons all the way around the bed of the Great Sea, so excited by his adventure and worried about its possible results that he could not sleep.

As hoped for, he reached Néfa before dawn; nearly two hours before, in fact. The soldiers from Ora and Néfa were ready to set out under the generalship of Tritu, a member of the supreme Army command, who had ridden with him from the capital in the nicest steam wagon, one with an enclosed metal cab with large glass windows. They set out immediately and were in the snow belt north of Sumiuperakwa by mid morning. The deep snow was difficult, but the steam wagons plowed through it steadily and reached Belledha by mid afternoon. As they approached, they could see that Roktekester had already arrived hours before and his people had methodically plowed two ring roads around the city, 200 and 1000 doli from the city walls. They broke through into one the rings, which used a section of the Royal Road.

"Stop!" General Tritu shouted to Mitru, whose snow plow was in the lead and with whom he was still riding. "We wait here." He jumped off and pushed past the steam

wagon to the machines behind. “Take that steam wagon very slowly—walking speed—500 doli north up the ring road! If any prisoners try to flee the city, cut them down with arrows and swords!” he shouted to the driver of the next wagon. Then he ran farther back. “Take your steam wagon 500 doli south—walking speed—along the ring road! If anyone tries to flee the city, cut them down with arrows and swords!” He went farther back and told the other wagons to hold their positions and be prepared to reinforce anyone on the ring roads needing support. Then he hurried back to Mitru, who pointed.

“Here comes a horseman from General Roktekester.”

Tritu nodded. “It looks like they’re in readiness. But then, they’ve been here for many hours.”

“They’ve done a lot of plowing. What’s the strategy?”

“Very simple: break into the south, north, and east gates simultaneously. The prisoners are probably disorganized and frightened. Many will flee out the west gate, and once they’re outside the city and stuck in the heavy snow we’ll cut them down.” He shrugged.

“And if they stay inside the city, they’ll be cut down.”

“Some. The rest will surrender and receive poganto.”

The horseman rode up and saluted. “The general asks if everything is in readiness.”

“We’re ready, are there any additional orders?”

“No, we have units of fifty soldiers in snow castles up there and down there.” The messenger pointed. Tritu looked, then nodded. The piles of snow weren’t very high, but they were easy to see, though soldiers were hidden and invisible behind the piles.

“My men are in a good place to assist. The general should launch the attack as planned.”

“Thank you, General Tritu. General Roktēkēster also asked me to report the following intelligence: sixty prisoners on horses rode down the Royal Road yesterday afternoon. Their attempt to enter Pēkēnwiča was repulsed by the villagers, so they headed northeastward along the Pēnkakwés and probably headed roughly toward Mēddoakwés and Mēlwika. We have notified the capital. That probably means the prisoners inside the city are fewer in number and less determined.”

“Then we have them.”

“Indeed, General.” The soldier saluted and rode his horse back to Roktēkēster’s command post on the east side of the city.

A half hour passed, and then they could see an armored steam wagon rolling toward the city’s south gate. It moved slowly and deliberately at first, ignoring the arrows that a dozen men dropped on it harmlessly from the wall above. It plowed snow away from the gate area, clearing it, and no doubt the men on the wall braced themselves for a frontal assault by soldiers. But then the steam wagon turned around and ran straight toward the gate, rapidly gaining speed. It crashed into the structure of oak and iron at forty kilometers per hour and its four tonnes of mass immediately smashed the gate—and crushed the snow plow—carrying the steam wagon straight into the city. It turned

eastward and drove along the wall to the first stair to the top, pushing smashed lumber aside as it went, then stopped. A hundred soldiers poured out of the interior; most dashed up the stairs while others fanned out across the city. The scattered defenders fled westward along the top of the wall, soldiers in hot pursuit. The steam wagon backed up and followed along the street paralleling the wall to make sure no one jumped onto a roof to escape.

The east and north gates received the same pounding at the same time. Only the east gate survived the first assault, but it succumbed under the second. Three hundred soldiers were now in Belledha.

Parked in the snow a thousand doli west of the city, Mitru and the general saw nothing. Several plumes of smoke rose from the city, but that wasn't new; fires had been burning all day. Finally half an hour after the armored steam wagons had broken in, the western gate opened and thirty or forty prisoners began to dash out of the city. They had no time to worry where soldiers awaited them; panicked, they fled down the cleared paths, often straight into the glare of the setting sun. When the soldiers rose to fire they jumped into the waist-deep snow and began to wade. But the archers were well trained; most men collapsed after two or three arrows pierced them.

Soldiers stood on the western wall at several places; clearly, the city had fallen. Tritu pointed to the gate. "Drive through," he said to Mitru. He looked back at the wagons and trailers of soldiers still on the Royal Road behind him, for he had deployed only half his force. He waved them forward as well.

In two minutes, 150 more soldiers entered the city through the west gate. There was no need to bulldoze their way in; the gate was flung open for them. People were beginning to pour out of basements and hideaways, cheering. Some were surrounding and beating prisoners who were still at large while others began to pull timbers from burned and collapsed houses. Timbers needed for poganto.

Tritu directed Mitru down the main street leading across town to the East Gate. The packed snow and ice was easy traction for the wagon. The trailer attached to their vehicle was full of soldiers; no one bothered them. At Belledha's central square, a knot of prisoners were guarded by a dozen soldiers and steam wagons could be seen prowling both the north and south approaches, with smashed gates beyond. Roktekester was there directing everything.

“Welcome, General,” he said.

“Thank you, General. We killed forty escaping to the west.”

“Excellent, we killed another hundred in the city, with maybe two soldiers wounded. It looks like we'll capture fifty or so; the townspeople are turning them in.” He turned to Mitru. “Go out the west gate and tell the soldiers positioned on the ring road that they may stand down and enter the city. They should report here to Tritu. Then take the Royal Road east four dekent, where you will find Dr. Lua and her mobile clinic at the village of Dhékhdedra. Tell her they may come here to the central square, where the army will set up camp tonight. We will use this as our headquarters for the next week.”

“Indeed, General. May I leave the trailer here?”

“Indeed, it will make you faster. Tritu will give you an armed escort of five soldiers.” Then Roktekester turned away to deal with another matter.

Within a minute Mitru turned around the steam wagon and headed out the western gate. In a matter of three minutes he had found all the units and conveyed the general’s orders, then headed across the river on the bridge and along the Royal Road, where he found Dr. Lua. In fifteen minutes he was back with the medical team and their two very sophisticated covered wagons. General Tritu stopped to look as the vehicles rolled into the square; they were impressive. Roktekester walked over as Lua stepped out.

“Congratulations, General, for your swift victory.”

“It was relatively bloodless; we have three wounded soldiers. Within an hour we will be sure we have all the prisoners rounded up and the soldiers will go across the town asking anyone with injuries and burns to come here. I suspect they will trickle in, mostly tomorrow. People need time to feel safe to move about.”

“What about the fires?”

“We have hoses with us; we’ll set up one or two steam wagons outside the gate on the river and pump in water. They’ll be out tonight or tomorrow.” He sighed. “It appears a third of the city burned down, including the palace and the prison itself. I suspect when we interrogate the prisoners we will learn that they had almost nothing to eat for months at a time.”

“So you won’t kill them?”

Roktekester was not amused by that comment. “Of course we’ll execute them, but not after interrogating everyone and determining who did what when. We need the entire

story. But don't worry too much." He leaned close. "Poganto will be a fast death, in this deadly cold wind."

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Threat

The army returned to Meddoakwés ten days after it left, in a darkening western sky that promised an overnight blizzard. Chris Mennea was exploring the new building for the Gésélekwés Maj Génadéma with Wérétrakester and Wérgéndu when they heard the city bells began to ring non-stop, then heard the steam whistles of many steam wagons blowing. They came out to watch the procession of vehicles enter the city, including the two mobile clinics; Roktekester wanted as long and impressive a parade as possible. The three of them followed behind the last vehicle and entered the military compound before the gates were closed. Chris wanted to see Lua; the other two just wanted to see everything. He walked up to the mobile clinic. “Hello?”

“Father?” a moment later Lua poked her head out. “How did you get in here?”
“We were watching the parade and walked in right behind the last vehicle. How’s Bellédha?”

“A third of it is destroyed, but the weather the last few days has been good and people have torn down a lot of the burned structures. The army shipped up enough tents from Endraidha to house a thousand soldiers. That’ll help until houses are rebuilt.”

“How many died?”
“We’re still not sure, but about two hundred soldiers in the original garrison, two hundred of the prisoners who rioted, another fifty have been executed, and maybe four

hundred citizens of Belledha. Half of them succumbed to pelui in the last two weeks and the other half to pillage by the prisoners.”

Chris shook his head. “Spondu?”

“Dead, as reported. Roktkester has left General Tritu in charge until the Réjé decides whether Sondanu will succeed his father, or a cousin. Sondanu’s anxious to be given a chance.”

“I’m sure, but I’m not confident he will be better.”

“Roktkester and Tritu gave him a dressing down yesterday when he expressed contempt for the prisoners. They blamed all of this on starving the prisoners, then forcing them to work hard with mining equipment. But apparently the coffers were empty and there was nothing to spend on food. The granaries in Belledha are old and have a serious spoilage problem and last year’s harvest was small.”

“And the Dwobergone have undercut the copper market, so their only profit comes from the silver. Sondanu’s always been working his people too hard and squeezing them. Did they rent steam wagons to cut and haul timber?”

Lua shook her head. “Apparently the Lord’s family is destitute, and the third of the town that burned was mostly owned by him. Mitru couldn’t find anyone willing to pay him to rent equipment.”

“That’s crazy! They can’t rebuild without timber!”

“I know. A lot of structures are being rebuilt as small temporary shacks made of wood left over from the fire and anything else they can find. If we could afford to help, maybe we can pay Mitru to deploy some wood cutters up there.”

Chris shook his head. “Not for a while. Two days ago the marauding band of prisoners passed through. They descended the mountain side above Yimuaidha, looted and burned a few houses there, then headed for Melwika. But Yimuaidha has a telephone now and called the palace, and they called us, so everyone was on the wall and alert. Our longbows killed four or five of them. They burned a farm house and disappeared southward.”

“They got here fast.”

“And we still had a hole in the wall! But with our longbows, it would have been deadly to try to ride through, and they were never on the east side of town so they never saw the hole. They’re lightly armed. The hole’s closed, now, and the new wall is really taking shape thanks to a lot of extra workers. We haven’t any spare resources for Yimuaidha, let alone Belledha.”

“I think the army may do something, then. I don’t want to go back for at least a month, dad. Besides the crucified bodies of prisoners decorating the walls, besides the burned third of the town, the place is in wretched shape. Maybe a quarter of the people are walking around in subfreezing weather barefoot and half naked; they don’t have a coat, they don’t have shoes or moccasins, they don’t even have a blanket! Some of the houses that didn’t burn are half-collapsed. The snow is covered by, and filled with, human waste. The main square only has six stalls for vendors; Tripola has thirty-five and is about the same size! The people living in the village of Dhékhedra, two kilometers east of town, had warmer houses and more blankets.”

“Or maybe the only ones out and about at Dhékhedra were the ones wearing the family blanket.”

“Maybe. At least the people have army tents and we distributed a hundred blankets.”

“I’ll telephone Meddwoglubas tonight and see whether they’re willing to contribute sheets. I bet they will; they’ve made a ton of money. And now the Meddoakwés temple has gone into the blanket collection business, so more are being donated.”

“Good.”

“Did you see Aniu?”

“Yes, several times. The génadéma was attached to the palace and was burned. We talked about the city; he feels utterly hopeless and wants a job in Melwika.”

“Let’s invite him and as many of his students as possible to come to Melwika for the winter, on the condition they return home in the spring. They’ll get a better education, and maybe we’ll be in the position to determine what can be done there.”

“Not that we can do it.”

“No, but we can make sure the palace and the army hear.”

Fifteen minutes after he drove his rover back into the house’s courtyard, the mobile clinic and the snow storm arrived. There was rejoicing that night in many warm houses while the snow flew outside.

The next morning, even though flakes were still falling, Mitru had his steam wagons—four were now equipped with plows—clearing the main roads as they traveled the valley. They had become essential for workers, students, schoolkids, sellers, and customers to get around. By noon the fifteen centimeters of snow were a forgotten nuisance and a welcome source of water.

Chris had an appointment, made before the storm, to drive down to Dëksawsuperakwa or “Southbridge” a hamlet built on the Majakwés, which served as Ménwika’s southern border. Fifteen centimeters of snow wouldn’t have stopped a rover anyway, but he found the plowed gravel road quite adequate for forty kilometers per hour, which took him to the hamlet in fifteen minutes. The population had gradually expanded in the summer and fall from seven young men to twenty, and now a few were married. They had started with an adobe common building ten meters square on the southwest corner of the intersection of four roads, the building’s rear against the sheer three-meter dropoff to the Majakés flood plain. Later the common building had been divided into two private houses and more had been added, producing a twenty-unit “rowhouse” fronting northward along Béranagrés Rodha. Chris parked in front of the fourth door—that of Chandu, the informal headman—knocked, and entered when invited.

“Lord, you made it! You are welcome. This is surprising weather, is it not?” He did not shake hands or invite his Lord to sit or have tea; having no wife, no parents around, and lacking the requisite years to be considered an adult, Chandu was not versed in even elementary etiquette. But Chris didn’t mind; like his friends, Chandu was a good peasant kid, willing to work hard if he saw an advantage. With some mechanical help, the

twenty of them had cleared and planted almost one hundred fifty agris last year; barely enough to feed twenty families, but enough to make twenty teenaged almost-men feel rich.

“Indeed, Chandu. At least the drought has ended and winter has finally come, as it should here.”

“I was getting very worried about the drought,” agreed Chandu. “Last summer our fields got pretty dry right before harvest.”

“But the grange came and pumped up enough irrigation water, right?”

“Indeed Lord, but we’ll have twice as many farmers next season, a lot more land, and the additional land will be higher.”

“But we’ll have the irrigation canal by then.”

“Lord, are you sure there will be enough water for it? I hear the reservoir has dropped a lot in the last month.”

“It has, but don’t worry. The hunters report plenty of snow in the montains. The water level behind the Péskakwés dam has been dropping because demand for electricity has been high, so we’ve kept the Péskakwés flow high all day, then varied the output of the Arjakés based on fluctuating demand. This is easier for the electricity control center, which is next to the Arjakés dam. But once the spring melt starts, Gordha will become a major power source and we’ll start to store water behind the Péskakwés dam.”

“As you say, Lord. I am a simple man and—”

“Honored Chandu, you don’t strike me as simple at all!”

“Thank you, Lord. It’s an expression.”

“I know. But I trust your judgment, so trust mine on this matter. I won’t leave you dry. Now, show me where you want to build the stronghouse.”

“Of course!” Chris’s question was positive; no doubt Chandu feared the Lord would forbid the plan. He pointed to the door, then grabbed his cloak and tossed it around his shoulders.

They stepped outside into the snow. Chandu shivered and kicked the snow with his legging-wrapped, sandal-covered foot. “Shita! May Esto damn this stuff.”

Chris made a note that on the western shore, “shit” was a swearword, just like in English. “Listen to your uncle,” he replied. “Buy yourself a proper coat and boots.”

“Oh, those coats make us look like tutanus!”

“No, they make you look like a prosperous Mélwikanu, which is what you are. Boots: two dhanay. A good coat: three.”

“Yes, uncle.” Clearly he wasn’t interested. “Here we are, Lord.” They had walked only a few dozen paces, eastward along the Béranagrés Rodha to its junction with three royal roads: northward to Mélwika; southward across the Majakwés to Endraida and Tripola; and eastward and upriver to Gordha and Kostakhéma. Chandu pointed to an empty lot on the southeast side of the intersection, which had the river on its south side. “Here. Forty doli between the slope down to the river and the Gordha Road. We’d build a solid stone building thirty doli square. The ceilings would be high, with a second floor. The walls would be ten doli high. The flat roof would have a protective wall around it with crenelations. It’d be fireproof and have a well inside for water. We figure it could

accommodate several hundred people if it had to. With prisoners riding around and Tutane in the vicinity, we need safety, Lord, especially once we have children here. Normally the stronghouse would be used for storage and meetings, like the grange.”

Chris nodded. He walked over to the dropoff to the river; a little water trickled in its snowy bed. He walked around the site. “You have thought this through well, Chandu.”

“Lord, my friends and I have thought much about our safety in the last few days. The prisoners outnumber us two to one; if they had come this way we would have been in trouble.”

“Indeed. If you want to build the stronghouse here, I suggest future expansion of the village be eastward, upriver on the other side of the Gordha Road. Leave a big open space east of the stronghouse between the road and the river, for safety and to give the village a public square.”

“My Lord, we’re too small for a square.”

“For now.”

“Thank you, Lord. So do we have your permission?”

“You do. I agree you need protection. There are many stones in the riverbed.”

“There are, Lord. We pay taxes to you, Lord, so we must ask, can you contribute to the effort in some way?”

“I can. Tell you what. I’ll contribute the timbers you need to build the two floors, and the cement to bind everything together strongly.”

Chandu thought a moment. “And Lord, since this is a permanent improvement on your land, could you pay us at all for our labor on the stronghouse?”

“Chandu, here’s what I can do.” Chris paused to get his attention. “I think this is a job for twenty men for maybe a month; thirty-six days. If the twenty of you agree to build this stronghouse, I’ll pay you half a dhanay a day each; that’s about half of what the labor is worth, which is fair; Deksawsuperakwa gains safety. Amos will come down to inspect your design for strength. And one more thing: I will send down a teacher to teach reading, writing, and numbers every morning for the month it takes to build the stronghouse, and anyone who wants to collect the half dhanay will have to attend.”

“Lord, we have a two or three here who know the letters and numbers, and we really don’t need more!”

“Chandu, the world is changing and all of you will need it. A month of schooling is almost nothing, but it is a start.”

“We won’t get the stronghouse built in a month if we have to be in school all morning!”

“True. It’ll take a bit longer. So I’ll pay half a dhanay a day for a few weeks longer.”

“Alright, fair enough. Actually, Lord, there are already more than twenty of us, so perhaps we can get it done in a month.”

“Oh? Others have arrived?”

“Yes, on almost every steam wagon from the western shore someone new arrives. Some of us anticipate that our mothers and fathers will come soon. Some hope for brides or have gone home to get them.”

“How many wives do you have here, now?”

“Eight, I think. Two are pregnant. And we have almost thirty farmers, doubled up in our cold houses.”

“This is not Ora, the winter lasts two more months.”

“So we are learning! With people arriving we need cash to buy tools, clothes, etc. Some of us are riding to town on the steam wagon every day to work there.”

“Good. Well, now you can stay here, go to a class in the morning, build all afternoon and evening, and get half a dhanay per day. That will help. And Chandu, once you have a stronghouse, more people will be attracted. If you want to lead this settlement as it grows, you must learn the letters and numbers. It will prove essential, if you don’t want to be pushed aside by older ones.”

He considered that. “My Lord, you may have a point about that, for I have seen how the letters and numbers can help in the grange.”

“There you go.”

He pointed to the string of adobe houses. “Some of the new ones want to meet you; do you have time?”

“Indeed.”

They turned and headed back. When they passed the rover Chris stopped, opened the door, and grabbed a leather satchel he often carried with him. They entered a house two doors east of Chandu’s, a long adobe rectangle five meters wide and ten long, divided into a front room for socializing and eating and back room for sleeping and storage. It was the home of Wérebjnu “Sacrifice for Truth,” a talkative young man from Markdhuna, the other Ora-area village that had contributed people to Southbridge. He

was quick to make a joke; a jug of wine lay on the floor next to a fire, a circle of six young men surrounding both.

When they saw Lord Kristoféru they all stood in surprise. Chandu introduced them all and Chris stopped to shake hands with each while Wérebejnu went out to get the others. “Here Lord, have a drink,” said one young man, offering him the jug of wine.

“Oh, no thank you. I thought I’d offer all of you something instead. Can someone get a pot of water boiling? I have mint tea.”

“Mint!” exclaimed one, who obviously had not seen mint for months. The circle broke up and someone grabbed Wérebejnu’s lone copper pot and took it to the well to get water while the others dashed home to grab their only cup. Chris tossed in the leaves and they continued to go around the circle as more came into the house, giving names.

Chris asked everyone what they wanted to have in five years and as they waited for the water to boil the shy youth spoke of farms, two wives, and many sons; it was the standard Eryan dream. One asked him if he knew of any eligible women. He had to describe his own family; its universal monogamy surprised them, as did the fact that his two daughters and their families lived with him and not with their husbands’ families. They asked him about Gedhéma as the hot tea was poured into everyone’s cups and they sipped to drive off the chill. They asked him where he wanted to be in five years as well.

After half an hour, Chris’s tea cup was empty and the pot was empty as well. He rose to leave and the twenty-seven men who had crowded into Wérebejnu’s tiny house rose gratefully as well, happy to have an audience with their Lord. Chris made a mental note to come back at least once every two or three weeks.

As he stepped over to his rover and was saying good bye, two steam wagons began to lumber across the bridge from Tripola. They all stopped to watch. The front steam wagon stopped at the intersection and a young man stepped down.

“Is this Deksawsupérakwa?” he called.

“Jéndu!” exclaimed Wérebéjnu.

“Cousin Wérebéjnu!” he exclaimed and dashed down the road. Southbridge had just gained another farmer.

“My Lord! My Lord!” shouted the driver to Chris. Hearing the call, Chris hurried over. He recognized the man as Weranisaju, one of Mitru’s veteran drivers.

“Hail, Weranisaju.”

“Lord, we just stopped at Médhela and the Lord there was very upset. He reported that thirty of the prisoners rode into the oasis yesterday, speared two pigs and a sheep, and rode eastward with the animals. He fears it means the prisoners are camping nearby.”

“Did he report it to the army?”

“He has asked me to do it, Lord, and he asked me to tell you.”

“He should use the telephone.”

“I suggested that and he shook his head.”

“Thank you. I’ll drive down to see him quickly; please tell my family my return home will be delayed.”

“I will do that, Lord.” Weranisaju saluted Chris, then started his steam wagon forward. Chris turned to Chandu. “Would you like to go for a ride?”

“In the rover! Yes, of course, Lord!”

Chris asked two others to join them as well; he felt safer with a full load. He showed them how to open the doors, enter, and close the doors behind them. Once the steam wagons had passed he backed the rover up Béranagré Rodha to the intersection and headed south.

“How does it work, Lord?” asked Chandu.

“Take some classes and find out. Here, put your hand on the wheel.” Chris took Chandu’s left hand and put it on the steering wheel, while Chris continued to steer. “Do you feel the vibration from the road? Feel the rover turn slightly to the right when I turn the wheel slightly?”

“Indeed, Lord,” and Chandu smiled. He left his hand on the wheel and looked at the gages and pedals, and Chris proceeded to explain each one. The road was straight, smooth, and plowed of snow; he speeded up to sixty kilometers per hour and the boys laughed with delight.

It only took a half hour to reach Médhela. It was a journey through thinner and thinner snow cover until, just before reaching the oasis, they broke out of it altogether. It was noticeably warmer when they stepped out of the rover and the sun was higher in the sky. The village poured out to see them, delighted by the visit of Lord Kristoféru. Lord Wénu came right out of his house and invited them all in. Chris introduced the boys quickly and Wénu ignored them once he understood them to be simple peasant farmers.

He made his complaint, and he was lengthy. Chris asked questions and probed to find out whether the village was willing to send out an armed posse to fight or arrest the

prisoners; they definitely were not willing to do that. Wénu wanted the cavalry to act.

Chris apologized that the cavalry had not and agreed they should.

After an hour Chris thanked the Lord for his hospitality and invited him to come to Ménwika some time, which Wénu said he would do. Chris rose to leave. After receiving some dates as a gift, they all got back into the rover and headed up the Royal Road toward home.

“Lord, if they don’t fight the prisoners, the prisoners will camp on their land and raid their oasis again and again,” said Chandu.

“I agree, and they will be a threat to Awsmoritua and to Deksawsuperakwa, maybe even to bigger villages. The cavalry must act.”

“Why haven’t they?”

“I guess the Bɛllɛdha campaign has been a distraction.”

“What do you think the prisoners want?”

Chris considered. “First, freedom. Second, some revenge against the order that overworked and starved them.”

“They will have to be killed.”

“I think so.”

Chandu considered. “Lord, why did you not ask them about the land south of the Majakwés?”

“It was not the right time. The land is not needed by me or by you right now. There is plenty of land north of the river. Besides, it may not be Médhelone land anyway, and the Réjé may be the one to decide who can use it, regardless of who claims it.”

“This world has a lot of unused land.”

“Indeed it does. Remember that, Chandu: it gives peasants an advantage, because they don’t have to stay in one place.”

“This is a lesson we have been gradually learning as the sea rises.”

“The prisoners!” shouted one of the boys in the back seat. Chris turned to look and saw them as well, about a hundred meters ahead of them and west of the road, twenty men on horseback with spears and swords.

He immediately floored it, but quickly could see that they could not ride past the prisoners fast enough. He considered turning off the road, but the brushland was irregular; a better place for a horse than a rover. He glanced down at the floor; he could just see the handle of his pistol. He slowed a bit and reached down to pick it up.

“What are you doing Lord, you need to go faster!” said Chandu, fear in his voice. “Chandu, you must hold the wheel absolutely straight for me. Do not turn it at all,” replied Chris. He released the safety on the pistol and pushed a button, lowering the driver’s side window electrically. He kept his left hand on the wheel to feel it and crossed his right arm in front of him, pistol ready.

The prisoners clearly were bent on attack; simple as that. The pistol had to be used. Chris hadn’t fired a pistol in seven years but he had not forgotten. He aimed carefully at the closest horse—they were easier to hit than their riders—and pulled the trigger.

The bang startled everyone in the car. The horses, frightened by the bang, all jumped and shied away from the rover. The one hit by the bullet immediately went down,

throwing his rider hard onto the ground. Two other horses tripped over the first one and fell as well.

The entire charge was broken up and slowed. It gave Chris the few seconds he needed to race by the prisoners on the road. He floored it and raised the window electrically. Chandu, shocked, looked at the curl of smoke rising from the pistol's barrel.

“Lord, what is it?”

“A weapon that I use only in emergencies such as this. We do not yet have the ability to make them, just as we do not have the ability to make rovers. As you can see, it is very effective.”

“And terribly frightening, Lord. We need something like this for our stronghouse.”

That gave Chris a thought. “Indeed you do, Chardu. I’ll see what we can arrange.”

Chris didn’t talk about his harrowing experience to the family over dinner; the kids were there and they had a pleasant time together. But after the kids headed off for bed, even though Chris felt exhausted—his wound weakened him a lot—he telephoned John Miller to invite him and Mitru over. Once they arrived, he sat with the two Millers, May, Amos, and Behruz and described the experience in detail.

“The prisoners are a very serious threat,” said Mitru. “I don’t know what to do about my steam wagons. Even if I send three together, they wouldn’t be safe.”

“They might not be safe even in the valley here,” agreed Chris. “And the boys down at Deksawsuperakwa are definitely not safe. If thirty armed horsemen ride up to

them and they don't have any sheep or pigs to give up, or any money, someone could get killed or even kidnapped. We have to make some defensive weapons.”

“But dad, you don't mean guns, do you?” asked May, gravely worried. “Because that'll just escalate the situation. It may already be too late, once the word of this shooting gets out.”

John shook his head. “Everyone knows I have a gun and they have heard it makes a terribly loud bang and could kill someone. They don't know how it works, of course. The army hasn't shown the least interest in it.”

“That's true,” agreed Amos. “The army knows about guns, too; they've asked me about them. I've always said they're still too complicated for us to make. They have explosives; Isuranu has manufactured about one hundred exploding trebuchet projectiles for them, plus lots of sticks of dynamite to blow up rocks and tree stumps.”

“I think right now they're content with long bows and trebuchets,” agreed Chris. “They have an unassailable monopoly on lethal force as a result.”

“How many bullets do we have left?” asked May.

Chris hesitated. “When we arrived one pistol had six bullets, the other five, and both have been shot once.”

“We probably could make a primitive rifle and bullets,” admitted Behruz. “But we can't replace the bullets fired. They're too sophisticated.”

“I don't want to make guns; I agree with May,” said Chris. “But we could make harmless or relatively harmless explosives. They're weapons when used against the ignorant, especially horses untrained to deal with explosions. But not otherwise.”

“Like firecrackers,” said Amos.

“Yes, or bigger; cherry bombs.”

“Isuranu could make those,” said Behruz. “Bigger ones could even include some rock salt, which would add sting; that would really frighten horses.”

“What about something like a roman candle?” asked Amos. “A long hollow container you could hold in your hand and point roughly at someone, which would fire flaming balls.”

Behruz nodded. “Sure, it’d require some planning, but that’s possible. I’d recommend some smoke grenades as well. They’re all non-lethal, short-range defensive weapons.”

“Perfect for defending steam wagons,” exclaimed Mitru. “We badly need something like this.”

“Steam wagons and strong houses,” agreed Chris. “Not for general sale and use; that would encourage thieves and Tutanés to get their hands on some and train their horses to tolerate the noise.”

“Mitru, have you tried using the steam whistle when a steam wagon is attacked?” asked Amos.

“We recently replaced the steam whistles so that they are louder and shriller. Very few horses are used to the noise. But that isn’t much of a defense.”

“Isuranu can have something ready by tomorrow night,” said Behruz. “I assume we’ll inform the army?”

“Leave that to me,” replied Chris. “Because I have a few things to say.”

“You need to talk to him about the new issue of the newspaper describing the Bellédha campaign, too,” said May.

“That too. Mitru, would you be willing to shell out a thousand dhanay toward a reward for destruction of the band of prisoners?”

Mitru considered. “Of course. That’s a small loss compared to an attack on three steam wagons.”

“Good. That gives me a bargaining position.”

The existence of a telephone system conveyed a certain advantage to Chris Mennea: the Eryan, still not used to the devices, rarely made calls except to convey routine business information or inform someone about emergencies; and since no telephone books had been printed, Chris was one of the few people who knew who had phones. So the next morning when he called Lord Kandékwes and Roktrekester, he was able to speak to secretaries and arrange convenient times to meet with both men.

The drive to Meddoakwés was quick; the day before the sun had melted the thin skim of snow left on the plowed roads, so the gravel was exposed and gave good traction. He parked the rover inside the new military compound—he now had permission to do that routinely—but since he had a meeting with the Lord Mayor first, he headed back out of the palace and through the capital's winding streets by himself to Kandékwes' palace on Market Square. His walk gave him the chills, but many of the people who saw him smiled and waved; his survival had given him special status.

The Lord Mayor was happy to see him. "Lord Kristoféru, you are looking better and better every day. You appear to be on the road to full recovery."

"Thanks be to Esto, perhaps that will be true. I still get tired in the afternoon; I have to take a nap."

“Most of us take a siesta anyway. Come, sit, and have some tea.” They sat on the floor on pillows facing each other while the butler poured cups of tea for them. “What can I do for you?”

Chris opened his satchel and pulled out a newspaper. “The *Melwika Nues* was supposed to go to press yesterday afternoon. Two of the four pages is about the Belledha campaign, but May read the article over and wondered whether a few points would disturb the army. We don’t think so, but with the new law we could be fined a thousand dhanay. So we don’t know what to do. The law’s ambiguity makes it very hard to determine what is safe to publish. We have ideas what is *fair* to publish, but that is not the same thing.”

Kandékwes looked at the paper in Chris’s hand, as if he didn’t want to touch or read it. “What are you suggesting we do?”

“Someone we trust needs to read the paper.”

“Hum. You don’t want Estoiyaju to do it, either.”

“No, not at all. As Queen’s secretary, he will want absolutely nothing published that could even slightly question something with even a remote connection with her Majesty’s government. I don’t think that’s what the law intended.”

“I agree.” Kandékwes considered. “How about Yusdu? Or Wérgéndu?”

“Yusdu is so old, I don’t think he will know what to make of the newspaper. I am not even sure he will know the issues. And someone will have to read it to him because he reads the new letters very slowly. Wérgéndu is a possibility, but I am not sure we

should have the chief judge of the area reading every issue of the paper. Or at least every issue that relates to Her Majesty's government."

"I was surprised that four issues in a row have appeared and all they have had are tiny little notices about government things. The Réjé has noticed, also."

"Has she? It has not been that we have intentionally been ignoring Her Majesty. May is the chief editor and with me in bed, she really didn't know what to do with the law, so she avoided the problem."

"I see." Kandékwes reached out for the paper and Chris handed it to him. The Lord Mayor pulled out a pair of reading glasses and began, slowly, to read the entire issue. Chris had to wait patiently; he completed his tea and was nearly finished with his second cup when Kandékwes put the paper down. "I don't see any problems with this issue. But I can't read every paper every week. It is not practical. I think you should ask Wérgéndu to appoint someone to read it every week—someone you both respect and trust—and the two of you will resolve any issues he finds. If you do that, no one will be able to sue."

"True." Chris was disappointed by the reply, but it was the best he would get. "I'll make an appointment to see him, then."

"That is what I would recommend."

"My Lord Mayor, something else I want to mention to you: the Mélwika City Council recently voted to establish a separate *high school* for children aged 15-17. Of course, some of them already have been attending the génadéma, while others have been attending the mendhadéma. This will give them classes designed just for them and will

allow the génadema to improve its admissions standards. To make the opportunity available to as many people as possible, now that steam wagons are running regularly, we propose to invite every village in the area to consider sending one or more students.”

“Excellent; how much?”

“About 100 dhanay per year. I should add, though, that the City Council would like to invite all the Lords in the area to Mélwika to consider the invitation. It would also be an excellent chance to discuss the danger of fires and ways to share fire fighting together. If we had special fire-fighting steam wagons in Mélwika and Méddoakwés, we could work together to protect both cities and help each other in severe emergencies.”

“That’s a good plan. I’ve wanted to invite the Lords here to talk about graveling more roads. I was beginning to think it’d have to wait for the Grand Court.”

“We could add that to the agenda, if you’d like.”

Kandékwes considered. “Yes, add it, and I’ll talk about it. I’d rather sponsor my own meeting, but I can schedule mine for after the Grand Court and the harvest—that’s when people know how much they can spend. A meeting now will help plan the meeting in Dhomménú. When do you plan to host this meeting of Lords?”

“In a few weeks, during the week after the usual nine-week late autumn term ends and before the intensive five-week winter term begins. We’ll have time then, and classrooms to hold the meeting.”

Kandékwes nodded and sipped his tea in order to recover from the irritation of having Mélwika come up with the plans before him. “How’s Mélwika’s addition? You

realize now I have to consider whether we make another addition here. We have to keep up.”

Kandékwés seemed to be joking, but Chris wasn’t sure. “The new wall is mostly up; we still have a stretch that’s only three doli high, but in a week it’ll be finished. We’ve stopped work on the streets, sewers, and water system, and construction of the Miller Magantekno Géndha, Miller Engineering School, is on hold until the walls are finished and we are safe again.”

“That’s wise. I heard this morning when I was at the palace that they tried to steal horses from a Dwobergone camp at dawn this morning. They got one horse and killed one warrior, but the Dwobergone say they killed three.”

“I didn’t hear about that. What camp?”

“One of their winter camps along the Majakwés. They called the palace from there to complain; there’s a telephone.”

“Yesterday twenty of them tried to ambush me. I was in my rover, driving back from Médhela. I got away, but it was close. They raided Médhela and stole three animals.”

“They’re hungry. They must be camping somewhere in the area.”

“Why doesn’t the army do something? I have an appointment to talk to Roktekester.”

“I’d counsel gentleness. Look, who’s on the Army Command Council? Perku: he doesn’t ride a horse well, he was a footsoldier. Tritu: he’s still in Bellédha. The Crown Prince: but they won’t send him out with a few hundred men to deal with this. Gelawu is

retired from active service and is managing Endraida on a day-to-day basis. That leaves Roktekester.”

“Why doesn’t he go out?”

“He just got back from a campaign and he doesn’t want to camp in the outdoors in the winter right now.”

“So, should we wait until they ambush three steam wagons, destroy one or two of them, kill a few passengers, and disrupt intercity traffic?”

Kandékwes sighed. “We’re still living in the old world, my friend, when we didn’t have to worry about caravans. They stopped for the winter.”

“I have to worry about this because our génadëma relies on the steam wagons to get students around. We’ll probably have to start manufacturing defensive weapons, like very small bombs that can’t kill but can frighten horses. We can raise a bounty of a thousand dhanay to destroy them; maybe the Kwlone will act.”

“Only if the band is on their land.”

Chris hadn’t considered that problem. “What do you suggest, Lord?”

“I don’t know. If you speak to him, encourage, don’t confront.”

“Thank you for that.” Chris finished his second cup of tea. “And thank you for your hospitality. I should go; I have an appointment with the General soon.”

Kandékwes rose. “I am so happy to see your health recovering. I hope we can see each other again.”

“I always enjoy our time together, Lord.” They exchanged small talk and Chris left.

He walked back to the palace. He had just enough time to find Wérgéndu, one of Roktékester’s nephews. He was in luck; Wérgéndu had some time. He heard Mennea’s complaint and suggested that his chief clerk, Krédanu, read the paper, as he was fair and not inclined either to be permissive or narrow minded. Chris readily agreed and hurried to see Roktékester.

“My honored friend,” said Roktékester. “It’s so good to see you and see that you are well again.”

“Thank you, I praise Esto every day that I am recovering.”

“Tea.”

“Thank you, I am honored.” It was one thing Chris didn’t need, after drinking his fourth cup of the day with Wérgéndu. “I am glad you are back safely from the Belledha campaign.”

“Esto preserved me. It is a very sad city, Lord Kristoféru. We’ll need to think how we can help it, come spring.”

“We will do what we can. But today I come to offer you things.”

“Oh? What?”

“First, a new weapon against these prisoners. They attacked me yesterday while I was returning from Médhela and only Esto enabled me to escape them. Behruz has started to make very small bombs that will not kill, but will frighten their horses. We’ll

give a supply to every steam wagon so they can frighten the prisoners away. It is a matter of time before they attack a steam wagon.”

“I fear you are right. These bombs can’t be combined together to make powerful explosions?”

“No, that will not be possible.”

“Good, because the army will not permit that.”

“We know and understand. Second, considering the coldness of the season and restrictions on your time, I would like to loan you one of our rovers for a week or so, while you pursue the prisoners. It will give you a mobile command post, speed, and a comfortable place to stay at night.”

Roktkester’s eyes lit up. “You are very generous, Lord Kristoféru! Under such circumstances, a campaign against them will be much easier!”

“I thought so. I am very worried about the damage they can do to remote villages, my farmers, and the steam wagons. Some merchants want to raise a thousand dhanay as a bounty on the heads of these prisoners.”

“Tell them not to, it could look like an expression of mistrust in the army.” He sighed. “I guess I will have to go back out.”

“It may not take long; they appear to be camped somewhere south of Melwika. I think in three days you can get them.”

“Unless they scatter; that is my fear.”

“I hope Esto is on our side. This world needs peace.”

Mitru was hauling a load of limestone to Melwika from Nuarjora when he spotted the man on the side of the royal road. He was barely able to stand using a stick for a crutch; his right foot was mangled and bloody and he was weak. Worried, hesitating, Mitru hit the brakes and stopped by the man, who raspingly implored his help. Fortunately it was an open stretch of road; a poor place to execute an ambush. He and the stoker jumped down, picked the man up, and gave him a place to sit on the steam wagon, then piled on the steam and headed home. They drove the steam wagon to the front door of Melwika Hospital and carried him inside.

“What happened to him?” asked Aréjé, who was on duty at the front desk at the time.

“He can’t speak much; he’s lost a lot of blood. He said something about being out hunting and his horse stepped in a hole and fell, throwing him.”

“Village?”

“He didn’t say.”

She nodded and grabbed the wheelchair they kept by the front door. Mitru and the fire stoker sat him in it and she wheeled him back to Stauréstu and Lua, who were on duty, where she summarized.

“What is your name?” asked Stauréstu.

The man put his lips together twice before he could get it out. “Soru.”

“Okay, Soru, I am Stauréstu. Do you want us to fix your leg? Because if you don’t, someone will probably have to cut it off in a few days. But we can save it.”

He nodded. “Please.”

“Then this is what we have to do. We’ll put a little mask over your mouth and nose. Breathe deeply and it will put you asleep, but just for a little while. While you are asleep and you can’t feel any pain, we will clean the wound and set the bones, then bind the leg and splint it so you can’t bend it. When you wake up it will hurt a little, but not too much. You’ll have to stay here two or three days at least, maybe longer.”

Soru nodded. Clearly, he was weak; he knew he had no choice.

“Okay,” said Stauréstu. He put the mask over Soru’s nose and mouth and the man was asleep very quickly; he was weak. Aréjé and Lua left the tourniquet in place and began to unwrap the dirty, blood-soaked bandages to reveal a serious compound fracture with one femur bone sticking out through the skin. While Aréjé took over the anesthetic, Stauréstu and Lua carefully cleaned the exposed flesh and sterilized it, added antibiotic, moved the bones back into place, sewed up the skin, and poured a Plaster of Paris cast around it. Lua let Stauréstu do most of the work; he was very good with sutures and she always admired the result. It took about an hour. They gave Soru a shot for the pain before he awakened and wheeled him into Room 6, where he could gradually recover. He was strong enough so they decided not to give him an intravenous; Eryan had never seen such things and often tore them out when they awakened. When he finally did awaken the nurse spoon-fed him some warm broth, and the smile on his face told her he enjoyed the attention.

The next morning about dawn, Stauréstu was making rounds and stopped by. “Are you feeling better?”

Soru nodded. “Indeed, Honored. . . Stauréstu?”

“You remember well, considering the condition you were in.”

Soru looked at his leg. “Will it be alright?”

“We’ll see whether the infection is under control. That is the big danger. But we have pills you should take to prevent it.”

“Anything, honored. I don’t want to lose my leg.”

“Then perhaps you will permit something that will be of very great benefit to you. We want to attach a tube to your arm that will drip medicine straight into your blood. This is much better and more effective. It will need to stay in most of the day, but you can always use your other arm if you need to.”

“I don’t understand, but it does not matter, Honored. Just do it and I will submit.”

“Alright.” Staurestu called for the nurse to bring an i.v. set up while he listened to Soru’s heart, measured his blood pressure, and timed his pulse with a little sand hourglass. Soru watched closely as he wrote it all down with a pencil. “You are young and strong; you should recover.”

“What did you put on my leg?”

“It is like cement, but softer and can be washed off with water. It will protect your leg for two months while the bone mends.”

“Two months!”

“Yes. But you’ll be able to walk on it, don’t worry.”

“Honored, I need to pee.”

“I’ll help you then.” Staurestu pulled a curtain around the bed, picked up a chamber pot, and handed it to the young man, who peed into it.

“Honored, I can never pay for this healing.”

“Have you a family?”

“They are far away, in Ora, and have no money.”

“I thought I heard an Ora accent. I’m from Mædwoglubas. What were you doing down by the Royal Road?”

“I was riding here, to make a better life for myself. I stopped to do some hunting, pursued a deer, my horse tripped and fell and threw me. . . when I woke up the horse was gone, so I bandaged my wound as well as I could and dragged myself back to the road.”

“You did a good job, considering you were weak and injured.” Stauréstu was suspicious.

“Thank you, honored, I have always been very resouceful.” Soru seemed unaware of Stauréstu’s suspicious tone.

The nurse arrived with the intravenous bag and tubes. Stauréstu proceeded to explain what he was doing as he inserted a needle into Soru’s arm and hitched it to the bag. Soru was surprised to watch the slow drip.

“That’s going into me?”

“Yes, and it is powerful medicine. It is inconvenient, but you must leave it alone. I suggest you go back to sleep. A nurse will bring you breakfast in a few hours. You need to sleep as much as you can for the next day or two. Then we’ll see how your leg is mending. If it is mending well, you should be able to move around on it.”

“Thank you, Honored.” Soru watched Stauréstu walk out of the room. He put his head back on the pillow. A pillow. A soft bed. A room with a curtain. Regular meals. He

had never had any of these things before. He relaxed, looked at the white ceiling, and marveled why Esto would take someone like him, who had seen and done many bad things in his short life, and put him in such a heavenly place. It made no sense. He tried to remember a hymn, but only a fragment came to his memory, and as he thought about it he drifted back to sleep.

He didn't awaken for quite a long time, when a nurse came into his room with food. "You slept all morning," she said. "You must need it! But I've brought you food." She pointed to soup, bread, vegetables, fish, and water.

"Thank you." She brought over a table that extended over the bed and put the food right before him.

"Would you like tea?"

That surprised him. "I've never had tea before!"

"Then try it."

"Why do they give me so many good things?"

The nurse laughed. "This is the way we treat everyone here who is ill! It helps them get better!"

"But I can never pay."

"What about your family?"

"I came here to make a new start."

"Well, the Lords pay for the hospital; even the Réjé pays some. When you leave, they'll tell you how much it costs. If you plan to stay here in town, you should try to pay it off in two or three years. It is a moral obligation, but not one anyone forces on you."

“And that works?”

“Sometimes it does. Mélwika is a different kind of town. We work hard here to live a prosperous life and we help each other. Of course, some people cheat, but some do not. If you are staying, you will see.”

“What sort of work can I get here?”

“What do you want? In the spring, Lord Mennea will release 6,000 agris to new farmers, so you can farm. Lord Miller is always hiring people in his factory. There are twenty or thirty big businesses hiring people. The hospital and génadëma sometimes hire, too.”

“But what can I do with this thing on my leg?”

“That’s a good question. I’ll ask Dr. Lua about that; maybe she can find something you can do around here for a few months. Maybe you can take some classes, too.”

“On what?”

“Reading, writing, counting. Here.” She reached down to the lower level of her tray and pulled out a picture book. “Look at this. It teaches reading with pictures. I can come back and explain them to you, some time. All of the nurses can because we all can read and write. We have to; we have to write down information about each patient.”

He took the booklet; it was pretty, colorful, and he could see how it worked, building words a letter at a time. “Thank you.”

Two mornings later, Melwika was surprised by the arrival of four armored steam wagons pulling horse trailers. Chris had received a phone call at dawn that they were coming, so he drove the rover down to West Street where they were parked right outside the city walls. Roktekester stepped out of the lead vehicle when he saw Chris coming.

“Hail, Lord.”

“Hail, General.” Chris looked at the caravan. “So, do you really need the rover? It looks to me you’re well equipped for the expedition.”

“These steam wagons are pretty crowded, especially at night; thirty men in each, twenty horsemen and ten archers. But with the canvas interior coverings over the windows, they’re pretty warm. The rover will help me get around quickly and I’ll sleep in it at night.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“I suspect just a few days. They aren’t far from here; they raided Awsmoritua last night. If they don’t get into mountains, woods, or deep snow, we’ll be faster than they.”

“Good luck. Do you want to see the firecrackers?”

“Yes, please.”

Chris looked around, then pointed to a spot a hundred doli away. The General and some of the soldiers followed him over. Chris pulled a bomb about the size of a large plum from his pouch, struck a match, lit the fuse, and tossed it as far as he could. He started to count as soon as he lit the fuse. When he reached ten there was an incredibly loud bang that startled everyone. They could see streaks of white flying in all directions.

“That one is the *saltru* or ‘salter’,” he explained. “When it explodes, it sends rock salt flying in all directions; if it explodes close to you the salt could pierce the skin, but generally it just frightens. The fuse takes ten seconds, so if you want it to explode quickly you hold onto it for a few seconds before you throw it.”

“Clever,” said Roktēkēster. “It isn’t a military weapon, but good for farmers and steam wagons to frighten off robbers.”

“That’s what they’re for. May Esto guide you.”

“Thank you, Lord.” They walked back to the rover, where Roktēkēster’s rover driver had already moved into the driver’s seat. Chris walked back to the gate and the military expedition set out.

He made the rounds of the family business partnerships. He stopped at Sajéku’s first. What had started out as commercial art on the top floor of Ornu’s optics building now had the entire building; Sajéku and his wife lived upstairs and did a lot of their creating there in the fabulous light that poured in through their glass windows, and they used downstairs as a screen printing area and shop. Wallpaper was their most successful product, with Melwika’s two dozen “new wealth” families ordering wallpaper for at least several rooms and a brisk business constantly arrived from cities all over the planet by steam wagon. Woodcuts, however, were also popular; Modolubu printed them for Sajéku. After a cup of tea, Chris felt fairly confident the business was beginning to produce a significant profit. One encouraging sign: merchants were ordering large quantities of popular wallpaper designs to resell locally.

Ornu’s optics shop was next door. “Hail Ornu,” he said as he entered.

“Hail, Lord Kristobéru,” replied Ornu, who could not pronounce the “f” western shore style and fell back on the “b” of the eastern shore. It made more sense anyway, since it was recognizably “bearer of Christ” to Eryan. “You look vigorous today.”

“Thank you, but it’s early. I’ll be exhausted by four bells.” He shrugged. “But I’m getting stronger daily, and this is the week between semesters, so it’s relatively quiet.”

“You have the next semester planned, then?”

“Yes. It’ll be a bit larger than the last one, I think. And we have some excellent continuing students.”

“So many Eryan are becoming experts, now, after almost four years of génadëma! I’m very pleased, Lord: the army just ordered twenty more binoculars by summer. That’s 750 dhanay.”

“Excellent. And you’re still making eyeglasses.”

“Yes, 150 pairs per year, now.”

“I’m glad you’re making money off of them. The hospitals usually find the needy can’t afford fifteen dhanay to buy them, so we give many away.”

“I think that’ll gradually change. The people here in Melwika have a lot of money to spend on luxuries; they can spend ten or fifteen dhanay on glasses.”

“True, but they’re mostly too young to need any!”

Ornu pointed to a man working with him. “Gurwu, here, wants to take the classes.”

Chris looked at him closely. “Yes, you’ve taken the classes before. You’re teacher in the . . . Tripola area, right?”

“You remember!” replied Gurwu, surprised. “Correct, I’ve been teaching at the schoolhouse in Wrétradontes for a year.”

Wrétradontes. . . that’s east of Tripola on the Royal Road. . . I love the name, ‘Dragon’s Teeth’ . . . a good sized place.”

“Indeed, Lord. We have 1,300 people, and about five hundred are aged 6-18. I have over one hundred children in my school, mostly aged 6-10.”

“One hundred!”

“Yes. I have a volunteer, a grandmother who comes in and helps to keep order, and four or five older girls come to help teach letters and numbers. And I have a school building, but right now it’s too cold. I hope we’ll get an iron stove for next winter!”

“It’s been really cold. So, what brings you here?”

“I need to earn some money! The village pays me only five hundred dhanay per year, mostly in food, to watch all those kids; I can live on it, but I can’t save anything for a dowry for my bride! So the village said I could come here for the next two months to improve my education, and they gave me a hundred dhanay cash for it, and Ornu said I could come here and work for him while I take classes . . . I assume I can take classes?”

Chris nodded. “Yes, we can arrange it. We still have some money left over from the Consultative Assembly to pay for them. Five hundred dhanay? That’s not much. Do you have a camera?”

“Yes, but I haven’t made practically any money with it. The pictures are all faded. Maybe the chemicals aren’t strong enough, or maybe the darkroom isn’t dark enough; if I

make it really dark I can't see what I'm doing, and if I can see what I'm doing the dark room isn't dark enough!"

"This is a problem," agreed Ornu. "We need to come up with a better system. I've only sold two cameras in the last year."

"Behruz hasn't sold many chemicals, either," agreed Chris. "I'll talk to him and Amos. We need to get away from big glass plates. On Gedhéma cameras use a flexible paper-like material and the pictures are printed on a special paper." He turned to Gurwu. "Are you paid at all to serve as postmaster?"

Gurwu laughed. "Lord, I would have to pay myself! I'm the only person in Wrétradontës who can read and write! I don't have a subscription to a newspaper. Maybe once every two months a letter comes telling someone about a loved one who has died, or I have to write a letter of that sort for someone."

"So, is no adult interested in reading?" asked Chris.

"Some are interested, Lord, and some have taken classes; but reading requires practice, and there's nothing to practice on."

Chris nodded. "It's the same way all across the world. We've got to get you a subscription to the *Melwika Nues*; it'll give you something to read to people. I know one teacher in a village who takes it to the tavern and reads it out loud; that has interested others in reading, and he passes the old issues around. Another teacher had a class project of making signs to put around the village, so people see written words every day."

"Those things would help, Lord, but at this point I'm so discouraged I'd rather move here and get a job that earns twice as much; and in coins, not bushels of wheat!"

“I understand,” said Chris.

“Otherwise, if I stay, I need to know more about healing. I think that will earn more money and respect.”

“We have a lot of people coming here for medical training,” agreed Chris. “Come to the génadëma tomorrow to see the courses and take a test.”

“Test?”

“Yes, we have so many special courses now, we have to be sure everyone has basic skills. It doesn’t take long.”

The next day Soru got up, on crutches, and hobbled to a bathroom, where everything was explained to him. It made his leg hurt a lot, though, and the bandages were stained with some blood. When Dr. Lua and Dr. Staurëstu changed them, however, they were pleased to see no infection, which meant he didn’t need the i.v. any more. Soru was glad to get rid of that.

The next morning the pain was much less and the wound did not bleed at all. Soru went up and down the corridor on the crutches, getting used to them, relieved he could move again. But now he had to worry about something else: being discharged from the hospital into a cold city where he had no home and couldn’t work. He went over to the nurse’s station at the end of the hall when lunch was arriving. “Can I help push the meal carts to the rooms?”

Dr. Lua was there at the time. “Thank you, Soru, but it isn’t necessary. You need to rest your leg, not use it.”

“Honored Dr. Lua, your kindness to me needs to be repaid, and I have no way to do it, except to help.”

“But these meals are not all the same, some go to some patients and others to others.”

“Oh. But I see they’re labeled.” He looked at the cart closest to him, which was ready. “This says “3.”

“Oh, you can read numbers?”

“Yes.” He used the English word; it was common hospital slang. “I can even read some letters now. This name is. . . B. . . l. . . r. . .”

“Blorané,” said Aréjé. “Did you learn from the book I gave you?”

He nodded.

“You’re fast and smart, then, Soru,” replied Lua.

He smiled, pleased that he had proved himself, especially since he had guessed the “r.” “I can learn pretty quickly, and in spite of my leg, I can do quite a lot.”

“And you have no next of kin here in town?” asked Lua.

“None. My mother and father are dead. I have a few cousins left in Ora, that’s it. That’s why I came here.”

“Okay, tell you what. For the next week—six days—I’ll let you stay in your room, but on these conditions. First, you have to wash every day; anyone staying in the hospital has to be clean. That includes brushing your teeth. Second, you attend morning classes in letters and numbers in the génadema building next door; we can help get you there. And third, you do two or three hours of very light work here in the afternoon or

evening. We could use help keeping things clean, moving things, pushing patients in wheelchairs, even talking to patients who have no visitors.”

“I agree,” he replied immediately.

“Good. You can start by pushing Blorané’s food to her in room three.”

“Thank you!” He stood one crutch up against the wall and put the other one in place under his right arm, and pushed the cart forward with his left. It was slow but steady.

“He really wants to help,” said Aréjé.

“He does,” agreed Lua. “And we can’t toss him out into the cold. Invest some time in him, and Mélwika will gain another smart, capable resident.”

“I hope he doesn’t mind cleaning up after patients, though.”

“We’ll see.” Lua continued reviewing the trays of food to make sure everyone was getting what was requested. She had two terminal cancer patients who could eat very little and several with illnesses that restricted their intake. Finished, she walked down the corridor to check on everyone again, since she had to spend the afternoon at Méddoakwés Hospital and oversee one operation.

The hospital had two floors for patients; the bottom floor had the emergency room, operating room, two examining rooms, an X-ray room, a nurses’s station, an office for Dr. Lua, a custodial area, and twenty-three rooms for patients. The second floor had rooms for twenty-five patients plus four rooms for office work. They rarely had more than half the rooms filled with patients; the top floor was used mostly as dorm rooms for

the medical school students or for relatives of patients. Half the world's hospital beds were located in Mélwika and the most serious cases were brought there for treatment.

Lua returned to her office to complete some paperwork. Soru delivered ten of the twenty-two meals, then went to his room to eat his lunch. When he finished he came back out to help collect the carts and push them back to the nurses' station. He delivered one of the last ones and was headed back down the corridor when an older man who looked funny entered the hospital. "Lua, are you ready to go to Meddowakwés?" he said. He had a noticeable accent, so Soru looked up. He was shocked to see the man who had killed his horse in a most sudden and complete way, five days earlier. He retreated into his room, afraid the man might recognize him. The vehicle, come to think of it, had been driven by a gédhému, and Mélwika had two gédhému lords. One was Dr. Lua's father. Most likely, the man had had no time to get a good look at him.

But he didn't know. His heart sank. Maybe his luck wouldn't hold after all.

As the sun sank in the west after the eclipse that evening, General Roktékester's caravan of armored steam wagons appeared from the south, rolling up the Royal Road. The General directed his driver to take the rover straight into the Meddoakwés Gate and to the front door of the Mennea house. By the time the front door of the garage had been opened, both Chris and Aisu had appeared.

"What's the news, General?" asked Aisu, after saluting.

Roktékester smiled. "They were camped forty dékent east, on the Ornawkwés River. We spotted the smoke of their campfires and rode against them. They had almost no

warning; no time to decamp, barely enough time to mount their horses. They fled in all directions and we slaughtered them.”

Aisu smiled. “A victory!”

Roktekester nodded. “Most complete. We killed forty-four of them and captured three. Five were killed at other times, mostly when they approached Melwika a week ago.”

“So, possibly eight escaped?” asked Chris.

Roktekester nodded. “Probably a few escaped. Something like that.”

“So, we may still have a threat to farms and steam wagons?”

“Possibly. I doubt it though; they’re scattered. More likely, they’ll go home, where we’ll capture some of them.”

Reread and edited, 5/20/13, 7/28/17

Progress

Another steam wagon pulled up to the old génadëma building and discharged eight more passengers: lords from local villages. Chris looked out the window of the meeting room and watched them come into the building, shake the mud off their boots—for it was temporarily warm, after three big blizzards—pull off their coats, and enter= the big first floor classroom, where they were handed mugs of hot tea.

Chris walked over to Mayor Weranolubu. “That should be the last batch.” He surveyed heads and counted. “I think we’ve got just about everyone.”

“I don’t see Weranobéru of Dhébkua,” noted Weranolubu.
“I didn’t think he’d make it; the road to Dhébkua is not very well developed and it’s a long trip to get here. But at least we have Rudhékwu of Domamitri.”

“Oh, I take it back; there’s Weranobéru!” Weranolubu pointed discretely. “With the Lords of Perkas, Ekwédhuna, and Brébestéa; I never thought they’d come. I’d better get us started.” Weranolubu walked to the front of the room and called the chanter forward. With his appearance up front, the crowd grew quiet. Then he chanted a hymn of Widumaj most beautifully, starting the meeting out on a note of reverence and faith.

“Good afternoon. I am Mayor Weranolubu of Mélwika. Lords Miller and Mennéa have asked me to chair the meeting today. On their behalf, I want to welcome all of you and thank you for coming here on this wintry day. Allow me to begin by offering a special welcome to Widéstu, Her Majesty’s Minister for Education and Health, who

represents the Queen herself in this gathering; and our High Lord Kandékwès, Mayor of Méddoakwés. Both wish to speak to us, but both have said they wish to wait. Also present are sixteen Lords of the towns and villages of this region; the Honorable Wérétrakester, widu and head of the Gésélékwès Maj Génadéma; the honorable Dr. Lua, head of the Mélwika Hospital and Medical School; the Honorable May, head of the School for Women; and a dozen other guests.

“We have three major topics of discussion for today: establishment of an *uda* *méndhadéma* or high school for the area; the creation of a fire control district; and improvement of our roads. Regarding the first, we have a report from Ornéstu, who is the superintendent of education for Mélwika.”

Ornéstu rose and walked to the front; he received polite applause. At 27, he was a bit older than the average resident in Mélwika; he had also completed three years of classes at the génadéma and had learned to read English passably. In the last six months his interest, and then passion, had become the subject of education. “Greetings to all of you,” he began. “The Mélwika City Council took a decision last month to establish a High School for the city, but it decided it wanted to open it up to as many young people in the entire area as possible. We have defined three types of *méndhadémas*: elementary, for children aged six through nine; middle, for children aged ten to thirteen; and high, for children aged fourteen through sixteen. This is similar to the custom on Gédhéma, where children usually attend twelve grades. We plan to offer only eleven because the year here is longer; children finishing eleven years here are finishing the equivalent of twelve in Gédhéma.

“Many of you may wonder whether Melwika has any students of high school age. We have only a handful who are growing up here in families, but we have as many as several hundred who have moved here on their own and are struggling to build houses, families, and farms. If one extends the school age up to twenty-five, almost every adult in Melwika would be eligible. Most adults do not find it easy to go to the génadëma; the classes are too advanced for them. The high school will offer evening classes to anyone and we will invite them to day classes as well if they are available.

“Why should people be educated for so many years? The results of education are clear: workers with better skills who work faster and are safer, and therefore can earn more money. Melwika does not yet have a law requiring children to go to school, but we will probably sign one in the next few months that will require education through age thirteen. We will strongly encourage, but not require, boys and girls to be educated through high school.

“What will we offer in high school? There will be classes on how to operate all sorts of machines, so that graduates can get jobs. Classes in accounting, bookkeeping, and business will help adults open businesses. We will offer basic science and math to everyone, and farming courses to future farmers. Those interested in going to génadëma can obtain the foundation for further study.

“How will students get here? The new steam engines that started in production last fall are capable of one hundred dëkënt per hour on a smooth gravel or concrete road while pulling a passenger wagon. At that speed, students could get here from Perkas or Domamitri in less than an hour. The school will pay the passenger steam wagons to move

students here from anywhere in the region. Transportation should cost 2 dontay per day or ten per week; just half a dhanay. Moving students here will probably double the number of passenger rides in this area and will thus bring about more frequent schedules and cheaper rides.

“How much will the school cost? With twenty-five students in each classroom, uniforms, lunch, books, and transportation, we estimate it’ll cost about 100 dhanay per student per year.” He paused to let that sink in; it was a sixth of the average rural family’s 600-dhanay income. “Of course, many villages will be sending only a few students, so the cost will not add up to very much for each place.

“Why send your youth here? Because with an education they will earn more money; perhaps twice as much per year. That’s the main reason. In fact, the 300 dhanay that three years of high school will cost may be less than the increase in income they’ll see *every* year! Families here in Melwika average a thousand dhanay per year. In Nénaslua, just down the road, the average family income is about 900. The farther from here, the less families earn. But with fast steam wagons every village can develop and earn more money. Ours will be the first region with a high school, so we will develop faster than any other region.

“Questions?”

There was a long silence. Ornéstu had answered all the common questions, but the cost was still 100 dhanay per year.

“Why can’t you build the high school in Méddowakwés?” asked Lord Sérékwés, “Swift Horses” of Ekwédhuna. The name and question were appropriate; Ékwédhuna,

“Horse Meadows,” was the home of Her Majesty’s cavalry, and the wealthy village—one could almost say suburb—was closely tied to the capital.

“We hope Mæddoakwés will build a high school as well, and eventually other villages as well. But this school is being planned and paid for by the Mælwika City Council.”

Kandékwes spoke up. “Mæddoakwés will build a high school, but not for a few years. For now, we will support Mælwika’s. The main cost difference is transporting students here, which is twenty-five dhanay per year.”

“How big will this high school be?” asked Érwërgu of Mæghduna.
“We need to know how many students everyone will send. The entire area has about 1,800 children aged fourteen through sixteen.”

“You’re talking about girls as well?” asked Andrulu of Boléripludha.
“Indeed. Boys and girls will be in separate classes and they will study some different subjects. They’ll all learn reading, writing, and numbers. But boys will also learn mechanics and electricity; girls will learn preserving foods and sewing. Of course, if anyone wants the other kind of class, they can take it.” He smiled and everyone laughed, but Ornéstu was serious; they planned to let everyone take every kind of class. By making it a joke, he conveyed the information in a harmless way.

“They’ll still have to take the steam wagon to Mælwika with the boys,” objected Mitrudatu of Morituora.

Ornéstu nodded. “But the steam wagon has two men on it; the driver and the stoker. The stoker will watch the kids as well and walk back to discipline them if necessary. We’ll make sure the boys and girls sit apart in assigned seats.”

“And there will be men in the coach, too,” added Sérékwes disapprovingly.

“And women,” Ornéstu was quick to add. “The coaches will be open to anyone, and the crew will supervise. The steam wagons will get here a bit before 8 bells for class and will leave after 4 bells.”

“What about planting and harvesting?” asked Erwergu.

“School will close at those times. The 100 dhanay is for fifty weeks of classes per year, not sixty-five.”

“What does this do to the génadëma?” asked Sarélubé of Béranagrés and Nénaslua.

Chris spoke up. “It means the génadëma can get better. Right now it is busy teaching reading, writing, and numbers to adults and children as young as fifteen. On Gëdhëma, no one can go to a génadëma unless they already know those things. The Melwika Génadëma will raise its standards and train people even better.”

“How much education do people need?” asked Andrulu, skeptically.

“Some need very little, and some need a lot,” replied Ornéstu. “Doctors, engineers, lawyers, chemists. . . they need a lot. Bureaucrats, electricians, mechanics need less. But even farmers can use reading; it helps protect them from being cheated.”

“We’ve done well for centuries on very little education,” replied Modosunu of Awsmoritua. “I see no reason to change that.”

“What about your men working the iron quarry?” asked Ornéstu. “Reading and writing will help them do their work.”

“A little reading and writing is fine, but they don’t need much, and girls don’t need any. A few classes is fine; this ‘high school’ is unnecessary for us.”

“Suit yourself,” replied Ornéstu. “We didn’t say everyone has to join. Send one student, ten, a hundred. . . or none.”

“Mëddoakwës will send fifty,” replied Kandékwës. “For a start, anyway.”

“I can’t give a final number,” said Andrulu. “But Boléripludha will aim to send twenty.”

They went around the circle. Of the sixteen lords present, four declined to send any—mostly the villages farthest away—but the others all said they’d send some. Only a few committed to a specific number. Ornéstu looked disappointed, but the commitments were for over a hundred twenty, and it seemed likely that a few hundred eventually would attend.

“Thank you, Ornéstu,” said Wéranolubu. “The next subject is a fire district. Last year Sarélubé’s house in Béranagrés burned and Melwika’s fire department responded. Three years ago there was a fire in Mëddoakwës and Melwika helped to put it out. Melwika needs a bigger fire department than ever, because it has grown and has more that could burn; the same is true of Mëddoakwës. But it isn’t fair that we pay for everything.”

“Tell us what you propose,” replied Kandékwës.

“Amos says he can design a steam wagon that can serve specially to fight fires. It will have a steam-powered pump, a large water tank, and a crew of five. We think it’ll sell for five thousand dhanay, and the crew will cost a bit less per year. We want one in Mélwika and one in Meddoakwés; eventually two in both; then maybe another one at the eastern end of the area, like Perkas or Domamitri. When someone has a fire, they call either Mélwika or Meddoakwés and at least one fire engine is sent, but if it’s a big fire all would be sent.”

“How much?” asked Erwergu, wanting the bottom line.

“The budget will be twenty-four thousand per year,” replied Weranolubu. “If Mélwika and Meddoakwés each pay a third, that leaves 8,000 dhanay. For a village of five hundred, the cost would be about 300 dhanay per year; 600 if you have a thousand people and 900 if you have fifteen hundred.”

“That’s about the cost of a burned house,” said Mitrudatu. “Assuming only one house burns. Morituora definitely needs this. We now have waterpower at the lake exit and we’re using a few electric motors to run things. We have a lot that can burn.”

“You’re also a large place,” replied Rostanu of Yimuaidha. “We have maybe fifty houses and three hundred people. I’m not sure it will help us much.”

“It’s up to each village; we aren’t forcing anyone,” replied Weranolubu. “But if you have a fire, you will put us in an awkward position. We’ll come fight the fire if you ask, but then we’ll charge you for the previous few years of fire protection.”

“Let’s go around,” said Andrulu. “Boléripludha will pay, of course.”

They went around and eleven Lords agreed to the fire district. Everyone feared a runaway fire; but some doubted they could help fast enough. “When will it start?” asked Mitrudatu.

“After harvest,” replied Weranolubu. “It’ll take that long to build the first two fire engines and train the crew.”

“When they aren’t fighting fires, can they be helping with irrigation?” asked Erwergu.

“Yes, I think so,” agreed Weranolubu.

“Then we’re in, too,” said Rudhékwu.

“The last subject is roads, and Lord Kandékwes has asked to speak about it,” responded Weranolubu.

The Lord Mayor walked to the front of the room. “I was talking to General Perku yesterday about further graveling of the area’s roads. He has committed ten thousand dhanay this spring to the task, mostly in the form of army labor and steam wagons. I am committing another ten thousand to the region out of my chest as regional Lord. But we will spend the money when the local village matches it, either in cash, harvest, or labor. In other words, if you commit a thousand, it will be matched by another thousand, either by the army or by me. Forty thousand dhanay will gravel forty dékent of roads.”

“We still have no gravel road at all!” exclaimed Weranobéru of Dhébkua.

“This is your chance; you only need about six dékent. Three thousand dhanay and it’s yours.”

“Perhaps we can find that.” He seemed to try to sound positive.

“Our people will want some pay, Lord,” objected Erwergu. “They will put their labor into the road because they’ll see the benefit, but if they get half a dhanay per day, it’ll be even better.”

I don’t know why we can’t be paid a full dhanay and a quarter per day,” responded Modosunu of Awsmoritua. “What are taxes for, after all?”

“Half a dhanay, we can manage,” replied Kandékwes testily. “The tax money is used up.”

“For jeweled coaches pulled by special steam wagons,” commented Modosunu. “It really is impossible for us to make a real commitment without a crop in the ground,” noted Sarélubé. “This conversation should be occurring in mid summer.”

“We’ll hold another meeting then,” replied Kandékwes. “It’ll be at the palace. We can refine our commitments to the high school and fire district then. The twenty thousand from the army and me are from this year’s budget, though, and the time to spend it is the two months right before planting. You will need to commit labor, not dhanay. Let’s go around.” He called out the names of the sixteen Lords around the circle and almost all of them said “two thousand,” which meant there was more commitment of labor than pay. Everyone wanted work during the two months before planting; winter reserves of food and money were the lowest.

“Good,” said Wéranolubu, with a smile. “What other business do we have?”

“There’s food, right?” asked Modosunu.

“Food for you, but I suppose we should leave your village in the safety of its isolation,” replied Kandékwes.

“Lord, we appreciate money like everyone else, but we don’t see the need for these other things. We earn a pretty good supplement to our fields at the iron pit.”

“When will you finish the concrete road from Mélwika to Meddoakwés?” asked Mitrudatu, who was irritated that the concrete stopped short of Morituora in both directions.

“Why don’t you devote your two thousand of labor to that; I’ll talk to the army and Mélwika about the funds,” replied Kandékwés.

“I want to know about the eastern addition and the new school,” exclaimed Andrulu, who was Miller’s brother in law.

Miller rose. “After we feast, we can give a tour; it’s warm enough. The wall around the addition was finished before the snow storms. We dug the ditches for the sewers and the water pipes but we’ll have to wait for the thaw to install them. The new streets will be concrete. We’re reserving half the northeastern addition for an industrial park and half the southeastern addition for the high school and engineering school. The foundations of the engineering school were laid in the warm weather and we’re continuing the work under a big tent with a few iron stoves providing heat.”

“The high school will be in the southeast corner,” continued Chris. “We’ll probably equip it with its own gate so students won’t have to enter the town. We’ll put fields for sports outside.”

“They’ll learn sports?” groused Érwērgu.

“Indeed; they teach discipline and being part of a team.”

There was a pause in the conversation. “If we’re here to talk about the region, I want to know what we can do about improving our farms,” said Rudhékwu. “Up here, the farmers have access to steam engines to plow and harvest. But down on the Dwobrébakwés we have none of those things. We have a dam, at least, and the road along the river and eastward to Mègdhuna has some gravel. That road *must* be improved; I implore you, Lord Kandékwés, to make it a priority of your budget. We also need a generator on our dam and a power line, and a phone. Otherwise a fire department will do no good. But above all, we want better farms.”

Several Dwobrébakwés Lords and headmen uttered “here here.” Chris rose and Weranolubu gave him the floor. “The villages on the Dwobrébakwés are indeed behind, but they do not need to remain that way. Progress comes when money is saved, then invested in something that makes more money, some of which is saved for yet more investment. We have less than half the Lords of your valley present today, so this is not a good time to plan. I suggest you start by renting steam wagons to plow more land, then to help harvest it. Then put some of the surplus into purchasing guano fertilizer—it could double your harvest per agri—or into digging irrigation ditches along the eastern and western sides of the valley to ensure irrigation water. Every harvest will be bigger.”

“But the price of grain will drop,” responded Rudhékwu.

“Not necessarily,” replied Chris. “Because fewer babies are now dying. Here in Mélwika, nineteen children out of twenty live to see their second birthday. As your population grows, it will need more food. And if there is more, people will eat better, especially in the winter when they are cold and weak from illness. And people who are

good with their hands will stop farming to make things, so the remaining farmers will feed them. Your valley needs training so your people can make things.”

“What about a grange?” asked Érwerp.

Chris turned to Kérdu, who was present. He rose. “I will be glad to show anyone how our grange works. It was easier for us to start one than it may be elsewhere because all our farmers were getting land for the first time, none had worked it with the help of machines before, and two thirds of them were from outside this area. It was harder to start a grange for Nénaslua and Béranagres because almost all the farmers already had established habits; it was possible because we were expanding the land under cultivation by a third. Basically, the farmers pay a sixth of their harvest to the grange—that’s on top of the third they pay to their Lord—and the grange uses the payment to buy steam engines and farm equipment, build a garage for them, build granaries to store the extra harvest, and dig irrigation ditches.”

“And what has been the result in Melwika?” asked Rudhékwu.

“Let’s see.” Kérdu glanced nervously at Chris, whose calm demeanor told him it was alright to disclose numbers. “We have two hundred farmers in the grange farming an average of 15 agris. They’re planting two crops per year. Last year the grange’s income was 32,000 dhanay; 160 dhanay from each farmer. That means the farmers earned 2,400 dhanay each, paid the grange 160, taxes to the Réjé, Lord, and city of 800, and 240 in mortgage payments, leaving the farmer with 1,200. I should add the typical farmer is also spending another 100 to buy fertilizer and seeds.”

There was silence. Over a thousand dhanay per year was unimaginable wealth for the average peasant farmer. “And the average farmer earns another three hundred from me or from other part time work,” added John. “That’s why Mélwika has two stores that sell bed sacks and furniture. Everyone has a bedsack stuffed with straw and a blanket, several chairs, lots of pots and dishes, a horse or cow, electric lights, and an iron stove.”

“Can we get a bank loan to set up a grange?” asked Rudhékwu.

“Probably,” replied Yimanu, who was also present.

“I have a different sort of question for Lord Mennea,” exclaimed Kandékwès. “Lord, I know you have been talking about the importance of establishing regional development plans, so I am worried you will help set up plans in other regions.”

“My Lord Mayor, Isurdhuna and Lewéspa already have plans. This area is the third one to develop a plan, not the first. I am sure Tripola will work on one soon as well. They are all very different. Lewéspa has stressed adult and child education and simple manufactures. Isurdhuna’s is a plan by the heir apparent, not by Lord Gnoskéstu, and involves spending ten thousand a year on roads and schools.”

“I see. Do you plan to disclose our plans to them?”

Chris considered. “No, but I think a newspaper article about all three should be written. Let everyone see and consider them.”

“Ah, you’re just keeping the pressure on us to spend money!” growled Kandékwès.

“Lord, be thankful for that, because tax revenues are going up faster than the increase!” replied Chris.

Two days later, students began to arrive for the intensive winter term. The 7 p.m. steam wagon from the western shore via Belledha pulled in on time and Thornton was there to welcome six students from Néfa, two from Sumiuperakwa, and four from Belledha. The latter group he brought home for a late supper after he showed everyone to their dorm rooms.

“Aniu, welcome to Mélwika!” exclaimed Chris, rising from the dining room table, as the four Belledhans entered the house.

“Thank you Lord!” replied Aniu, a very broad smile on his face. “I am so very, very happy to see you, Lord, especially after hearing about your injury.”

“Esto is the greatest healer. I am feeling almost back to normal. Come, introduce your friends to everyone. We don’t know them all.”

“Certainly. This is Ékwiegéndu, my assistant and the other full-time faculty of our Belledha Génadema.” He laid a hand on the shoulder of a dark haired and even a bit dark-skinned young man in his mid twenties, who nodded respectfully. “His focus has been numbers, accounting, architecture, and civil engineering. And here we have someone you haven’t met: Aréjanu, our brightest student, interested in geology especially and the sciences in general.” A man in his late twenties with orange-brown hair typical of the Eryan nodded a greeting. “And finally, someone a few of you have met; Sulubaru, the city’s banker, who taught business classes for us.” Sulubaru, a man of about thirty, nodded a greeting.

“You are all welcome. Let me introduce my family to you.” Chris went around the table and introduced everyone, even the four grandchildren. The four sat opposite Liz, Lua, Amos, and Behruz, with Chris at the head of the table. After a quick explanation of the cutlery and the napkins—things the four had not seen before—while the food was brought out by the cook, they all started to eat. After the usual preliminary smalltalk, Chris leaned over to Aniu and finally asked, “So, how goes the city.”

“Belledha?” He shook his head. “It’s very sad. Progress is and will remain very slow. A third of the city burned and after a month very little has been done. Three hundred army soldiers remain to keep order. Over a thousand residents of the city are living in tents all winter. Another thousand have fled, some permanently I fear. I am sure there are at least a few dozen here in Melwika; our steam wagon was greeted by a Belledhan looking for a cousin who was expected with us, but had not come. Perhaps one building has been hastily rebuilt; the others that burned are still in ruins.”

“Is there no timber? Is the weather too cold?”

“Those are factors, certainly, but Lord Spondanu, our new Lord, has not taken action. Much of the town that burned was owned by his family, including his palace and the génadema adjoining it. But he has no money to rebuild anything; the prison riot occurred because his father had no money to feed the prisoners. They rioted after six days of no food at all. So he sits back in the repaired corner of the palace and demands rent from the people whose homes burned, or demands that they rebuild his buildings so they have a place to live. The army has to defend his palace to prevent a riot by residents. Naturally many have left.”

“And he couldn’t get a loan?” Chris turned to Sulubaru.

The banker shook his head. “The Lord didn’t ask at first, then he demanded a loan without being willing to secure it with property as collateral, so naturally we turned him down. The bank building burned as well; with it, all our paper money went up in smoke. The vault survived and we managed to send the cash out of the city on several different steam wagons. I stayed as long as seemed practical, but the lack of business and his growing demands finally forced me to leave Belledha with all our banking ledgers. Tomorrow I’ll take them to Yimanu for safe keeping.”

“But you hope to reopen the branch?”

“Maybe in the spring it will be feasible. Meanwhile, the merchant families in town have greatly reduced their presence because no one can buy anything. No one has cash.”

“It’s a terrible situation,” agreed Aniu. “I, for one, want to stay here in Melwika for at least a year; I don’t care if I never go back to Belledha. The city will never progress.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say *never*,” disagreed Ékwégéndu. “But it is true that we can’t expect the city and region to develop very much very quickly. For various reasons, it is not very receptive to the new knowledge.”

“How many people can read and write?” asked Liz.

“Maybe thirty, to one degree or another,” replied Aniu. “But many of them are very limited in what they can do.”

“And we have schools in two villages only,” added Ékwęgéndu. “Most villages were uninterested. As you no doubt know, the only improved road is the Royal Road, and we have no electricity or telephones.”

“And I doubt the city will get power and telephone lines soon,” added Amos. “The telephone company is stretched to the limit to complete the line around the southern end of the sea. We’d like a northern line as well to provide a backup, but right now we just can’t afford it. The investment money isn’t there.”

“How many letters did the post office handle?” asked Chris. Aniu thought. “Maybe one or two a day; ten per week.” “That’s all?” Chris was disappointed. “That’s less than the volume of letters just between Tripola and Meddwoglubas; both of those places send twelve to fifteen letters per day to each other.”

“What do you think we can do?” asked Lua. “I saw the city, as you know, and was deeply affected by the damage and the poverty. We would like to help.”

“I have my doubts anyone can help much, right now,” replied Aniu. “The army is the main force that should help right now,” replied Ékwęgéndu. “The soldiers are doing a lot by keeping the city secure and quiet. But if they could bring equipment to plow the main road to the villages north of the gluba, that would help open transportation of food and timber. Both are needed for rebuilding. The road southward onto the old sea bottom should be cleared as well; last year we started cutting timber down there and pulling it up the river. The city needs wood, since much of it was built of wood.”

“There are portable steam-powered sawmills that could be sent,” said Amos. “Mitru has them. But of course he has to make a profit from them, and it sounds like no one can pay right now.”

“Correct. The army should pay to rent the sawmill, since even the Lord can’t pay.”

“Why did this happen?” asked Chris. “I find it shocking that an entire city could fail like this.”

“A combination of things,” replied Sulubaru. “But all of them have one factor behind them: wealth built on forced labor. Half our population is landless peasants sharecropping lands of their local lord or of Spondanu. Some of the local lords are absentee; they visit a few times a year, but otherwise live in Méddoakwés or on estates in Ékwédhuna or Brébestréa. Then there’s the copper and silver mine on the northern side of town, worked by prisoners in chains with minimal equipment. They can’t compete with the new Dwobergone copper mine, which produces copper at a quarter the price. The late Lord Spondu simply could not produce that cheaply, nor could he match the quantity. As steam wagons spread elsewhere, our area will fall farther behind and people will simply leave because of lack of money and opportunity.”

“I can testify to that,” agreed Chris. “We have some Belledhans here.”

“And we don’t even know how rich the mineral reserves are,” added Ékwéggéndu. “Lord Spondu did commission a study, but the army geologists never finished it.”

“The city seems cursed by bad luck,” noted Aniu. “And a lot of secrecy.”

“That makes it worse,” agreed Chris. “I wonder whether Spondanu will agree to a census? I’m sure the Queen will want it surveyed.”

“Plus Penkakwés and Sumiuperakwa,” agreed Amos. “It’d be a good target for a summer medical and geology expedition, just like the western and southern shore last summer.”

“I’d love to get back there,” agreed Lua right away. “I think we can be sure the expedition would not be as successful as last year’s, which visited the most advanced regions of this world.”

“You know, Chris, we should organize a seminar on regional planning,” said Amos. “I had some courses in it, almost twenty years ago. We’ll have some of the most gifted folks from Meddwoglubas here, plus representation from Ora, Néfa, and Tripola. I bet we can get some bureaucrats from Meddoakwés to attend.”

“From Bidhu’s Office of Statistics and Widéstu’s Ministry of Education and Health?” asked Chris.

“Exactly.”

“And maybe even an officer or two from the so-far do-nothing Peace Corps,” added Behruz. “And some of Mélwika city staff as well.”

“This is a good idea,” agreed Chris. “We’ll have to work hard to implement it in such a short time, though.”

“Well, I’m not interested in that,” said Aniu. “I’m afraid I’ve lost hope.”

“I haven’t,” responded Ékwégéndu. “Count me in.”

“The geology is exactly what I want to do,” added Aréjanu.

“It would support the work of the bank, too,” added Sulubéru. “I suggest you invite Yimanu to send someone.”

“Good idea.” Chris pulled out a pencil. “Let’s write this idea down, then finish supper!”

Day by day, Soru found his leg growing stronger. Eight days after arriving at Mélwika Hospital, he put his weight on the cast, very carefully, and found he could indeed walk on the leg with relatively little pain. That freed him from the crutches, much to his relief. The hospital staff celebrated by moving him to an empty room on the second floor where some of them resided; he was no longer a patient, he was temporary staff.

He was determined to make himself useful. Even emptying bedpans and cleaning up vomit was alright; it meant a warm room, three real meals every day, and above all the company of very interesting people. He had never imagined such an environment: a place where people served others and constantly asked each other interesting questions. Aréje and another nurse continued to give him informal classes on reading, and then he started attending a literacy class across the street at the old génadéma building, which was now gradually becoming the Medical School, but which still hosted adult literacy classes at night. The classes were filled by young men similar to him, escaping a life far away, often guarded in talking about their old lives, determined to get ahead, dreaming of riches. The Mélwika dream, it was called: he was bitten by it too. He went to bed at night so excited that he could barely sleep, and then often awakened when his old life intruded in the form of nightmares: of beatings at Belledha Prison, of prisoners raping prisoners, of

pervasive hunger and open wounds from excessive labor. He often wondered what the doctors and nurses had thought of the numerous scars on his back from whippings. They had never asked; a lot of young men had such scars.

Then one night, two weeks after arrival in town, he returned to the hospital after class and headed for the hospital's first floor to do clean-up. He had been out three hours; there were certain to be messes to clean up and young male patients wanting a man to take them to the bathroom or help them with something. He had become a virtual male nurse for some; they were not used to the idea of strange women taking care of them, though they often loved it.

He heard a quiet conversation coming from the room of Arktanu, a nearly toothless man about sixty whose grandson was a farmer in the Grange. He had been admitted that afternoon for food poisoning, a common hazard in late winter when supplies were running low and getting old. Soru stepped in to take a look and was startled when Arktanu and Chris Mennea looked up at him.

“Ah—” he said, startled, terrified but not wanting to show it, wondering whether he should start to run, though he wouldn’t get far with a cast on his leg.

“That’s alright, you didn’t disturb us,” said Mennea. “I know this Honored and wished to visit him.”

“Oh—”

“You look white, Soru, do you believe in ghosts?” said Arktanu, chuckling.
“Don’t worry, my bed pan’s clean.”

“Oh, you’re the assistant Lua told me about,” said Chris, smiling. He was tempted to rise and offer both hands to the young man, but something told him not to. “You’ve been immensely helpful here, and we are pleased to be able to help you with your leg as well.”

“He has been really helpful,” confirmed Arktanu. “He helped me feel at home here. It’s a strange place, Lord Mennea, with strange rules.”

“But Honored Aktanu, those rules helped to make you well,” replied Chris, returning his focus to the man who was about his age.

“I suppose. I never would have come if my grandson hadn’t insisted, and I think I would have survived this one. I’ve survived plenty of other sicknesses, my Lord.”

“But you never know which one will take you.”

“The one Esto chooses, Lord.”

“Perhaps, but we can also make that choice happen much later in life, Honored.”

“I . . . I’m sorry for interrupting,” exclaimed Soru, interrupting again, then he retreated from the room. He stood in the hall, looking at his shaking hands. Lord Mennea got a good look at him that time. Apparently he didn’t recognize him as the horseman with the long sword. He breathed a sigh of relief and wondered whether the Lord might suddenly recognize him. At least Dr. Lua had put in a good word. That might help.

He was still standing outside the door like a fool when Lord Mennea came out. “Oh, you’re here? Did the nurse tell you to come here? Is she still on the telephone?”

“Ah, indeed Lord, she is on the phone conferring with Dr. Stauréstu about a patient in the emergency room. She didn’t want to disturb Dr. Lua at home.”

“We appreciate that, but if the case is serious, she should call. I guess she knows that.” He lowered his tone almost to a whisper. “Can you come around with me and introduce me to the other patients? I happen to know Arktanu; we’ve talked a few times. Dr. Lua told me at supper he was ill, so I came over to see him. But I am the Lord of everyone else here; I must stop in and say hello to them, and wish them well.”

“Oh, ah, of course, Lord.” Soru was very nervous and was sure he looked nervous. He pointed to the first door and led Lord Mennea inside. But he gradually warmed up as he saw the Lord clearly did not remember him. He was amazed by the Lord’s concern for others, even reciting a hymn—of some strange sort he had never heard before—with one patient. He spent almost an hour with the sixteen patients staying overnight in the hospital.

“Thank you, Soru,” he said at the end. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a silver dhanay. “This is for your trouble, and a little reward for your service here. I can see you care for these patients. We really appreciate your service to them.”

“Thank you, Lord,” and Soru bowed his head in shame, almost feeling like he should cry. Chris was surprised by his reaction, but did not know what to say, so he turned and headed for his coat, so he could walk home.

[20 Feb. 2006; reread and edited 5/20/13, 7/28/17]

Spring Term

The next evening, Amos and Thornton waited in Fortress Square to greet a steam wagon from the southern and western shores. On board were four mechanics and engineers from Meddwoglubas, two from Tripola, and five from Ora. There was obvious tension between the Meddwoglubans and Orans and hesitation to speak in front of each other. Once the groups separated—Thornton guiding the Meddwoglubans and Tripolans (an uncomfortable grouping as well, but less so), Amos the Orans—they quickly complained about the presence of the others. It was as the Menneas had expected: the various regions had intense rivalries where use of the new knowledge was concerned. John and Yimu Miller had equally strong reservations about the Orans and Meddwoglubans and had expressed it often. All this was layered on top of preexisting regional prejudices: the Orans tended to view themselves as the true center of Eryan civilization, as theirs was the richest and possibly still the largest city and the world's natural capital; the region of Meddoakwés had the pride of being the capital and knowing what was going on; Meddwoglubans had a sense of being the talented underdogs, but were viewed by the others as country hicks; Tripolans had pride in their region's distinctive strengths, for they were strong in traditional crafts, but otherwise felt left out and undervalued. In addition, one Néfan mechanic and one very bright, capable young man from Sullendha in the Penkakwés attended; the former had the comfort of knowing he came from a sophisticated and urbane place, with lots of resources; the latter was viewed by everyone

as a Tutane, almost as bad as a Sumi. They also had one mechanic each from Meddoakwés and Morituora.

Chris and Amos conferred about the problem all morning to refine the solution they had crafted, dragged in Yimu, John, and Behruz to get their usually cool assent, then in late afternoon, before the inaugural dinner of the five-week late winter term, they called the entire engineering class together. They invited Lord Miller and Mitrané, eldest daughter of Lord Estodhéru of Meddwoglusbas, to attend; the latter was in town to take classes. General Pérku also attended.

They met in the large classroom of the old génadéma building. It was a big space, but with Yimu's six engineers, Amos's three electrical engineers, and the guests, almost thirty people were present. People sat in regional groups or as isolated individuals, wondering how they could all work together.

“Let me run through a few very simple logistical matters first,” said Amos. “We still don't have a new engineering building; it won't be finished until early summer. One of the tasks we will consider together is refining the final design of the building's interior based on the needs that emerge from this class. Meanwhile, we will use the classrooms here and the labs across the street in our existing engineering building. We will also have access to lathes and other heavy equipment at the Foundry. We'll be meeting all afternoon, five days a week; that way we can get in a lot of time together in five short weeks, the equivalent of two courses. If anyone wants to take other classes, they will have to do so in the mornings and evenings. It will not be possible to take geology or

other science classes, as they meet afternoons. Everyone here, I understand, can read and write; that's essential.

“A major problem we face is working together as a team, not many separate, rival groups. The way we propose to do this is to focus on specific mechanical projects. We will tackle each project as a group consisting of the entire class or part of a class; in the latter case, people will choose which project to work on, but we will strongly encourage interregional membership. Each project will have a team leader and will result in something that actually works, preferably well, and can be sold. At the end of the project we will discuss the result and award the project to a particular place. If the class is unable to decide who will get the project, then the Board of Directors of the School of Engineering will decide. That board consists of Lords Miller and Mennea, Behruz, Yimu, and myself.” He paused to let everyone digest the information.

“The award of the project will also involve three rules. First: the award is good for one year, and in that time production of the thing for sale should begin. If substantial progress toward production has been made in a year, the award can be extended another year; but if, after two years, nothing has been sold, the School of Engineering can award production to another place or group.

“Second, once production of something starts, whoever makes it has an exclusive right to it for ten years. During that time, the other participants in the programs of the School of Engineering will respect that right, although they will have the right to produce a variant if they come up with a better design. Therefore it will behoove the producer of a

product to ask the School of Engineering to help them refine the design, because then they will be awarded the rights to the refinement and a ten-year monopoly on it as well.

“Third, for any design developed here and awarded for production, we want five percent of the sales price to come back to the School of Engineering during the ten year period. This will give the school a financial basis for maintaining and improving its labs and work areas, paying its faculty and staff, and providing services to everyone. It is only fair that we get something for the effort.

“We hope that the result of these rules will be as follows: the generation of a fair and reliable profit, which encourages innovation; wide sharing of information about what makes something work, which encourages further improvement and innovation; and creation of a central, neutral facility for further research and collaboration. Of course, everyone is free to create their own private facility to improve things, or to improve things themselves; but then we can’t guarantee a right to produce that item. Comments?”

At first there was silence; stunned silence on the part of some. John Miller, who had been very hesitant, said “This is essentially the creation of a *paténti*.” He converted the English word into an Eryan term.

Amos nodded. “Correct. On Earth, when someone invents something, they can turn to the government and apply for a *paténti*. I suppose here one would say *wodi*.” Amos used the word for giving permission, which as a noun was used as “license.” “This is a piece of paper that gives them the exclusive right to that thing for a period of time. To get a *paténti* they must submit a complete design and explanation of the item and how it works, and the *paténti* is a public document; anyone can read it. We should produce a

request to the Consultative Assembly to create *paténti* law at their meeting this spring, and ask them to recognize the *paténtis* we have already created.”

There was long silence again. Then Yimu Kérékwès, brother of Lord Mitru of Ora and head of the Ora Ironworks—it was ironic that the two iron works both were directed by men named Yimu—spoke up. “Amos, we came here to learn how to make new products for production in Ora. We didn’t come here to help others compete against us or to help little operations become big.”

Amos pointed to the crowd around them. “Honored, here we are. This is the reality. My family is dedicated to serving everyone. If you want our knowledge, I’ve told you what rules we propose to follow. It is a question of fairness.”

“Honored, we don’t like the situation either,” added John Miller. “But we accept that other places will learn how to do metal working, and that we can not do everything. There are many simple iron products we have wanted to produce for years, but we haven’t found the time to produce them. I’m willing to share them with others.”

“And we are anxious to develop new products,” added Lédu (“freeman”), Tripola’s chief mechanic.

“There are many you can develop from wood and ivory,” replied Sulu, Ora’s chief civil engineer.

“And even more with steel,” replied Lédu, with equal speed.
“What about existing items; how will we keep others from copying them?”
exclaimed Yimu Kérékwès.

“We’re not here to teach that,” replied Amos. “Let’s see whether the projects that people want to pursue overlap.”

“And you’ll be willing to come to Ora again to assist us with our private projects?” asked Mitrubbaru, head of the génadëma there.

“Yes, occasionally, just as I help the Miller family privately with their projects, and have helped Mæddwoglubas with theirs. That will continue. But I won’t have a lot of time for traveling after the School of Engineering opens.”

Mitrubbaru nodded, satisfied, and looked at his Uncle Yimu, who seemed willing to remain silent in his criticism.

“I suggest everyone telephone their Lord in the next few hours and explain the rules to them,” said Chris. “This is a rather sudden development of a policy, but it is necessary because of the discomfort and rivalry among all of you. We have to create a neutral space where everyone can work together; it’s for your own individual good, too.”

“We had hoped to work on improvements to our steam wagons,” complained Yimu Kérékwës.

“You have the perfect opportunity. The Oran engineers probably can dissect and spot the problems of Mælwika engines better than anyone else, and vice versa. If both parties are willing to take a critical look at each other’s products, maybe both could be improved,” suggested Amos. Several shifted about in their chairs; neither group liked that idea.

“Let’s consider what projects we want to tackle,” suggested Chris. “I wonder whether the friends at Meddwoglubas have ideas?”

“We do,” replied Dontanu, Meddwoglugbas’ chief engineer. “Perhaps I should start by showing everyone our latest product.” He reached down and picked up a long canvas bag on the floor. He stepped forward, stood it up on the table in front, and removed the canvas to reveal a small grandfather clock. Everyone oohed. Dontanu pulled up the counterweights and pushed on the pendulum to make it swing. Then he pushed the hands of the clock toward the hour position, slowly. When they reached 4 p.m. position, the clock struck four times.

Several people applauded. Chris smiled broadly and proudly. The two Yimus of Melwika and Ora had an ambiguous reaction, no doubt wishing something so sophisticated could have been made by them.

“We’ve only built two of them,” began Dontanu. “They keep very good time; based on the eclipse, they generally gain or lose only a few minutes a day. They take a lot of time to make and will cost fifty dhanay to purchase. We think there is need for one or two hundred of them. We hope to make an even smaller, cheaper model in a year or two; we’d like to make something that can be sold for ten dhanay.”

“And that is your project?” asked Mitrubbaru, puzzled.

“No, this is finished. We’ll start making six a month in a few months. It is a demonstration of what we can do, and a gift to the Melwika Génadëma for all they have done for us.” He paused to pick up the clock and carry it to Chris, who gratefully accepted it and placed it on a side table in the room. Then Dontanu returned to the front. “Our project is a sewing machine. Two of us have been working on it for a year, on and off. It’s quite complex and we still don’t have one that works reliably.”

“A machine that sews?” said Sulu, puzzled.

“Yes, it actually sews for you, and quite fast if it works right. We’ve brought our partially functioning model.”

“That sounds like a great project,” said Amos. “And since you’ve already made progress on it, I think we can all easily agree that you should have the *paténti* on it. What else?”

“We want something simple, but widely useful,” said Stéléku (“Possessor of Stallions”), the mechanic from Sullendha in the Penkakwés region.

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said Amos. “And I have suggestions for both you and Lédu. For Sullendha, something that can be made out of many materials, but simple sheet steel will work best: an ice box. This is like a chest or box, but it stands on legs. It has a door that swings to the side. There is a place for a large block of ice on top and a pipe to lead melt water to a reservoir on the bottom. In between is a large area with shelves where food can be placed. The ice keeps the food cold enough so that it doesn’t spoil. Ice is now easy to obtain and is not very expensive; the ice from Snékhpéla is clean, so the melt water can be drunk safely. If such a box can be made and sold for a few dhanay, I think you can sell thousands of them.”

“That doesn’t sound like something we would use in Sullendha,” Stéléku objected.

“Maybe not now, but in a few years you will.”

“What did you want to suggest to us?” asked Lédu.

“Two closely related things. First, a hand pump for pumping water up a long pipe; second, a simple windmill for running the pump. If they can be made cheaply you will sell thousands over a decade.”

“And our grange will buy some right away,” added Chris. “Because we are about to extend our irrigation over a large, rolling area of land this spring. Irrigation ditches can’t reach all of it. But if a windmill pumps water from an irrigation ditch to a water storage reservoir on top of a hill, it will be able to irrigate areas that are above the ditches.”

“There are many areas in the lower Arjakwés that will buy them,” agreed Lédu. “This is a good project.”

“Many houses will want the hand pump, too,” added Amos. “It requires a well under the house. Many new houses will be built that way. Then one can pump water up right where one needs it, whenever one needs it. No walking a dekent to a well or spring any more. It will save much time.”

“What else?” asked Sérwéru, one of Ora’s engineers. “We have three projects that will keep some of us busy for a few weeks,” replied Amos. “Let’s start with them because they’re simple, then move to more complex projects for Mélwika and Ora.”

“I’ll tell you what I’d like to see our engineers tackle,” said John, leaning forward in his chair. “A steam powered saw for cutting down trees.”

Amos was startled by the idea, but before he spoke up, Sulu exclaimed, “Now that’s something we need! My Lord, you have coal; we don’t, but we have forests that must be cut before the sea drowns them!”

“We dig our coal with an Ora steam shovel; you can cut your trees with a Mélwika saw.”

“This would complement our line of attachments better,” pointed out Yimu Kérékwès.

“Father, I’d rather focus on a hydraulic system,” said Yimu Miller, looking at his father.

John shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

“Then we’ll try the saw!” concluded Sulu.

Amos looked at John, who seemed indifferent, and he wondered why the man had raised the matter. “Okay, we’ll give it a try,” said Amos. “I’m not sure a steam powered saw can be mobile enough to cut trees; we’ll have to consider that problem first. Since Mélwika is already producing pumps, a hydraulic system is a good project for them.”

They had a very solemn inaugural dinner that evening. The next morning two hundred resident students—their largest student body ever—headed to class; during the intense early spring term they were teaching Accounting 2, Advanced Engineering Seminar, Agriculture 2, Biology 2, Calculus 1, Child Education 1, English Translation 1, Eryan Literature 3, General Science 2, Geology 1, Human Physiology 2, Nursing Practicum 3, Organic Chemistry, Physician Practicum 3, Regional Planning 1, Sedimentology, and a

half dozen tutorials the more advanced students had designed for themselves. The matriculated students took an average of two courses each, since each met six hours a week. Nonmatriculated students—another hundred from Melwika and vicinity—took Reading 1 and 2, Basic Math, Basic Science, Hymns of Widumaj, Introduction to Business, and Agricultural Science 1. Many of the latter courses met at night. Occasionally the non-matriculated were allowed into the more advanced courses, and some of the matriculated students took the evening classes, as they were very useful for teachers in one-room school houses, and thirty-five of their matriculated students were of that sort. Another eighty of each kind of student took classes at the Gésélékwès Maj Génadëma in Meddoakwés as well, and some of the latter's courses—especially those in Philosophy, Ethics, Eryan Literature, and Biology—warranted a steam wagon ride to the capital, since students were free to circulate between the two génadëmas.

After the first meeting of the regional planning course, Chris came home quite tired. “Don’t let this course wear you out, dear,” said Liz, concerned about how tired he looked. “You still haven’t completely recovered from the attack.”

“I know, but don’t worry. I’m most of the way there. I just need a cup of tea.” He flopped down on the couch near the dinner table. “Where’s mom?”

“Taking a nap; it’s almost 4, after all. I’ll get us some tea.” Liz walked over to the stove, which had just been relocated in part of what used to be a rover garage, and poured two cups from the always-ready pot. They sat together on the couch and held hands. “How was class?”

He sipped and thought. “It’s going to be quite good, once we get past some problems. We need to settle on some class projects, probably involving creation of some mock plans, but there’s resistance to releasing information on any particular region and planning for it. Students are willing to make plans for their own regions, but don’t want to share personal information, and would rather not even share the plans if they can avoid it. So I think I’ll have to create a mythical region, complete with imaginary census and tax data.”

“That’ll take a while.”

“A few hours. It doesn’t have to be big. How was your afternoon?”

“The usual. The widows are knitting a lot of sweaters; we worked on them. We need additional space.”

“As soon as the new engineering building opens, Amos will be out and you can have the entire second floor. We’ll move literacy and other adult education classes to the top floor to free up the old génadéma building for more medical school use, until the widows need the top floor as well anyway!”

“That’ll be a while.” She paused. They could hear banging across the courtyard. “The workers have really ripped the heart of Lébé and Thornton’s place and started on the new walls. I stuck my head in a little while ago. The plaster work looks quite good.”

“Good. When will they finish?”

“Two more weeks, then they’ll redo May and Amos’s place. I was out walking this morning and saw some really attractive chairs at Megdentéstu’s store. Do you have time to go with me and take a look? I think we might want to get them.”

“Sure, after finishing the tea. I hesitate to go only because I don’t want Megdentéstu to feel pressure by my presence to bargain down his sales price.”

“I know. These are really nicely made, by the way, and very uniform in appearance.”

“Impressive.” Chris looked around. “Behruz is usually here.”

“Yes, but he’s at the chemistry lab. Some of the various objects proposed for Amos’s class require plastics, so he’s looking into preparing them.”

Just then the front door opened and someone wearing boots could be heard coming toward the courtyard. A moment Thornton appeared.

“Hey,” he said.

“How was geo class; or was that in the morning?”

“Morning. The geo class went well. I’ve got one student who knows so little, he’ll have trouble finishing the course. Otherwise, everyone can read and write quite well; I was impressed! Dad, this is the best student body we’ve ever had.”

“You’re right, it really stands out. They’ve had a lot more training than our earlier cohorts of students and make fewer excuses about not performing. I think they’re more confident, too. I have to sit in on some of the courses our Eryan faculty are teaching. I get the impression they’re doing a pretty good job. That reminds me, you’ve only got two courses left to graduate this summer.”

“I know, it’s pretty exciting. It’s always strange teaching a course—like stratigraphy—and ‘taking’ it at the same time.”

Chris chuckled. “At least you learn it well!”

“True. Speaking of stratigraphy; I took Dwosunu and Aréjanu on a quick drive through Ménwika this afternoon. We were looking for outcrops to plan a new field trip. We drove along the future irrigation ditch all the way to its end at the southeast corner of the claim. When we got to Roundtop, we got out and explored on foot in order to study the rocks in detail; there are a lot of outcrops there. We found some gentle folds—perfect for a quick stratigraphy field trip—but we also found an old Sumi ruin. We mentioned it to a hunter we saw on the way back here and he said yes, he and his friends call it ‘Penkwayukwa.’”

“Five Windows?”

“Yes, there’s a terrace on the west side of Roundtop that was the foundation of the villa and it has five vaulted tunnels underneath; five arched openings, so ‘Five Windows.’”

“Hum.” Chris was impressed. “Hey, let’s drive down, I’d like to see.”

“Okay!” Thornton looked around. “And Jalalu’s still next door?”

“Yes, with cousins.”

“But you said you’d go with me!” exclaimed Liz, her mouth open.

“We can run over to Megdentéstu’s later. Dhoru and I don’t have much time before the eclipse.” He downed the rest of his tea and stood up. Thornton smiled; he was happy to have a little adventure with his dad.

“Say, can we bring Marku along? He was in the science building earlier.”

“Sure, if we can find him.” Chris had rather liked the idea of a father-son trip, but Marku was fascinated by archeology; throughout the fall he had created two sequential

archaeology seminars with May and had even managed a survey of the ruins on the hill above Morituora before the first snows. This ruin would be much closer and on Mennea land; much easier to do serious archaeology on.

Chris put his coat back on and they hurried out. They walked across town. Chris managed to keep short the two unavoidable social stops on the street; Thornton ran ahead to find Marku, which took a little while; they met at the rover, parked in a new garage attached to the dorm on the new campus, and headed off. Thornton drove eastward along the Péskakwés Road through fallow fields, each marked with a number so the Grange could find it with its machines, now clear of melted snow except for little bits in hollows and shadowed spots. Near the gluba, a new irrigation ditch had been dug that ran southward; he turned onto the dirt road that followed it. The ditch had required considerable excavation to a depth of three meters in order to cross a high area, then it snaked along the irregular ground, staying as high as it could in order to hug the eastern boundary of Ménwika township. They soon passed the strip of farmland about a kilometer and a half wide and reached brushland; parts of it had been cleared for farmland and other plots were being cleared as they drove along the road. In three kilometers they came to Roundtop, the highest hill in the township; a big, fairly flat mound that rose only fifteen meters above the canal. The canal ran east of it in another deep cut; Thornton turned the rover west and headed up the gentle slope.

“It should be easy enough to put a water cistern on top,” observed Chris, as Thornton slowly drove them around bushes and ancient, withered olive trees. “We’ll set up a couple windmills by the irrigation ditch and a pipeline to the top.”

“Yes, the top is pretty flat and there’s bedrock close to the surface. We’ll need to haul in rock; the hill was picked pretty clean to build the villa.”

“Where is it?”

“On the northwestern slope; Roundtop’s steeper on that side. The villa terrace was cut into the hill about a third of the way down.”

“I can’t wait to see,” said Marku, leaning forward.

They reached the top and Thornton slowly drove them down the other side while Marku craned his head forward so he could look out of the windshield from the back seat. They could see two or three collapsed structures. One had a line of four columns marking a grand entrance facing west; it was obviously the main house. The walls still stood about chest high, with the rest of the walls and the roofing tiles in heaps over the ruin.

Thornton parked on the side; he didn’t want to drive the rover over the old vaults under the terrace, lest they collapse. They got out and walked to the grand entrance.

“Wow, very impressive columns!” said Marku. “This was the home of a wealthy Lord.” He passed them, Thornton and Chris following, and they climbed over a heap of debris that represented an old front wall. After passing a series of ruined walls that framed the entrance area, they stepped into an old hall about ten meters wide and twenty long.

Marku pointed to a stone bench along both walls. “That’s a feature in big Sumi houses on Sumilara even today; they’re covered by cushions and pillows.”

“Then this hall could have sat eighty people easily,” observed Chris. He looked down at the bricks and leaves underfoot. He reached down and began to move debris until he got to the floor. It only took a minute to expose it. “Hey; a mosaic!”

“Really?” Marku hurried over; Chris had exposed a small area of the floor, but it was enough to show a hand reaching toward a star. “Wow!”

“This was a rich villa, then,” said Thornton.

They walked across the old hall and into the ruins of a series of smaller public rooms. Then they crossed a breezeway and kitchen and into the private quarters; lots of bedroom-sized rooms, now reduced to heaps of brick and stone. “How many rooms?” asked Thornton.

“There are maybe sixteen right here,” replied Chris. He pointed to another building across an old courtyard. “And it’s about the same size.”

They crossed the old concrete and stone courtyard, part of which was set half a meter lower; an old pool. Marku stopped to point out to them a little pool about a meter square and deep with a lip along the edge around it. “When they drained the main pool for cleaning, they put the goldfish in here,” he explained. “It had a cover over it, see?”

Thornton chuckled. “How did you know?”

“They have these at Lilalara, too, and when I described one to a Sumi merchant he explained it.”

“You’re going to have to go to Anartu at some point,” said Chris.

“Oh, I’d *love* to,” replied Marku.

They explored the other building quickly as well; the cheaper construction told them it was servants’ quarters. A smaller building between the two and enclosing the third side of the courtyard was fancy; probably a guest area. Even it had a dozen rooms and a small central space for entertainment.

“So, what do we have,” said Chris. “Room for about twenty servants and workers; a pretty big villa.”

Thornton pointed to ruined cottages west and south of the terrace. “And room for a couple dozen families over there; a village of peasants or quarters for a lot of slaves.”

They wandered back to the housing of the extended family. One back wall still stood three meters high; it was thick stone with remains of painted plaster stuck to it. The room was larger than the others; originally it was probably pretty grand. Chris kicked a heap of bricks and it toppled, revealing a bone underneath. Startled, he pulled back a few more bricks and uncovered part of a skeleton. “Whoa!” he said, startled.

“Oh!” said Thornton, looking on. “So, we’re not alone.”

“And look at the arm bone here!” added Marku, pointing to a long groove. “This guy was cut by a sword before he died!”

“It looks like a sword wound to me,” agreed Chris. “I guess this villa was not abandoned; it was attacked.”

“Tutanes,” concluded Marku. “Then as now.” He looked around. “Let’s go back to the rover.”

Thornton pointed up at the sun. “The eclipse starts in a few minutes anyway.”

The three of them all hurried back to the rover, and climbed in with some visible relief. The skeleton had shaken all of them up. Thornton looked at his father, then started the engine and turned the rover to head back up hill.

“Thornton, do you mind if I drop out of your stratigraphy course?” asked Marku. “To do this instead? Not at all.”

“We’ll talk to May tonight and put together a team to supervise the course,” said Chris. “Find a couple other students to work with you; to work under you, Marku, because you will have to be the instructor. You know more about archaeology than May does, thanks to your two courses.”

“I’ve read a lot,” agreed Marku. “We’ve even started translating some texts from English, so we can start a real archaeology course.”

“We’ll have to think about your safety out here,” added Chris. “It won’t be so serious once all this land is settled and cleared for farming, as it will be by early summer. But right now if some robbers came along, there wouldn’t be anyone around to see them.”

“So, should I plan to excavate the villa, then?”

“No, survey it first,” replied Chris. “Give May and me a report. Maybe we want to make this an open air museum; maybe we want to do some restoration eventually; maybe we want to level the site and move the good stuff to a museum on campus. Figure that out.”

“Okay!” said Marku, excited. “We should make sure the land hasn’t been assigned.”

“If it has, we’ll buy it back. The villa and the area around it won’t be disturbed,” pledged Chris.

The amount of light outside suddenly dropped as the sun passed behind Skanda, so Thornton turned on the headlights. Under the rosy ring of light from Skanda’s atmosphere and the thousands of stars that came out when sun and Skanda were both

dark, they drove back to town in silence. After dropping off Marku, Thornton drove slowly to their house—the streets were crowded at that hour—and parked the rover in the courtyard. Thanks to new plans by the electric company, the surge of power consumption during the eclipse was now handled much better; not only were all the streetlights on, but the lights inside the house were all glowing as well.

Liz was waiting; Agné was busy cooking supper and Mary was up from her nap. Lébé was back from her class and had brought the extended family's kids home, so they were playing in the big dining area. Thornton joined them while Liz and Chris donned their coats to walk to Megdentéstu's furniture store near Temple Square. She quickly found the livingroom chairs she had been looking at—very handsome, wide wooden chairs with nice carving and comfortably uphoistered seats—only fifteen dhanay each, though Chris gently bargained Megdentéstu down to twelve. Chris paid for them and promised to send over someone with the rover the pick them up.

“You’re right, those are nice chairs,” he said to Liz in English as they stepped outside. “They’ll look nice in the parlor.”

“I’d like to buy two for May and Amos’s parlor, too,” said Liz. “Later, for Thornton and Lébé as well. Behruz and Lua have some nice chairs upstairs already.”

“Alright. The quality of furniture has really improved in the last year or two.”

“Megdentéstu has an electric motor to turn a wood lathe, right?”

“Yes, I think so, so he can prepare wooden furniture much faster than it was ever possible before.”

As they left the store, the sun came back out from behind Skanda after eighty minutes of eclipse. The factory's day shift had let out; two hundred workers were walking home. Others had just been dropped off by steam wagons from Méddoakwés, and some were shopping before getting on steam wagons heading west to the capital and the villages in between. Temple Square and the road leading northward to the Mennea home were thronged by pedestrians and shoppers; it was the busiest time of the day. Everyone slowed to greet their Lord, so Chris and Liz were busy saying hello.

They were home only ten minutes before there came a knock on the door. Korudé, their maid and part time nanny, who was helping with supper, went to the door. A moment later she brought Sarébējnu, chief priest at the city's temple, into the dining room.

Chris smiled. "Honored priest, thank you for the visit! We are most pleased to see you! I hope all is well with you and your family."

"Indeed, my Lord. Okwané is recovering from childbirth very well, thanks to Dr. Lua's assistance, and Sarébējnanu's growing very fast. He won't let us sleep, of course. He will have a strong voice for chanting the hymns. We are most grateful for the gifts you gave us."

"We were honored, and I now hear Lukolubu's wife is with child as well. Our priests will both have established lines, in a few months!" He gestured to two chairs. "Let us sit. Korudé will bring us tea."

They sat and she brought them steaming cups. "Indeed, Lord. We are both happy and grateful to Esto. How is your family? How is the génadema?"

“Very well, both. The génadëma has never been stronger; this is the best term we will have ever held. We have very capable students and they are going deeper and deeper into their subjects of study. It’s a shame we don’t have more money to support their education!” He added that because a visit from Sarébëjnu usually included a request for money. Most of their students were on financial assistance; the average reward was five dhanay per week, or half of room, board, and tuition. The three thousand dhanay grant for financial aid from the Consultative Assembly covered only ten percent of the shortfall.

“I’m sure. No doubt you will be relieved to know I am not here to ask for more money for the temple. The temple is doing fine; sacrifices lately have been pretty strong, and with *ejnaménu* coming up we expect to have a surplus for our bank account, which we’ll use next winter to help the hungry and homeless. They have been a bigger burden than we expected; Mélwika is getting two or three new families per week, Lord, and that will increase sharply after the month of sacrifice ends.”

“Fortunately, that’s when we’ll need labor to finish the irrigation ditches,” replied Chris. “Anyone who is willing to use a shovel will be able to earn the money they need for food and farm tools.”

“How much land are you opening for agriculture, Lord?”

“All of it, which is three times the amount already open. In the fall we finished the ditch across the eastern side of the township, which is the uphill side, and we’ve started digging four irrigation ditches westward across the township to the land of Nénaslua and Béranagrés. We’ve even started plans for windmills and water cisterns on four hills that

otherwise would be above the irrigation ditches. We will be able to irrigate all 124 square dekent—10,000 agris—of land. We've already assigned a quarter of the new land to one hundred farmers, and they've been clearing their land all winter, weather permitting."

"I've seen the smoke from the brush fires. I gather the grange has three more steam wagons, too."

"Yes, they've spent a lot of money. They're ready for the heavy work preparing the land that will start in a few weeks."

"Now I see why we're getting so many families every week; many are arriving for land. And the payments haven't decreased?"

"Correct, the city and I get a tax of a ninth of their harvest, the Réjé gets two ninths, a twelfth goes to the grange, and a twelfth goes to me to purchase the land from me, for a total of half their crop."

"I ask because I want to start some kind of charity for the temple here. Yesterday Logolubu and I went to Meddoakwés to confer with Weranodatu and the other priests at the temple there. They plan to start an orphanage; instead of letting the babies who are left at the temple die, they can be saved and raised as an act of charity. The number of babies being left has dropped by half in the last year but there is still about one per week who is abandoned. All the temples will be asked to expand their charities, and they're all being asked to organize widows to help them."

"This is an excellent plan! It proves the value and importance of the temples to the people," said Chris. "What charity do you want to try here?"

“We don’t know. Melwika doesn’t have orphans and the Lords already provide many services and some assistance. One possibility is a place where people can stay for a few weeks for free, until they can find a house and obtain land. But that will require more space than we currently have.”

“A shelter,” said Liz, who was overhearing the conversation. “Maybe two big rooms with sleeping pads on the floor, one for women and children and one for men.”

Sarébjnu was startled by her comment; he had forgotten she was even in the room. He looked at Chris. “Actually we don’t have homeless women in town, only men.”

“Except occasionally when a man divorces a wife?”

The priest turned to her. “You are right, my Lady, sometimes that happens. Then we let the woman sleep on the edge of the sanctuary itself, where the sacred flame protects her but where she can’t defile the sacred space.”

“Thank you for that, honored priest,” said Liz, trying to sound appreciative.

“Honored priest, if a woman ever comes to you seeking safety, please refer her to this house,” added Chris. “We will extend a welcome to her.”

“Very well, my Lord.” He looked around at Liz and Mary. “Lord, the women of this household are remarkably talkative.”

“Indeed. Do you know why? Because there aren’t enough of us. I had one son and two daughters, not three sons, and I need all of them to be strong and capable. Where would all of us be without Dr. Lua?”

“She is a great healer and a marvelously sympathetic person,” agreed Sarébejnu. “But returning to our discussion, perhaps a shelter for newly arrived men would be useful in Melwika. What do you think, Lord?”

Chris considered a moment, then nodded. “It would be useful. We could donate a piece of land for it near the new east gate, where there will always be a contingent of soldiers. I am sure we can get pipes, iron stoves, and electricity donated as well. It will need a bath for them; that’s something this city hasn’t enough of.”

“Indeed, the génadëma’s bathing facilities are always crowded.” “We plan to build more; or maybe we’ll ask the city to build a large public bath, because it is needed. I am sure the city will contribute toward this project, so you should ask.”

“I will, of course, but I would hope the two gedhemu Lords will show their piety to Esto and their generosity as well.”

“I’m sure we will,” replied Chris, ignoring the pointed “gedhému” reference. “We’ll have to see how expensive this will be. You will need to hire men or priests to run it as well. I can probably contribute several thousand dhanay.”

Just then the clock at the foundry struck 6:30. That was usually the sign for the cooks to start carrying food to the table. “Honored priest, will you stay for dinner?”

“You are too generous, Lord.” He was using complicated Eryan etiquette, which called for pretending you didn’t want to or couldn’t, and expected your host to beg.

“I beseech you, honored priest, to bless my family with your presence,” insisted Chris.

“Very well, but it is my honor, not yours. You have a remarkable family.”

They rose and walked to the table, Chris pointed to the place of honor between him and Liz, sat the priest down, and explained the fork and napkin. The others began to arrive from various parts of the house, greeted Sarébjnu, and took their places as well; there was always extra space on either side of Chris for guests. Agné and Korudé began to bring out supper: a huge stew of meat, fresh vegetables from Endraidha, and rice, with bread. One of the last to arrive was Lua, and she was accompanied by a nervous looking Soru.

“I apologize I’m late, but I just had an important telephone call,” she said. “It’s just as well, I was able to invite Soru to come along.”

“Greetings, Soru,” said Chris. “You are welcome in my house and at my table.”

“Thank you, Lord,” he said, with a bit of quaver in his voice.

The ritual of seating was repeated, though Soru used a fork and napkin all the time at the hospital, so it was unnecessary. Chris waved everyone to start eating. On the left side of the table after Soru was Lua and Behruz, with ten-year old Jordan and four-year old Rostamu between them, then Thornton and Lébé with ten-month old Jalalu between them; the right side had Sarébjnu, Liz, Mary, then May and Amos with Bahiyé, almost two, between them. As introductions went around the table, Soru cast glances at Amos’s black skin, intrigued that a person would have such an appearance, and wondering why Behruz looked distinctly Sumi.

“Soru, where are you from?” asked May.

“Ora, along the riverfront.”

“The part that’s all gone.”

“Indeed. I understand the topmost street of the old city is now endangered and will soon have to be moved. At that point none of old Ora will be left.”

“The city has been mostly swept away,” agreed Chris. “And now the suspension bridge is endangered, because the glugluba has doubled its width. The water diversion intake keeps getting choked by rocks, making the city an almost impossible place for waterpower.”

Soru listened eagerly and said nothing at first. “As you know, we have long been very proud of our city; it has been the center of wealth and culture on the western shore, and the western shore has always had far more people than the eastern shore. The flood has been a terrible burden for Ora.”

“Well put,” said Chris, admiring the young man’s eloquence.

“And what happened to your leg?” asked May.

Soru turned to her. “I was riding here on a horse—I was able to borrow one from a cousin—and it fell in a hole and broke its leg while we were hunting in the lower Arjakwés valley. I was thrown off and broke my leg very badly. I was able to put a tournequet on it, though, and hobbled back to the Royal Road, where a steam wagon came along and picked me up.”

“Thank goodness; you would have died in a few days,” said Lua.

“Why were you in the lower Arjakwés?” persisted May. “The logical route would be through Tripola and the Kwolone country.”

“When I left Ora, I did not know the logical route,” he replied with a shrug.

“And what do you want to do here, once your leg heals?” asked Chris.

“I don’t know, Lord. I had thought I’d come and work on a farm, with some factory work as well. But now I see so many possibilities. . . I really don’t know.”

“Soru’s taking literacy classes at the classroom building and working at the hospital,” added Lua.

“I can see you are bright, Soru,” said Chris. “And Éra needs bright people with education and ideas on how to make this world a better place.”

“So I am learning, Lord. Every day there are new possibilities.”

“We have seen so many changes in the last few years,” echoed Sarébejnu. “It is disorienting and frightening for some. I have a steady stream of people coming to the Temple for comfort and advice about this strange, new place. But in the last year, I think, there has been less shock and fear. That’s partly because Melwika has gotten so big and there are so many Eryan used to it, and they can explain it to the others.”

“Yes, I heard about . . . elections?” asked Soru.

“The second election will be this fall,” said Chris. “We’re electing one member of the city council every two years. Who knows, maybe this time we’ll elect more than one.”

There was a pause in the conversation, then Lua said, “Speaking of progress, the call I got right before coming here was progress of sort. Dr. Mitrētu called me from Méddoakwés Hospital to tell me that Dr. Béndhu, the army’s chief surgeon, had just stopped by. He had come to the hospital to see me, not knowing that I leave there at about

5. He told Mitretu that there had been a major outbreak of pelui in Belledha *and they had it under control*. Only five have died.”

“Do they need your help?” asked Chris.

She shook her head. “No, they don’t want it. They’re proud of being able to do it themselves.”

“Such a scourge,” said Sarébjnu. “And this city has been completely free of it for two years.”

“We have clean water,” replied Lua. “The army has set up water tanks in five places around Belledha and they fill them daily from a spring outside the city, so that has helped.”

“They need to help rebuild the place,” responded May. “Have you seen the inaugural re-edition of the *Tripola Bédhe*? It has an editorial—a carefully written one—calling for army assistance.”

“I saw it,” said Lua. “It’ll be interesting to see whether anyone complains. I thought it was alright; they’re being really careful, now.”

“This is part of the fear and disorientation Sarébjnu refers to,” said Chris. “It’s relatively easy to make a printing press and start producing newspapers; another thing entirely to educate people in what is good for a newspaper and what is not.”

“That’s how I feel,” agreed Soru. “Every day I learn something new, but I really don’t know what to do with it all.”

“We’re not sure either,” Chris assured him, with a smile.

(Feb.25 or 25, 2006; reread and edited, 5/20/13, 7/28/17)

Inspection

“My, it’s a beautiful day,” said General Roktkester, as he and Chris climbed into the rover. “Planting weather, if it weren’t for the evening frosts. How do I open this window? I forgot.”

“The button.” Chris pointed, then pushed his and let the electric motor roll down his own window. The General did the same thing and was pleased to see the result. They drove out of the new garage for the rovers attached to the engineering building—now a substantial shell of stone and brick, reinforced by timber and steel beams—and headed northward across the new addition to Peskakwés Rodha. The General pointed to the old east gate and twin towers. “Are they tearing them down, or leaving them?”

“I think leaving them. I know the bank has talked to Aisu about renting part of both of them for safe storage. The idea is to have soldiers staying in the rest of the space.”

“That makes sense. The engineering school is quite large.”

“And we have room to make it bigger, too. It’ll have a lot of work space.”

“We want to send a dozen students this fall.”

“Excellent! They will be welcome.”

The new East Gate was open; they drove out and up Peskakwés Rodha. The Peskawés valley was on the left, with a steady flow of water in the river. On the right were fallow fields, often with cows grazing in them. Roktkester looked at the picturesque scene with a smile. “Oh, I love farms. And yours are so neat, too.”

“The farmers are doing a good job.”

“You can see their pride and industriousness. And they own the land? Not you?”

“They are buying the land from me; a twelfth of each harvest for twenty harvests.”

“That’s all? In the east Arjakwés Valley, the farmers have been gradually buying their land for a century!”

“I wouldn’t call that ‘buying.’ The equivalent of two full years of harvests is fair.”

“But what will you do in twenty years?”

“In maybe ten years; some farmers are making two harvests per year. As Lord, I’ll still get almost 2% of their harvest, with the city getting 9%. If my land has 400 farmers earning 2400 dhanay per year before taxes and other expenses, I’ll get almost 20,000, and I won’t have the expenses that other Lords have because the city will cover them.” He didn’t mention that farmers’ incomes could very well double or triple.

Roktækester nodded. “That’s plenty for you and your family, especially since you’ll have other sources of income I’m sure.”

“We’ll need them, because we’re supporting the génadema as well. It still doesn’t cover its own expenses. The educational needs are too great.”

“True. But your family has interests in the bank, phones, gas company, and electric company. How’s the line to the south shore going, anyway?”

“Estanu just came back from an inspection trip. The poles and lines are completed from Endraidha to the beginning of the snow belt. From there to the Dhébakwés, the

workers attached the lines to pruned trees, so they extended them another fifty dekent.

The gap is only fifty dekent along the river, where the line runs through farmers' fields.

It'll be completed in another two months."

"Good. That's about the time Gordha will get a spring flood and will start generating power."

"And we'll need it, because our reservoirs are getting very low; we're putting out a lot of power and not much water is recharging the reservoirs. Moritua's pretty high, but my farmers are getting really worried."

"Hence the need for water storage," agreed Roktekester.

Chris slowed the rover and turned right onto *Bolakra Rodha*, "Roundtop Road" as the road along Ménwika's eastern boundary was now named. Two parallel tracks of thin gravel showed some effort to improve the dirt track. They paralleled the eastern irrigation ditch and crossed two side ditches, then entered unfarmed land. The terrain was being cleared almost everywhere; piles of brush were accumulating along the road where the grange's steam wagons came to haul it away and sell it for firewood. Some plots had already been harrowed. A few accumulating piles of stone indicated the sites of future storage sheds, barns, or even houses.

"A lot of activity," said the General.

"They're all anticipating water, and they're all members of the grange; that means steam wagons to help them."

In a few kilometers—about half way across Ménwika—the road dropped into a gentle valley while the irrigation ditch bent eastward along the valley's northern side to

stay fairly level. Then the ditch snaked back to them as they went back up the valley's southern slope. They reached an intersection where a newly dug irrigation ditch ran westward while the main ditch turned southward and was incised more and more deeply into the rising hillside until it was five meters deep. At that point Chris stopped in a flattish area of trampled grass cleared of brush. "This is Bolakra. Four weeks ago, when we decided to site a water tower up there—I'll drive to the top in a moment—there were no plans for this place. But then we found an old Sumi Villa called Penkwayukwa, because down in the valley you can look up and see five arched vaults that form the terrace on which it was built. That prompted further exploration of the area and we discovered an old spring down in the valley, which still flows intermittantly. We're now half way across Ménwika and at the junction of the main road running southward along the eastern border and the main road running westward across the middle of the township—we've named it Penkwayukwa Rodha—so this is a fairly central location. The water towers—you can see we've already installed one of them—"

"How many will you install?"

"Four in the next few months, maybe more later. They're modifications of the standard heavy gage steel tanks that Miller makes for storing gas. The towers are necessary because we have a pretty large area here that's higher than the irrigation ditch, so they provide the water for the fields. Anyway, the farmers in this area asked the grange whether they could enclose the space in between the towers to serve as a local stronghouse, in case people get caught out here if we get visited by Tutane. It would be very safe if a band of thieves or a group of Tutane attacked because it'd be fifteen doli

high. We also plan to install an electrical and telephone line along this road. With that, farmers began to talk about building houses here because they'd be much closer to their land; you can walk to half the township in less than an hour. So now we're laying out a village site for 100 houses, and the grange has decided to set up a garage here and station one or two steam wagons."

"Steam wagons? How many does the grange need?"

"We need one steam wagon per thousand agris under cultivation, and we'd rather have more than that."

"If five or six hundred people plan to live here, some security is a reasonable precaution."

"That's what we thought."

"And what about Deksawsuperakwa?"

"Same situation. We're laying out a townsite for 100 houses. It already has electricity and a telephone and they started building a stronghouse when the robbers were a threat. We're setting up a pump to pull water from the Majakewés into an irrigation canal and we may ask permission from the Dwobergone to extend it eastward so the water flows into the canal by gravity instead."

"Okay." Roktekester pointed to the water tower. "Show me."

Chris nodded and they headed up Bolakra's future "Main Street" to the water towers on top. Chris parked the rover when they reached the top and they both got out. Roktekester walked along the square of foundations with four pads in the corners for the water tanks. One corner was occupied by a small, hastily built stone hut for the

watchman. “Kristobéru, this really does look like a fort,” he observed. “Are you planning to put the four water towers at the four corners?”

“Yes, enclosing a square fifty doli across; that’s how big a safe place for six hundred people has to be. The grange building will store tools, coal, and grain, as well as the steam wagons. The interior will be large enough for grange meetings and festivals and it’ll be a safe place in case of attack.”

“I need to come back when it’s finished to make a report, then.”

“Exactly. It’ll have a sloped tile roof with a crenulated wall around the outer edge; men will be able to stand on top and defend the building.”

The General nodded. He pointed to a triple heap of smelly bird guano. “And you’re storing stuff here already?”

“It has to be spread when the ground is plowed. We’ve been ordering guano all winter; the grange has three hundred tonnes in storage. We’ve had a busy winter. The gravel was spread on these roads on top of packed snow.”

Roktekester walked the site, then strayed to the western edge to admire the view. “All this land is yours?”

“Yes, pretty much.”

“When you irrigate this piece fully and all of it is farmed, you will own a quarter of the farmland in the Arjakwés.”

“That’s about right. Of course, I won’t *own* it, though; I will be Lord over it.”

“No wonder people are spawning all sorts of rumors about Ménnea, his empire, and his castles. This move of yours makes sense to you, but it is very dangerous. You have made enemies.”

“By settling the land? I don’t think I’ve taken away workers from many villages here on the eastern shore. They have as much land as before and can now farm it more efficiently with fewer farmers and their steam wagons. Three quarters of my farmers have western shore accents; they’ve been flooded from their lands by the rising sea.”

“I know, but you don’t understand *jealousy*, my good Lord. Lords all over the valley are taking the estimates of peasant income here, figuring out how much of it *they think* you are getting, and coming to an exaggerated estimate of your importance and wealth. That decreases their own importance. I received requests to investigate these rumors from several sources.”

“The Rejé as well?”

“I won’t say,” replied Roktækester, though Chris got the impression the answer would have been affirmative.

“So, what do you recommend now?”

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t defend yourself by explaining that instead of milking your peasants, you’re selling them the land and teaching them to read; that looks far more dangerous! You’re better off using ignorance as a defense. I’ll see whether the Réjé can be persuaded to come through here; I’m pretty sure she will visit Gordha in two or three months. She loves to see happy, prosperous peasants; she can afford to take their side sometimes.”

“The army can always station some soldiers here.”

“No, we want people clustered in large villages and towns, not in scattered hamlets. If we start stationing soldiers here, every little place will request a garrison.”

“That would be a problem.”

“So how will you organize Bolakra? I suppose an election.”

“The grange will plan the village site and haul in building materials. I’ll ask the Melwika City Council to pay for concreting the main street and the two parallel side streets and putting in water and sewer lines underneath them. After that, we’ll see. In the fall we’ll elect the grange’s board for the first time. Maybe Bolakra will be a district able to elect two or three members of that board; we’ll see. Maybe those two or three can serve as an occasional village council. I don’t know yet.”

“Elections are another dangerous thing, here.”

“Don’t worry, on Gedhéma the army does not have elections. Armies can’t be run that way.”

“Of course not. I can’t imagine how everything else gets run that way, though.”

“Come back in a few years and see.”

“Hum.” Roktkester was not pleased with that. He noted the old Sumi villa on the other side of the hill. “So that’s the villa? What are all those men doing? Clearing it for building materials?”

“We will obtain some stone and brick from it, but at the moment Marku Bejdédrai has organized a dozen workers—including four students—to remove the loose debris from the site. They’re trying not to destroy any walls that still stand; in fact, they’re

standing up fallen sections and cementing them in place. We've removed the remains of two or three people—probably members of the family who lived there—to Mélwika for safe keeping; the hospital staff is examining them to determine cause of death.”

“Why, in Esto's name?”

“Well, they were killed; that much is obvious. Most likely this villa was destroyed 1020 years ago. According to Kwéteru's chronology that he mailed us several years ago, which we then sent to you, 1021 years ago the Tutane started to march westward during the “Year Without Summer” and four years later the Sumi city at Meddoakwés fell to them. This villa probably was destroyed in that campaign.”

“Interesting.” Roktekester considered. “There's a young officer stationed in Anartu; he's taken classes in Meddoakwés, so you may have met him, his name is Skandu. He's of Sumi background from the capital and speaks fluent Sumi. He has full access to the Great Library in Anartu and we have been encouraging him to read and take notes. I think he'll write a book eventually. You should write him about this place. I bet he can figure out who owned it.”

Chris laughed. “Interesting. I'll tell Marku.”

Roktekester turned back to the rover. “Let's drive to Deksawsuperakwa.”

Chris followed the general back to the vehicle and they headed back to the main road, then turned onto Penkwayukwa Rodha and headed west along an even less graveled dirt track. They passed just below the five vaults and had a clear view of them. In another kilometer the road split—the gentle ridgeline of which the road and ditch were running split into two ridges—and they took the leftward branch, which headed almost straight

toward Southbridge. They had to slow as they passed a steamwagon and a team of farmers extending the ditch; the team was throwing the excess dirt on the road to raise it. Then Chris accelerated again.

“How are things in Belledha?” he asked.

“Still bad.” The general shook his head. “Confidentially, I don’t see Spondanu lasting past the Grand Court. He’s greedy and incompetent.”

“The army needs to help the people because no one else can. Mitru would rent steam wagons to plow side roads and haul timber, but no one can pay him, and the safety of his equipment is uncertain.”

“I know. There may be a few escaped prisoners in the area. But I think we will rent his equipment in *ɛjnaménu* to help.”

“If you had rented it earlier, it would have been better; that month is already getting crowded with bookings. I know because the grange has a reservation for that month. And the thaw will turn all the roads to mud, so even steam wagons won’t accomplish much.”

“You’re right.” He sighed. “I have convinced the Réje that we need to sink a substantial amount of money into the northern shore over the next year or so. The road graveling will shift that way once the snow melts, with the goal of graveling all the way to Néfa. Assure Dr. Lua we’ll plan the operation differently this time; the workers will have uniforms, boots, better tents, and better food. We think it’ll still cost us less because the new steam shovels and gravel sieves will cut the total number of workers and because

Meddwoglubas can make clothing and tents pretty inexpensively. Also, I think I've convinced the Military Central Command to assign thirty thousand dhanay to construction of a telephone line."

"Just for telephones? I doubt private investment for an electric line will be available. The southern shore line has drained off all the spare cash."

"I know. I plan to talk to the Réjé about making available twenty thousand dhanay to the Consultative Assembly to fund the electric line. Electricity really is not the army's business."

"I see. Twenty thousand is about right, if the work is managed carefully. But telephone and electrical connections really won't help Belledha that much."

"I know. They're a morale booster more than anything else. But Belledha has potential waterpower. I think the Réjé may be willing to assign all of greater Belledha's tax output to improvements in the region: gravel roads, school buildings, helping people rebuild burned houses, etc."

"Excellent. That's the sort of thing they need."

"We also have to figure out what to do with the prison. There was even the suggestion to build the new one in Mélwika! But I think we'll leave it in Belledha."

"The prisoners shouldn't be mining copper and silver with picks and shovels; that can be done more efficiently by workers who know heavy equipment using steam power. But they can do other tasks that are not dangerous. Talk to Amos and May, they know something about prisons. Amos once had to help design one."

"Really? I'll tell Perku, the prison's his assignment."

“Bellédha also produces bitumen; we’ve bought some to make the insulation on the wires, though the quantity and price were not practical. It can probably produce more. It has limestone, which Ora needs. It has plenty of timber to cut and export. Agriculture can be improved, and the people can learn various manufactures. They make good boots up there.”

“Yes, but they don’t have good quality leather; the army bought five hundred pair of boots from the Tutane this year because they make them well.”

“Someone needs to look at the north shore and figure out what resources it can exploit and what talents its people can contribute to the common good, and then make a plan to develop the resources and people.”

“Plans, plans. Always plans.” Roktekester looked at the brushland around them; they had driven into an undeveloped part of the township. “Ménwika has a plan. Pretty soon your town’s production will rival the entire Bellédha region.”

“It takes a lot of work, Lord General. The Grange’s five-member board has been meeting several times per week lately to coordinate our resources efficiently. We use the veteran farmers to teach the newer arrivals. We planned the use of our steam wagons months in advance to reduce the number we had to buy; that meant figuring out what jobs could be done during the winter and encouraging farmers to get off their butts and do them for a cash incentive. Much more planning can be done by the other Lords.”

“That’s true. With the increase in rainfall and the dam at Gordha, the entire lower Arjakwés can now be settled systematically, and what you’ve done here could be repeated several times over.”

“The army’s doing the same thing at Endraidha. All the regions have plenty of unused land, even those regions with serious flooding by the rising sea. And many Lords are making plans. Albanu is constantly planning how he can dominate the Néfa area even more efficiently and completely.”

“Very true. How goes your course on regional planning?”

“Pretty well. It has helped all of us get beyond a simple list of improvements, like roads, power and telephone lines, schools, and hospitals, and think about what the purpose of development is. It really gets down to what the hymns of Widumaj teach us and how to make a world that expresses them; the hymns give a lot of guidance about what sort of people we should be. But this conclusion is controversial, with some insisting that science should determine everything and others interested in Bahá’í ideas about development. Ultimately, this world has to resolve the question of the purpose of development. That’s when it’ll be clear what to do for Belledha.”

Chris slowed, then turned left onto the Royal Road. The settlement of Deksawaksuperakwa loomed up, dominated by the stronghouse that was its largest, tallest structure. Roktkester cast a professional eye on the structure as Chris approached it slowly, then parked the rover. His arrival also created a crowd, as a class took a break and came out of the building to see what was going on and those at home came out to join them. “This place has grown a lot just in the last month!” exclaimed the General.

“Yes, thirty house lots have been claimed,” agreed Chris. “They’ve put a lot of effort into the stronghouse, so they are safe. Many of the arrivals are sleeping there

because it's warm at night; I donated two cast iron stoves for it. They'll build houses after the planting."

Roktekester looked around at the crowd. "They're so young!"

"Their villages have been flooded in the Ora area. Let's go inside."

Chris led Roktekester inside through one of the large doors suitable for driving steam wagons into the building. Much of the interior was a garage; tracks on the floor could be seen. "We're keeping two steam wagons here every night," explained Chris. The general glanced at the tools hanging on the walls and opened several of the wooden bins lining the walls—perfect to sit on and currently empty. He pointed to the stairs—there were two of them, on opposite sides of the room—and they went up to the second floor. It was a large, open space divided into a series of personal areas by sleeping pads and wooden chests.

"They own a lot of chests."

"It's the first possession most of them buy. Melwika makes some very nice ones."

Roktekester nodded, then took the stairs up to the roof. It had a slight slope to it; it was made of wooden boards laid very close to each other, their seams sealed with bitumen and then the whole thing was covered by a thin layer of concrete. That explained the heavy timbers supporting the roof.

"Very impressive. Hard to defend, with the huge doors."

"It's designed against robbers and groups of horsemen, not against the army. With an armored steam wagon, this place could be broken into and taken pretty quickly."

"That's very true. I gather the houses have been designed to form a wall, also."

“Of course, all villages are set up that way, with gates that can block the entrances. Good for keeping in animals at night and keeping out wolves and strangers. This place can’t close up at night, though, because it’s build right on the bridge across the Majakwés and steam wagons come across day and night.”

“They could always open the gate when a steam wagon comes along.”

“It would mean someone has to be awake all night.”

“With all these young men here, I bet half the village is up all night!”

Chris laughed. “They do drink a lot of wine.”

“Your entire town drinks a lot of wine and beer,” agreed the General. It was true; the Town Council had even discussed the problem. He looked around, then nodded.

“Okay, I’ve seen enough to write my report saying that the rumors are ridiculous exaggerations. Let’s get back to town.”

“Alright.” Chris led Roktekester down the stairs and back to the rover. After saying hello to several of the young men—it irritated him more of them weren’t out working, but that was another sign of their youth—he got into the rover and drove back to Melwika, six and a half kilometers to the north.

“Since I’m here, there’s one more thing I should see,” said the general, as they approached town. “There’s that young man who’s working on a *plétru*.”

At first, Chris didn’t recognize the word; then he remembered it was the term they had coined for a glider. “Oh, yes, Okpétu. He has taken over one of the unheated spaces in the engineering building.”

“He keeps sending bills for things to his brother, who takes them to the army quartermaster, who pays them. Wire, special cloth, special bamboo and wood from Sumilara . . . it’s totalled a few hundred dhanay only, but I’m getting curious about it.”

“Sure, let’s take a look.”

In a few minutes they entered Melwika via the South Gate. They immediately turned right and followed back streets around Majakwés and Péskakwés Rodha and their junction at Temple Square, an area so crowded with pedestrians and horse-drawn carts that motor vehicles were now supposed to avoid it. The back route took them directly to the end of the engineering building where the rover garage was located. They got out and walked through the first floor of the unheated shell of the engineering building, admiring the work of carpenters and plasterers and glassworkers as they went; classrooms were taking shape, workshops were being enclosed, windows were being glassed in. At the far end was a long space two stories high, ten meters wide, and twenty long; eventually it was to be the main workroom. It had a concrete floor, a wall of completed glass windows admitting brilliant sunlight, and a bank of lightbulbs on the ceiling. When they entered they both stopped, surprised by the progress on the glider. Both wings and the fuselage had begun to take shape.

Okpétu and Sérwéru were busy covering the right wing with alien parachute material as the Lord and the General entered. They rose, surprised. “Welcome!” said Okpétu.

“Honored Okpétu, I am amazed at your progress!” exclaimed Chris. “Two weeks ago all you had was a partial framing of one wing!”

“And now the right wing is mostly finished. The left wing will take another week.”

“This is General Roktēkester of the Central Command.”

“Ah, General, I am honored you have come to visit!”

“My pleasure.” Roktēkester approached the glider. “How do the wings flap?”

“They don’t. This doesn’t fly the way a bird does. It will need help to get into the air; a rover will have to tow it until it is going very fast. Then it will sail on the breeze the way birds do, without flapping their wings.”

“That will work?”

“Theoretically.”

“How high can you go?”

Okpētu considered. “The gedhema books say as much as ten dēkent. And a glider can go at least as fast as a speeding rover; if it is possible to fly over the sea, it could get to Ora in maybe two hours.”

“Praised be Esto!” The general admired the glider even more. Okpētu sat in the cockpit. “As you can see, there is not much room in here for someone, but it has to be small and light in weight. It has a windshield in front of very thin glass; we broke some panes installing them. After I am inside I can pull a top over me from behind.” He turned, reached back, and pulled a stiff canvas cover forward. “That will help keep me warm because up high the air is cold. The glider has four wheels to land on, but once it is in the air I can pull this lever to retract them.” He pointed. “And here I have some very simple controls; a steering wheel to turn the plane, for example.” He turned the wheel and they

saw flaps on the right wing and the vertical tail rudder move. “We’re still installing the flaps on the left wing. In this space in front of me will be an altitude gage and another gage indicating whether I am going up or down.”

“Fascinating. And what are the special materials you’re using?”

“As you can see, the wing structure itself is bamboo—long, light, flexible, and strong. The ribs are either bamboo or taramo wood, which is also strong, but light in weight. Holding the wing together has been quite a challenge. Wrapped around the shell is specially cotton cloth from Meddwogubas; it has a very tight weave. We’ll add a light coating of oil so that it repells water quite well.”

“How did you get so much done so fast?” asked Chris.

“I had help from the intensive engineering workshop.” He pointed to Sérwéru, who made a simple bow.

“Not all of us,” replied Sérwéru. “Let’s just say the Ora contingent of engineers is getting pretty frustrated. Miller fooled us; he proposed something that was too difficult, then waited for us to protest that we needed it instead! So I fear when we leave next week, we’ll be empty handed.”

“What’s the problem?” asked Chris.

“A portable steam powered saw is not practical. It has to be rigidly connected to the source of steam power to keep the rotary chain tight, so we’ve had to design a power saw that pivots, like a hand on an arm. It’s difficult to make such a saw portable and useful.”

“I see the problem,” agreed Chris. “But in fairness, when Miller suggested a steam powered saw, Amos hesitated at first.”

“I concede the point; I don’t think Amos was in on a plot to lead us down a blind alley. And I won’t say a steam saw is impossible, either. The others are hard at work on the mechanism to keep the saw at the same distance from the steam-powered wheel but allow enough freedom of movement to make it useful. I’m sure they will solve the problem adequately. But the problem has come to bore me, so I’ve been helping Okpétu for the last two weeks.”

“Two or three others help, too, sometimes in the evening,” added Okpétu. “I am grateful to Esto, for I do not have the mechanical skills they have.”

“It’s our job,” replied Sérweru.

“So, when will you be ready?” asked Chris.

“The instruments will take a few weeks or a month, so I think it will be after the end of *ɛjnaménu*.”

“Are you sure it’ll fly?” asked Roktekester.

The pilot laughed. “No, of course not! We’ll start with very slow towings by the rover. If there’s trouble I’ll be able to pull a lever to disconnect the tow rope. No doubt we’ll have to make adjustments.”

“The weight and wing size are right, based on the *gedhéma* books,” said Sérwéru. “I can read enough English myself; I know that.”

“I’ve had a student translate many pages for me,” added Okpétu.

Roktèkèster turned to Sérwéru. “What are you saying about Miller and your engineering course?”

“At the beginning of the course we were proposing projects and he proposed a steam-powered saw for cutting trees down, but Yimu immediately asked that Ora have the project, since it complemented our steam shovels and other equipment. But it is much more difficult!”

“I see. What are the other items your course has made?”

“Windmills, hand-powered pumps for raising water from a well—though the lever can also be pumped by a windmill, so it can pump water either way—an ice box for keeping food cold, a sewing machine—it really does sew things together quickly—and a hydraulic lift. The last is quite complicated and fascinating; we’ve just about finished a prototype. The electrical group has been working on an amplifier for electrical signals; it’ll make the telephones work better and is needed for making radios.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Roktèkèster. “I’ll have to hear a report from Amos.” He turned to Okpétu. “The army is pleased to be funding this glider; best wishes with it, and be sure you don’t get killed in it! Lord Mennea, shall we walk back to the génadéma?”

“Yes, certainly.” They both exchanged goodbyes with the two young men and walked out of the engineering building heading westward. They crossed the site of the city’s old eastern wall and went around the agricultural and life sciences building, then walked through a large open space.

“This is where you want to build a Bahá’í temple, eventually?”

“Yes, but we will wait. Right now it would be controversial.”

“Yes, please wait.” He pointed to the life science building. “I like the greenhouse; it must be a pleasant place in the winter.”

“Very expensive to heat enough to maintain the plants.”

“I can imagine, and the glass work must have cost a fortune.”

“It was a bad investment.” Chris pointed to a new building. “That’s our library.”

“Oh? Can I see?”

“Of course.” Chris turned slightly to lead the general to the nearest entrance. They went up a flight of stairs and entered a long space, eighteen meters wide and twenty-five long, with grand windows on both of the long sides above shoulder-high book cases. The long walls were almost completely covered by thousands of leather-bound books and notebooks.

“How many books do you have?” Roktekester gasped in surprise.

“Five thousand! Four thousand are in English that we have printed using the computer. The rest are translations, partial translations, and notebooks of notes assembled by various classes.”

“Incredible! I had no idea Gédhéma had so many books.”

“This is nothing, I assure you. Nothing can be taken from the library; students must read them here. This place is pretty busy as a result. It’s open from dawn to midnight every day. All these books can be found somewhere else because we almost always make at least two copies, but the other copies are scattered about. Méddoakwés has about half as many.”

“This is amazing, Lord.” The General was more than impressed; he was moved. He pulled a book off the shelf—he was not aware that it was an encyclopedia volume—and flipped through the English pages, glancing at color photographs, charts, and maps that the computer’s inkjet printer had rendered in good quality. He looked at several before his curiosity was satisfied.

They headed back out. Roktekester’s private horse-drawn coach awaited him on the other side of the campus, so they crossed part of the quadrangle. Chris led him to the nearest building so they could walk through the humanities building, then the science building, then the refectory, then the dorm, so he’d see the whole campus. As they crossed through the humanities building they saw May in a classroom with a dozen students. Roktekester stopped to stick his head in, curious to see what she was teaching. “Ah, General, welcome!” she said, stopping her English lesson. She was uncomfortable about him, and the feeling was mutual; he had no idea what to make of an outspoken female, and she was the most outspoken of the Mennea females.

“Greetings, Honored May,” he replied, using a male form of address and managing a friendly tone. “I am very impressed by these buildings. What are you teaching?”

“Advanced English Translation. These are the best students; the Réjé can be proud of them.”

“Excellent, I’ll tell her. Are you pleased with the new issues of the *Tripola Bédhe*?”

“Yes, they are controling their tone much better. It’s good for the *Melwika Nues* because more people are buying our paper. And they have come up with a good idea we are copying; including a coupon in each issue that entitles someone to obtain another copy of the paper for free. One dontay is really too much; people won’t buy it. But there was no way to charge half a dontay.”

“I see your point.”

“What do you think of the new paper?” she decided to be bold.

Roktekester hesitated. “It is better, as you say. I think the palace will start its own paper soon as well, to publish our views.”

“You are welcome,” she said, though she wasn’t sure she believed it.

“Thank you.” He nodded a goodbye to the class and continued down the hall with Chris. They walked outside and crossed into the natural sciences building. Thornton’s geology lab occupied one side of the building. The walls were covered with maps, and tables groaned under piles of rock samples, most of which were neatly labeled. The other half had two large classrooms. Upstairs were physics, astronomy, and meteorology labs and classrooms for those subjects.

From the natural sciences building they crossed through the refectory building, which had a second story housing the business school and the génadëma’s administration. The dorm was a quick walk as well; fifty meters long, it was divided into rooms three meters long and wide off a central corridor; three stories high, it could accommodate ninety students, and it was full. Another identical dorm across the quadrangle was full as well.

They exited at the far end of the building near the general's coach. Roktekester turned to his host. "This has been a most illuminating tour, Lord Mennea. Your génadëma inspires me with new ideas and possibilities, as does your land. I can only wish you the best in all your efforts."

"Thank you, my Lord General. Please convey my greetings to Her Majesty when you next see her."

"Thank you, I will." He extended both hands to Chris and they shook. Then Roktekester climbed into his coach and headed back to the capital.

(Feb. 28, 2006; reread and edited 5/20/13, 7/28/17)

Month of Sacrifice

Thornton gave the map of the Ornawkwés Valley one last scan. The students had done an excellent job. Thanks to the permission—nay, the active request—from the Médhelone tribe that lived at the Médhela Oasis twenty-five kilometers south of Melwika, the geology class had spent ten days out of the last five weeks of the intensive winter term exploring their territory and its uncertain western borderlands, following the Ornawkwés or “Eaglewater” for eighty kilometers, from the spot where it exited the land of the Krésones to its junction with the Arjakwés far to the west of Meddoakwés. Thanks to a changing climate, the dry wash now had water in it most of the year along most of its length, and the semiarid brushland was now becoming prairie. The five hundred Médhelones controlled twenty-five hundred square kilometers of grassland, far more than their cattle could use; they were becoming worried about hunters with longbows poaching their bison, giraffe, zebra, elephants, rhinos, and other large game; and they were wary of Arjakwés Valley Lords casting their eyes on land that now had agricultural potential, thanks to more irrigation water, steel plows pulled by steam wagons, and windmill-driven pumps. Thornton had hoped to find the tribe a resource, but other than large game, none had emerged. The tribe now worried about the map, a copy of which had to go to the army, becoming a resource for land thieves.

But at least the geology class had given them a thorough survey of their property. A dozen students had advanced quite a bit in their geological experience. Thornton, now

22 Earth years old, was a geological veteran and felt very comfortable with field work and mapping.

Suddenly sunlight began to stream into the classroom from the west and darkness was replaced by day again. The daily eclipse, an hour before sunset, was over. The electrical lights in the room began to glow more brightly as, all across the Arjakwés Valley, people began to turn off their electrical lights, slackening demand. He reached over and turned off half the room's lights, as they were not needed.

But it was also time to go. He stuffed papers into his satchel—he had to review a dozen final projects and no longer needed any help from May—grabbed his jacket, turned off the lights, and stepped out of the lab into the hallway. He did not bother to lock the Geology Lab's door, as nothing of value was stored in the room, and the building would soon be locked.

He walked across the space to the humanities building next door to get Lébé. She had been busy grading papers for her course. She happily put down the one she was working on when he stepped into her office. "Please, take me out of here," she said.

He gave her a kiss. "Let's go home."

She rose stiffly from the chair; she was six and half months pregnant and it was beginning to get uncomfortable. He helped her up, mostly as a kindness, as she really didn't need help. "How's the map?" she asked.

"It's quite good. I added the last altitude measurements this afternoon and they correlated pretty well with the student measurements. I also read one of the papers and made some comments."

“Good. I’ve gotten a lot of grading done, but I have a lot left.”

“Any good stories?”

“Oh yes, three ‘grandmother stories’ that are perfect for the folk tales book.” She took her coat and picked up her stuffed satchel and they headed for the door. He took her satchel to help. “I’m looking forward to *εjnaménu*,” she continued. “A month of peace and quiet.”

“And since you’re pregnant, no fasting.”

“Yes. I’m not worried about that, though; I like the fast.”

“It looks like I’ll have to use the month to catch up in reading and writing, and I have to plan a land use planning course for the second spring term.” He shook his head. “That’ll be a real pain.”

“I can help you with the translating, since I’ll basically be waiting for the baby at that point. You’re helping with the Biology 1 course too, right?”

“Yes, first spring term. It has never been taught very effectively so far. So that’s *another* first time preparation.” He groaned.

“I’m glad someone’s getting biology organized, though.”

“Father wants me to teach three biology courses next year, so I guess I’ll be doing a lot of studying of bio! At this point the six geology courses I’ve taught are pretty easy, though.”

“Should be, you’re on track to complete a Bachelor’s degree in geology!”

“Plus I can teach intro chemistry, astronomy, and physics.” He smiled.

They headed past the Bahá'í Center and turned north, toward Péskakwés Rodha, one of Ménwika's two main thoroughfares. It had gotten chilly during the eclipse, though it was still above freezing. As they were walking down Péskakwés Rodha, they saw Mitru walking toward them.

"Hail!" he exclaimed. He was in a good mood and happy to see his sister and brother in law.

"Hail! So, you're *still* in town," said Thornton.

"Yes, I haven't been out much lately. Blasted office work. And . . . the problems with intercity traffic have me a bit scared, especially since I'm about to be a father again."

"That was a scary incident last week down on the south shore," agreed Thornton.

"Thank Esto the stoker lit a Roman candle in the firebox and handed it to the driver. I was just talking to him earlier. He said when the horse threw the rider, the rider was almost run over by the steam wagon's wheels, so that guy got the scare of his life."

"And they threw how many cherry bombs loaded with salt? Three?"

"No, four. The riders fled. Of course, two passengers had soiled underclothes afterward. That wasn't published in the *Melwika Nues!*" He laughed.

"I'm not surprised, those things are incredibly loud," agreed Thornton. "We used one on some wolves stalking our camp, down on the Ornakwés."

"Is your office work enough to keep you occupied?" asked Lébé.

Mitru laughed. "By Esto, yes! It's crazy, in fact. I've now got *four* steam wagons just for intercity work! One is constantly going around the old seabed on the northern

route and another on the southern route, plus one is constantly running to Gordha and either Kostakhéma or Gimutroba; the route to the Spine was closed only a month. Then I have one steam wagon that constantly follows one route, from the glacier at Snékhpéla to Néfa to drop off ten tonnes of ice at the port—Anartu uses a *lot* of ice—then up the mountains to Isurdhuna, now that we've forced our way through the passes, then back to Néfa and Snékhpéla."

"What are you getting at Kostakhéma?" asked Thornton.

"Mostly ice, but sometimes furs, meat, and ivory. We now get our ice from the Kostakhéma glacier and from their lake, which is partially frozen most of the summer. Did you hear the army plans to open a bank branch at Kostakhéma, of all places?"

"No. That'll help payments."

"A lot. The paperwork on those four steam wagon routes keeps one accountant busy almost full time. Then I have three steam wagons on the local passenger and cargo runs around here, two more in the Tripola region, and two in the Néfa region. It looks like I'll get the local transportation contract for Léwéspa, pushing my transport system up to thirteen steam wagons. Then I've got eight more that can be hired out for agriculture and forest work. Four of them come back from Endraida in two days to help the Ménwika grange. And I need three extras to cover the breakdowns." Mitru pointed to a door they had just past. "I'm going to Tritu's house for dinner; why don't you at least stick your head in. He'd like to see you."

Lébé looked at Thornton, then nodded. "Okay, we have time for tea."

They followed Mitru to the front door, where he pulled on the giant knocker. Like a typical Eryan house, the outer wall was blank, though at least Tritu had painted it an attractive light blue and had installed a few bushes and flower pots—still empty—to add some vegetation. A male servant opened the door almost immediately and ushered them into a large room where Tritu entertained men; the women entertained their friends farther back. The large room had big glass windows opening onto a long garden; Tritu’s three wives each had a side of the courtyard for themselves and their children, the oldest of whom were approaching adolescence. One was busily cooking in the courtyard while another was taking down laundry.

They were greeted by Tritu, who was happy to see them. Ménu was there as well. The five of them had tea and chatted. Tritu was very happy; the Foundry’s books had been added up for the end of the month and it had done very well. Ménu was even happier; construction was booming in town like it never had before and he had hired thirty more workers in the last month to keep up. Manu’s sawmill was cutting lumber day and night now that timber could be hauled down from the mountains and Déru was creating large quantities of cement for mortaring stone walls.

Thornton and Lébé finished their tea and headed home. It had warmed up a bit in the late afternoon sunlight. Once they entered the house, Lébé headed to her mother’s to get Jalalu, and Thornton stuck his head into Amos and May’s apartment to see how the remodeling work was going, since that family had moved into his and Lébé’s living room while their place was ripped apart. Satisfied, he headed to the computer room.

He had to update the list of items they had asked the aliens for. He updated the list every few days even though he never even got an acknowledgement. Three months earlier when the regularly scheduled drop was about to happen, a short email had arrived confirming that the “usual order” of medicines and inkjet cartridges would be dropped at the usual time during the eclipse up by Péskakwés Gluba. It was unsigned; most likely, Philos had not sent it. He hadn’t heard from Philos in seven months.

A student was busily typing up an Eryan translation of an English text while the inkjet printer put out page after page of an electronics textbook that Amos had requested. He reloaded the printer with more paper and yielded to Thornton, who had priority for short tasks like this. Thornton glanced at the inkjet cartridge supply; it was getting low because they were printing as much as thirty thousand pages of materials a month. He still had a few hundred photographs to print as well.

He found the list and made a change of specifications that Amos had asked him to make; the aliens needed as much information as possible to consider a request. He saved the file, put it in an email, added a quick note with the date and time, and sent it. He rose from the computer to get the digital camera so he could set the printer to print the pictures when the computer beeped with an incoming email. He turned to look; the subject line was “Re: Latest Request.” Startled, he opened the message and read.

Dear Thornton: My wife and son and I have been away for a few months, but now we're back for about a year. I see you've sent us five or six requests, each an update of the previous one. The drop is scheduled for six days from now and we can't accept any more changes to the list after tomorrow. But we have been working on the items requested

for your school of engineering. We are impressed by your family's ability to get all the different groups interested in technological development to work together and accept a single common place to work, so we are willing to work harder to provide your school the items it needs.

I hope you and your family are well. I still hope fate will allow us to see each other, face to face, once more. Philos.

He reread the message again, excited to see something from Philos after so many months. He decided to be a bit bold and hit reply.

Dear Philos: We are all well. Perhaps you heard someone attempted to kill father back in the fall. He was in serious danger for about a week, then he recovered reasonably quickly. He still gets tired, but otherwise he has returned to health. Also, Lébé and I are expecting another child in two and a half months! We're very excited about that.

The college is doing very well. After four complete years here, we have now assembled a group of very talented students who are acquiring considerable training and we find our capacities growing day by day. This term the college has had better courses, more courses, and a more talented student body than ever before. It has been very exciting.

Where have you been; your home world? What role are you playing here; are you just a student? We haven't received any requests for information for months.

Thornton.

He sent the message and waited a minute or two, then a reply popped into his box.

I can see from the web search requests coming in that your students are studying a much wider range of subjects, and in much greater depth. Yes, we were on our home world. We were shoring up support for our collaboration with you, which represents a sharp departure from anything we've done recently with another client species. The politics proved to be favorable and I returned here as Assistant Director of the entire station. We've also obtained better fabrication systems for making some of the items you need. Your people will have to move toward manufacture of some items, such as aspirin, but we will also be in a better position to make other drugs for you, such as heart medications. We also have a larger staff and are better able to restore the sea's ecology, which underwent massive extinctions in the last two years. We also have two ecologists here interested in the various transitions going on, from desert to prairie and prairie to forest. They may be able to collaborate with some of your students; we need specific ground truth to verify observations from orbit.

So we are looking forward to a more diverse range of collaborations with you. Philos.

That intrigued Thornton. He typed in reply, *Then perhaps we should choose a time and day when we can exchange a series of emails and make some specific plans.* In a moment the reply came: *Yes, but not until after the supply drop next week. Philos.*

That seemed to be the end of the exchange. He couldn't believe it. He reread the exchange, then suspended printing momentarily to print out the emails, so he could show his father. He ran downstairs. "Grandma, have you seen my father?"

Mary looked up from her desk in her room, where she was writing. "He and John left about half an hour ago with Kérdu of the Grange and a fellow named Ekweru, I think. He seems to be interested in chickens or turkeys or something."

"Where were they going?"

"The back side of the new addition, I think."

"Oh?" That surprised him; it was zoned industrial, not agricultural. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, they were talking about places inside the city where one could site a poultry facility where the smell would not offend residents."

"Ah, I get it. Thanks! Tell Lébé I just got a communication from Philos and I have to tell dad about it."

"Oh, marvelous. I will."

He grabbed his coat and dashed outside. He was excited and wanted to let John know as well, since the equipment was for the engineering school both men were designing. He jogged northeastward across Foundry Square and then up the road along the top of the gluba; it was the shortest route to the back side of the new addition. He was panting when he reached the old city wall, most of which was still intact because some houses had used it as one of their outer walls. The old East Gate was still there and he passed through it into a large area bare of brush and even of loose rock; it had been picked up long ago for use in building. The rough, rolling ground was unimproved except for three main roads that had been bulldozed across it at the bottom, middle, and near the top of the slope, and another road that cut diagonally across all three; several very steep

alleys for walking had been laid out straight up the slope, one of which ran along the inside of the new wall. The ground between the highest street and the ridgeline was already leveled for a half dozen huge metal storage tanks for gas, each of which was separated from the other by berms of rock and dirt so that an explosion could not spread; the city needed gas storage very badly because demand was growing fast and a pipeline to Mæddoakwés via the intervening villages was now being considered. By placing the gas tanks along the ridgeline, gravity would direct flames up into the sky, rather than toward nearby buildings. To improve safety a small pinnacle incorporated into the city by the new wall was being leveled so that a huge water storage tank could be built, thereby providing the city and its firefighters with a reliable supply of pressurized water.

Right below the installed gas tanks was a ten-meter cliff and Thornton could see four men wandering the bare ground at its base. He headed up one of the future alleys to reach them. As he approached—slowly, so as not to disturb their discussions—he could hear the conversation.

“If you start here, the building could run thirty meters and be about twelve meters wide and three stories high,” Chris was saying. “That’d be enough for . . . maybe five thousand chickens.”

“A funny idea, stacking chickens three stories high,” replied Ekweru. “But then, why not; they can live in a high rise apartment, like many people.”

“You could start with a ten meter long building and add sections to it as your money and chicken supply expanded,” suggested Kérdu.

“I’d rather build down by the reservoir, where it would be easy to dump the chicken waste,” commented Ekweru.

“Honored, as we have already noted, chicken waste cannot go into the city’s water supply,” Chris repeated quietly but firmly. “Besides, with the current demand for fertilizer, you will find a ready market for it. Just hire some kids to scrape it up every day or two.”

“And up here the smell will dissipate on the wind more easily,” added Kérdu. He pointed to the Foundry’s smoke stack, which carried the iron making’s exhaust gasses all the way up the mountain and up a twenty-meter steel pipe. A steady wind from the east was dispersing the smoke horizontally above the city, so they could see there was a steady breeze.

“Well, this seems like a good spot, then,” agreed Ekweru, a bit reluctantly. “When can the grange help with the construction?”

“Any time is equally bad,” replied Kérdu. “So they are all equally good as well. We have so many people arriving right now, it’s incredible. Yesterday we gave out land to ten farmers. But our veteran farmers are tired of the chaos, are tired of digging ditches, and might prefer a challenge like this.”

“Especially since I am among them.” Ekweru had been a farmer on Mennea land for three years.

“Exactly. I suggest you go to your friends, ask them how much labor they owe or want to give the grange, and assemble a construction crew that way. Next week when we

start renting several steam wagons from Mitru we'll be able to spare one to move rocks and brick and lumber here."

"I'll need a lot of chicken wire, too."

"Order it now; the foundry has a lot of work backing up," exclaimed John.

"Okay," said Ekweru. He turned to Chris. "You said we can go to your business office tomorrow morning to draw up the paperwork?"

"Yes. If you want, bring a friend you trust who can read well, to verify everything for you."

"No, Lord, I trust you. A fifty-fifty split of profits between me and the grange is fine until I can repay their investment."

"I estimate our investment to be five thousand dhanay," warned Kérdu. "We'll have to watch the costs of construction carefully, though, and maybe we can keep it down to four."

"I understand." Ekweru nodded. Then he offered his hand to the others, even Miller, and they all shook. He looked pleased and excited.

Thornton, sensing that the discussions were over, approached. Chris looked at his son. "So, are you ready to buy a dozen eggs?"

"It sounds like you plan to sell a lot more than a dozen!"

"A few thousand eggs a week, and maybe a thousand chickens a month!" replied Ekweru, happy to do a little boasting. "I'm producing a twentieth of that now, but my chicken coop really isn't safe on my farm; foxes and wolves have broken in, and at least once a person. Here, the chickens will even have electricity!"

“And with the volume, he’ll make a profit and sell eggs and meat at maybe half the price of everyone else,” added Chris. “Packed in ice, the chickens could be sold almost anywhere.”

“A chicken empire,” added Ekwēru, triumphantly.

Thornton repressed a smile. His father turned to him, so he said, “I have a private matter for the two Lords.”

“We will see you tomorrow, then,” said Ekwēru, and he and Kérdu headed back to the town.

Once they had walked a half dozen meters, Thornton switched to English. “I just got an email from Philos. The regularly scheduled drop next week is on, and they can take updates of the list through tomorrow.”

“Really? They’re finally responding?” asked Chris, surprised.

“Yes.” Thornton read the exchange of emails to both men.

John was excited. “Finally, they’re getting us the equipment for the engineering school! That’ll help a lot! Can we get together tonight, after the graduation dinner, to talk about other items we should order?”

“I guess,” replied Chris. “Say, John, that reminds me; back at the beginning of the term did you suggest the idea of a steam-powered saw in order to distract the team from Ora?”

John stared at him. “What if I did? They weren’t forced to choose that project. Besides, they actually managed to make a functioning prototype.”

“They did, but one that will probably be too expensive to manufacture or use, while you all managed to complete two projects.”

“Like I said, it was their choice. As they get more sophisticated at engineering, they won’t make such mistakes.”

“No, they’ll just return your kindness in equal measure.”

“Hey, you’re setting us up for worse trouble! You’re increasing the total farmland in this area by a *third* and you’ve got an army of yeoman farmers to farm it with steam wagons and a couple thousand dhanay of guano. They’re going to turn out two thirds as much farm produce as the area already produces, and what will that do to food prices and tax revenues? My brother in law at Boléripludha’s frightened and angry. If he knew about this man who plans to produce half as many eggs and chickens as his entire village in a single building *inside Melwika*, he’d freak out!”

Thornton was startled by John’s use of “freak out”; he rarely even spoke in English to them, since after thirty years, Eryan was easier for him. But Chris’s reaction was one of anger.

“John, the Arjakwés Valley represents maybe a sixth of the entire world in terms of population and food and you have a son able to move the food everywhere. We have a rising sea and lots of displaced people. We have a thousand second and third sons and their wives here, which means more land to feed people in their home villages. We have growing cities that need food. We have a half-burned down city on the north shore. We have better nutrition because we’re raising a wider variety of crops. And we’ll have cash crops to export in a few years. I wouldn’t compare all that to dishonesty!”

“And we’ll see which gets us killed, especially when those thousand literate farmers tell their cousins about voting!”

“We’ll see, John; we have a consultative assembly, after all.” Chris looked away from John, and quiet followed, but at least the three of them continued walking back to their houses together.

That night, the Mélwika Génadema held its dinner and graduation for the term. The next day, steam wagons heading for the northern and southern shores were loaded with a hundred forty students riding home. But one of the two dorms stayed open because sixty students remained; they were the “future graduate students,” the really serious students who were all exploring special topics via reading and small group meetings during the month of sacrifice. The library was open and busy.

The first day of *ɛjnaménu* was a bit like Mardi Gras; everyone in town was on the streets partying, and the Temple thronged with visitors bringing animals or singing the hymns of Widumaj. The inns and food sellers had a brisk business; so did the stalls and shops, because people bought gifts for their family. The steam wagons running between Mélwika and Meddoawkwés were laden with shoppers, because many came to the new city from the capital to explore its new, exciting, and innovative stores. The Eryan were largely poor and struggled terribly most of their short lives; even the Mélwikans, with their greater prosperity, struggled to survive; so the first day of *ɛjnaménu* was one of their rare moments of compensation.

Then the month settled down. The month of sacrifice was a holy month; some celebrated the first and last days, most also celebrated the first day of every week, and a few (who had money or who had none at all) celebrated every day they could. It was the first of the thirty-day, five-week months; during the winter when Skanda and Éra were farther from the sun, the months had thirty-six days. On the morning of the eleventh day of the month, Soru rose at his usual time—a bit before dawn—to find half the hospital staff finishing their breakfasts in the hospital's refectory.

“Good morning Soru,” said Arejé.

“Good morning,” he replied, looking for the coffee pot, because he had discovered the marvelous properties of that dark drink. “A lot of people up early this morning.”

“This is the first day of the Bahá’í Fast,” she responded.

“The what?”

“The Bahá’í Fast. We’re Bahá’ís.” She pointed at the other doctors, nurses, and medical students present; about half the hospital staff. “We are followers of Bahá’u’lláh, and He has commanded that we eat and drink before sunrise, then abstain until after sunset for the last nineteen days of *ejnaménu*.”

“Who?” Soru was baffled by what he heard.

“Bahá’u’lláh,” replied Stauréstu. “He lived on Gédhéma about a century and a half ago. He said Esto had sent Him with a teaching suitable for the new knowledge. He revealed many, many books. He talked about the unity of all humanity.”

“Kando Estoi,” added Aréjé. “That’s what Bahá’u’lláh means.”

Soru nodded. “And what is the purpose of the fast?”

“It’s part of our sacrifice; it’s the Bahá’í *ɛjnaménu*,” said Staurestu. “We don’t sacrifice animals, but we sacrifice our meals for Esto and we sacrifice our time and service for others.”

“We’re going to say some prayers now,” exclaimed Aréjé. “Come join us, if you want. Since you’re not fasting, you can always eat breakfast after.”

“Thanks; I will,” he agreed. He waited while the six of them piled their dishes in the sink, wondering about this word *Bahá’í*. He had heard it a few times, especially in the last week when they had been celebrating, like everyone else. Last night the entire Bahá’í staff was absent, too. Perhaps that word explained their kindness to him.

They gathered in an empty room down the hall, which served as a sort of chapel; it had two rarely-used copies of *The Hymns of Widumaj*. Stauréstu opened their devotion by chanting a Bahá’í prayer for fasting; it was eloquently translated and his singing voice was superb. Others chanted or recited other prayers. Aréjé chanted part of Widumaj’s Hymn of Sacrifice. It was a simple but moving devotional program. At the end Stauréstu looked at the others and said, “Well, let’s go serve,” and they all rose to get to work. As they were walking out, Aréjé said, “If you’d like, you can come to the supper at the Menneas’ household after sunset.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course. During the fast they hold a supper and discussion every other evening in their courtyard. They feed forty or fifty people; it’s huge. Anyone is welcome. And on the off nights there are break fasts here at the hospital, at the Bahá’í Center, and in houses around town. There’s something just about every night.”

“Thank you, I’ll think about it.”

Reread and edited, 5/21/13, 7/28/17

Flight

Soru watched Dr. Lua and Aréjé enter the room with some trepidation. The chief doctor smiled. "Your leg should be ready. Does it feel ready?"

"I wonder whether we should leave the cast for another week or two, to be sure."

Lua was surprised by that; most of her patients wanted it off too soon. "Why, has the leg been giving you pain when you put weight on it?"

"Ah . . . no, not exactly." Having witnessed many physician-patient interactions over the last two months, Soru knew better than to lie.

"Not exactly. . . what, then?"

"Well. . . I guess I'm just worried about whether it's ready."

"It should be. In fact, it probably should have been adequate a week or two ago. The break was a pretty clean one, and the muscle damage healed pretty well. What are you worried about?"

"Are you worried about staying here?" added Aréjé.

That startled him, but she was very insightful. "I'm sorry, Dr. Lua. You have to understand that all my life I have lived with very, very little, and it has been very difficult. I did not even realize it was difficult, except in retrospect. In the last two months I have lived in a way I simply could never have imagined. It . . . I don't want it to end."

"I see. Well, Soru, you've been a very hard worker and an excellent addition to the team. We can count on you, and we know it. So we have no plans to fire you and put

you out. You can be part of this team as long as you want to be. In fact, we should probably talk about two things in the next week. One is your schedule, because I think you should continue to take courses. You'll be a much better contributor to the team if you can read and write better, do basic arithmetic, learn basic science, etc. The more you know, the better. When you are a member of the medical team for this area, we expect a certain number of hours either working in the hospital or in class, and we prefer that schoolwork be between a quarter and a half of your time. The second matter is money—.”

“Oh, but I can't pay!”

“No no; *we* pay *you*, Soru. People have to live. Room and board in the hospital or in the génadema is six dhanay per week; we cover that unless you want to rent a room in town and feed yourself, in which case we will pay it to you. Three-credit courses cost thirty dhanay each and we cover them if they are relevant to your work here. Then we'll give you two dhanay per week of spending money; more as you gain experience, doctors in training with four years of experience will get six dhanay per week of spending money. Finally, we will open a bank account for you and put 1.5 dhanay per week in it; that's money for retirement or a major purchase, like buying a house. You can't take it out otherwise, and it earns you interest.”

“The bank?” He was puzzled by that, absorbing the idea. “Retirement . . . ?”

“When you're too old to work, usually age seventy.”

“Seventy, who lives to be seventy!?”

“We probably will if we use the hospital,” replied Aréjé. “But if you die earlier, the money goes to your heirs.”

“Like I said, we can talk more about all of this later,” said Lua. “In the last few weeks we’ve been giving you one or two dhanay per week anyway and some clothing, and you’ve been taking courses for free. So the arrangement will get a bit better.”

“It’s fine with me!” exclaimed Soru, excited.

“As I said, you are welcome to stay,” repeated Lua. “Now, let’s take a look at your leg.”

He nodded and climbed up onto the examining table, and stretched out his leg. Lua unwound a bandage that helped to hold the two halves of the cast together, then she cut the cords that had fixed the two halves together since the site of the compound fracture had last been examined. The cast came off, exposing soft, sensitive, pink skin. They examined the scars that marked the place where the bone had poked out and where they had performed surgery to put it back in place. The skin had healed well.

“Let’s stand on it,” Lua urged. Soru nodded and with the help of the two women, he slowly climbed off the examining table. He put weight on the leg, winced a bit, then nobbled around.

“It hurts, but that’s because it’s stiff. The pain doesn’t come from the bones, I think.”

“It’ll take a few weeks to recover full use of the leg,” said Lua. “If you want to help yourself and help Eryandukter, schedule a visit to her every day for some exercises. She is learning *physical therapy*.” Lua repeated it slowly in English, then translated it

into Eryan. "This is the art of helping people recover the use of parts of their bodies. You will recover the use of your leg without her help, but she needs to practice on the staff because they can tell her what works and what does not, better than the patients can. Do you understand?"

"Yes, of course. I'll be glad to go to her." He liked Eryandukter and regretted she was married; indeed, regretted that all the female staff was either married or twice his age. He walked around the room a bit more. "So, my leg will recover completely?"

"Yes, completely. In fact, the bones will be stronger than they were."

"This is extraordinary. I've seen people with breaks like this. Either they hobbled around on crooked limbs that were almost useless, or they lost the leg completely!"

"Of course. They didn't have access to a hospital," replied Lua. "But now we do."

"Dr. Lua, you have given me a gift that I cannot repay. Right after the leg broke, I thought my life would probably be at an end, or at best I would be a cripple. But now . . . now . . . I'm not only whole, I'm a changed man." Tears began to course down both cheeks.

"It's alright, Soru. You are welcome. What more can I say; you said thank you, so I am saying you are welcome. If I ask for anything in return, it's that you give a gift of service to someone else. That's what we must do for each other."

He nodded. "Thank you. Thank you. I'll be at the break fast tonight at your house, too."

"You are always welcome there. I've seen you at a lot of Bahá'í events lately."

“I have made it to every break fast there, and a few here. I’ve even been fasting over the last few days. And I joined your grandmother’s class on Ruhi Book One and should have it finished in a few weeks.”

“Excellent! Have you declared your faith in Bahá’u’lláh, then?”

“No, I haven’t. I want to be sure first, Dr. Lua.”

“Good, you should not hurry. Pray.”

“I’ll pray for you, too,” added Aréjé.

“Thank you,” he replied. “Now I should probably walk around on this leg; I have to check the patients.”

Lua smiled. “They’ll all be very happy to see you without the cast.”

He nodded and hobbled out of the examining room while Dr. Lua and Aréjé headed into the next room, where a woman with a seriously infected cut on her right arm awaited them. He walked the hall and stopped at every patient, checking their bed pan, providing them with water, helping one woman get to the bathroom, chatting with an old man recovering from a serious infection caused by three abscessed teeth that had to be pulled. And he realized that not only was he extraordinarily lucky, but he also had a job that he loved. Who could have ever expected that to happen? It caused him to start praying spontaneously, and the Bahá’í Greatest Name Alláh-u-Abhá came out of his mouth rather than a hymn of Widumaj. That caused him to ponder as well.

By noontime his leg was pretty sore and tired. Since he was fasting, he spent his lunch hour napping. When he rose at 1:30 he made another quick round of the patients, then asked Stauréstú, who was now the physician on duty—Dr. Lua usually spent her

afternoons at Meddowakwés—whether he could go out. It being quiet, Stauréstu assented.

Soru had never walked more than fifty paces from the hospital before. He had lived in Melwika for two months and had no idea where anything was. So he headed out the hospital's front door, looked around, and decided to head uphill to get a view. He passed the Foundry and Steel Mill, their buildings ringing from the pounding of metal on metal and the roar of fast moving air. It was quite a climb to get to the summit of the hill and the effort made his leg quite sore. But the view at the old tower on top, next to the foundry's smoke stack, was spectacular. An irregular blanket of red roofing tile covered the hillslope all the way to the plain and up the hillside to the northwest. Ménwika, to the southwest, had bigger roofs—reflecting the wealth of its inhabitants—except for scattered blocks of apartment buildings built mostly by Estanu. The industrial parks stood out as well because the roofs tended to be rusty corrugated iron. Then there were the new eastern additions, which were mostly bare ground except for a network of concreted streets. Already scattered houses were appearing in them, as well as the engineering school, the gas tanks, and the water tank. He had heard everyone predicting that the additions would be built up in a year or two at most.

And once again it amazed him that he was *here*, with a functioning leg, a roof over his head, a warm bed, and a full stomach. It was a miracle. He looked westward over the town and spoke aloud, spontaneously, “Oh Esto, why have you done this to me? I am undeserved, a bad man . . .” And then it occurred to him that Bahá’u’lláh had done all these things for him. “Bahá’u’lláh, what do you want me to do?” he said. “Have you

rescued me so that I will do something for you? Am I supposed to accomplish some great thing in this world? What could it be?" He shook his head. That didn't make sense either. But he had an overwhelming feeling that, indeed, he had been rescued and was called for some accomplishment. Tears came to his eyes and flowed down his cheek in gratitude for a second chance at life. And then it occurred to him that at least he could pray. He turned west, toward Ora where he was born, toward the capital city, toward the Mennea home, and said the short Bahá'í obligatory prayer:

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the help in peril, the self-subsisting.

That seemed to help and bring closure to the feeling. He stared west and wondered what lay there for him in the future. Then he turned and started to limp back down the hillside to the hospital. He had to find Stauréstú or Aréjé and tell them that he was now a Bahá'í.

Three days later, the Bahá'í Fast and Ejnaménu ended with Bahá'í and Eryan New Years. At sunset the Bahá'í community of Melwika began to gather at their center near the college with food to break their fast. People kept arriving . . . and arriving. . . and arriving.

..

“There’s no room!” exclaimed Liz to Chris. “This is amazing!” looking at the wall to wall, standing room crowd.

“What’s our capacity? Two hundred?” asked Mary.

“We’ve definitely passed that!” said Chris. He glanced at the table with food. “There won’t be enough.”

“I’ll go to the women’s génadéma and call home,” said Liz. “I’ll get Korudé to whip up something fast.”

“No, she’s on her way here,” said Mary. “Chris and you should run down to Temple Square and buy bread and anything else that doesn’t need preparation.”

“Right,” Chris said. He looked around to see who else could go, then decided to do as grandmother said.

Just then Modolubu hurried up. “Six more declarations!” he said. “Unbelievable!”

“How many is that, now?” asked Liz. “Fifty. . . nine?”

“I think so,” said Mary. “And my two Ruhi classes have twenty-five, now, with a third class forming next week.”

“Added to the fifty Bahá’ís we had a year ago and the fifty who declared throughout the year, no wonder we’ve run out of space!” exclaimed Chris. “We’ll need to plan an addition.”

“We’ll need to double the size of this place!” replied Liz. “Let’s go, Chris.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll help Mary,” said Modolubu, apparently figuring out the problem.

Chris and Liz headed for the door, pushing through the crowd. Thornton and Lébé were just inside the door greeting people. “It’s too crowded in here,” said Chris to Thornton. “We can’t have more people in here. Get some students and haul over every chair you can from the nearest classrooms, and any portable lights as well. We’ll set them up outside.”

“Okay,” Thornton replied. “Can you greet?”

“Sure,” said Lébé. “And I’ll send any students I see over to the Humanities building.”

“We’ll probably have some theft,” warned Thornton.

“That’s alright, we need to be hospitable,” replied Chris.

Thornton nodded and followed his parents outside. There was already a small crowd standing outside, waiting to go in, and more were arriving by the minute. Skanda was beginning to throw a lot of light on the slightly cool evening and high, thin cirrus clouds promised to shed a twilight glow for at least an hour and a half, so conditions outside were not too bad for an outdoor party. A dozen electric lights would make the scene a bit exotic.

Thornton spotted a circle of students standing and chatting. They quickly assented to help and rounded up a few friends—farmers from Dëksawsupérakwa, including Chandu—who were nearby. As they all were walking to the Humanities Building, they saw a group of a half dozen men dressed in skins and feathers—Tutane—walking toward them. Several men froze, startled.

“It should be okay,” said Thornton, wondering who they were. But as they got closer he recognized Aku, a Bahá’í from Gordha. “Allah-u-Abhá Aku, son of Endrodatu!”

“You recognized me. Hail Dhoru of Mennéa!” The men moved toward each other more quickly and extended both hands to each other to shake.

“You are welcome. Are you here for the spring term?”
“Indeed, with my wife, three other men from Gordha, and we met these two good men of the Kaitere on the steam wagon. Perhaps you remember Magékeru, son of Lord Méneghues.”

“Yes, of course; hail Magékeru! How are you? We haven’t seen you here for two years.”

“Indeed, Lord Dhoru, it is good to see you again. Bélékwanu and I have come from Gimutroba to take courses here for both spring terms.”

“You are most welcome, also. How are things in Gimutroba? How was the winter snow?”

“Gimutroba never gets snow; that’s why it’s Gimutroba,” replied Magékeru. “Gimutroba” meant “winter huts” in standard Eryan, though in the Tutane dialect, “winter quarters” would be a better rendering. “It’s in the middle stretch of the valley, the warmest part. The eastern mountains were buried in snow; the western ones got less than usual. As for Gimutroba itself, we had a good winter school for children and adults. As usual, most of the tribe—about two thousand—gathered in the valley for the winter, but

we aren't a single settlement; it takes half a morning to ride from one end of the huts to the other. So I held classes in my father's house in the gathering room and Bélékwanu held classes farther north and east in his father's courtyard. We taught the numbers and letters to about two hundred boys and one hundred men."

"Excellent."

"There was a great increase in interest this year because the steam wagon was visiting regularly," added Bélékwanu. "Its size and noise was impressive, but more important was the link to the outside world it provided. Men and women were busy weaving woolen wear to sell and were buying soap, oranges, wine, and other things from around the world. But the newspapers were particularly interesting. Our adult classes were built around reading the articles, discussing them, and helping others puzzle them out."

"That's the way it is in Gordha as well," agreed Aku. "Our school was much bigger over the winter because the town swells so large, especially now that the pasture east of the ridge is getting drowned by the reservoir. Many people were reading the newspapers. The articles last month about the regional planning course triggered quite a discussion, especially since a group of us spent the winter reading *The Secret of Divine Civilization* in great detail. Lord Walékwes wants to create a regional development plan for the Meghendres."

"We, too, are interested in development," added Magékeru, not to be outdone by the other tribe. "The dhuba around Gimutroba is full of pieces of metal; let me show you." He grabbed a pouch at his belt and pulled it free, then opened it and pulled out

some shiny samples. Thornton took them; he could feel rough pieces of iron clinging to them magnetically. He examined them in the twilight.

“These are nickel-iron meteorite. They represent pieces of something that fell from the sky. How big is your dhuba?”

“As I said, half a morning’s ride; maybe twenty dökent north-south or east-west. It’s a round, wide area in the valley.”

“Interesting. Yes, it sounds like a dhuba, then.”

“Are these of any use?” persisted Magékéru.

“We’ll have to ask Yimu, who runs the foundry, or Amos. But I think they might be.” He looked around at the nervous students waiting with him. “My friends, we have an urgent task and maybe you can help us. The Bahá’í Center has so many people crowding into it, we need to set up an area outside with lights and chairs. Perhaps you can help? We can lock up your swords in my office, where they will be safe. Later, after the gathering, I can get you settled into rooms in the dormitory.”

“Lord, will my wife and I be able to share a room?” asked Aku. He pointed to his wife, who had been standing behind him.

“Yes, the hospital can provide you with space together. The dorms do not have adequate bathrooms to accommodate married couples.”

“We’re also getting very hungry; we want to break the fast soon,” added Aku.

“You were fasting on the trip?”

“Yes, of course; it’s not that long from Gordha. All four of us from Gordha are Bahá’ís. We were the core of the class studying *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. On the trip here we explained the fast to Magékéru and Bélékweru.”

“You are all welcome to come to the Bahá’í Center to celebrate,” repeated Thornton. “Then we’ll get you rooms.”

The next evening, dinner at the Mennea house was much smaller—to the relief of Agné and Korudé—only three guests were invited: Aku, his wife Kerbloré, and Soru. “So, how many Bahá’ís in Gordha?” asked Liz after they sat at the table to eat stew and bread.

“Eight,” replied Aku, with a smile. “We’ve had three declarations since fall when people settled in for the winter. We’ve been holding a weekly devotional program in our home, but that didn’t do much. When we offered a class on *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, though, that generated interest, because Gordha is very restless right now; the electric lights have really stirred a lot of thinking about *development* and *progress*. We had twenty-five reading and discussing the book together.”

“And many of the others are very interested,” added Kerbloré. “I think now the Ruhi Books will attract an audience.”

“Albékwu attended many of the classes, too,” added Aku. “As headman of the génadéma he couldn’t express interest in the Faith, but he quietly listened, commented sometimes, and absorbed the ideas. And he has been talking to Walékwës; the Lord asked me about the passages about consultation with the people.”

“Really?” said Chris, surprised.

“Yes, but that isn’t so surprising; we Tutane are a very independent people and we often make decisions in *kowokwas*.” He used a word that meant “talking together.”

“How big are these *kowokwas*?” asked Chris.

Aku shrugged. “It depends. Walékwas usually convenes one every year and invites the heads of clans, but once or twice he has convened a *kowokwa* of all men at Gordha. He convened one of them last year to discuss the dam. It was essential to get support for drowning the eastern meadows.”

“I heard about that,” agreed Chris.

“We’re close to electing a local spiritual assembly,” continued Aku. “One of the interested ones is the second son of the second priest at the Kwétrua. What should our attitude be toward the *jér segi*? ”

His use of “old customs” puzzled Chris at first. “You mean the old gods and ways of worshiping them, before Widumaj?” Chris asked, to make sure he understood. He paused to consider. “As I understand it, the gods Werano, Endro, and Mitro are *very* old; they are found in the legends on Gedhéma. Why should we not assume that Esto sent a widu who taught hymns about them?”

Aku nodded. “Yes, that is the Bahá’í way; look at the positive and not assume the negative. Now, what about equality of men and women? What does that mean?”

Chris smiled; it was the most common question the Eryan asked, as it was an idea that was both shocking and a little attractive. “It means we gradually move toward a new relationship between men and women, one based on fairness and equal respect.”

“Gradual, dad?” asked May.

“The Eryan must determine how they will define equality,” injected Liz. “Men and women can both vote to choose the members of the spiritual assemblies, and both men and women can be voted for, but that does not mean men and women must be elected right away. Women are not comfortable with a change in their status either; they are not ready for a sudden change in their status. Men must help them, strengthen them to take on new roles and responsibilities.”

“Like your widows?” asked Kerbloré. “Because I would like to set up a widow’s group in Gordha. I have been sent here by Lord Walékwès to get medical training; women badly need access to better medicine. But we have many widows also, and they need things to do.”

“Not just the widows,” replied Liz. “All women tire of just taking care of the house and raising the children. They need some time to make other contributions to their tribes and villages, because their loving hearts, their patience, their ability to serve, their cleverness, are all badly needed. That’s part of equality as well; women have contributions to make.”

“I suppose that’s true,” exclaimed Kerbloré; it had not occurred to her to think that way.

The idea surprised Soru as well. “Are you saying women could work?”

“Indeed,” replied Liz. “But it depends on each woman, each couple. Many women don’t want to work; they are happy with the responsibilities they already have. But Dr.

Lua works, and thank Esto she does; she heals many people. Yet she also has two children.”

He nodded, understanding. “I have another question. This is based on something I heard at the Naw-Rúz party last night. What should someone do if they know of someone who has committed a crime and gotten away with it?”

“We certainly should not condone or encourage breaking the law,” said Chris. “If someone has hurt someone or stolen something and one knows about it, one probably should tell someone who is maintaining the law; a Lord, a judge, an army officer, etc.”

“Of course, many times there is no justice here,” said Soru.

“Very true, but we need to help justice become stronger.”

Soru looked down and nodded, feeling shattered. But just then the telephone in Chris’s office rang. “Excuse me,” he said and he rose from the table. A call was unusual; demand for telephones had not been strong. The family only got three or four per day. He hurried to the phone and picked it up. “Hello?”

“Lord Kristoféru, this is Lubésé.” She was the town’s telephone operator. “I thought I should call you and let you know that I just got a call from the technicians working on the telephone line west of Tripola. They have connected the two shores together and they’re testing it right now.”

“Really? I’ll be right down! Thank you.” He hung up and headed back out to the dining table. “I’m running over to the telephone operators. Amos, you might want to come along. They’re connecting the shores together.”

“Really? I’m coming!” Amos jumped up, leaving half a plate of uneaten food.

“Don’t worry, we’ll be back.”

“Don’t take too long!” objected Liz.

The men headed straight to the door; it was chilly, but the walk wasn’t that far.

“Finally,” mumbled Amos as they headed out.

“I know. Five months too late and twenty thousand dhanay over budget. It’ll take years to pay this off.”

“Depending on the amount of power the lines ship back and forth. At least the spring melt has started.”

“Yes, that takes pressure off our dams.”

They hurried across the street and down hill fifty paces to the hospital, where the town’s switchboard was located. Lubésé was just inside the door where she doubled as the hospital’s receptionist, though the switchboard was now taking most of her time. As they entered she was sitting in front of her switchboard, which was covered by a spaghetti of wires connecting phones together. In front of her was one of Meddwogluba’s new clocks, which had a second hand. Along the right side of the switchboard was a long piece of paper and a pencil with which she could write down the originating number, starting time, and ending time for all long distance calls; they cost one dhanay per fifteen minutes, and a series of calls in one day could be added up to a single fifteen minute time block. Since the Royal Road came to the capital from the south shore via Mélwika, she now controlled the area’s long distance service.

“Listen there,” she whispered, pointing to a nearby phone. She grabbed a cord and plugged the phone into the long distance jack. Amos picked up the phone and Chris listened in. “Hello again, Ora, can you repeat?”

“Ora here,” replied a woman, and she began to count from one to ten.

“Thank you. Meddwoglubas, could you hang up now? Ora, repeat again, please.”

There was a click as the Meddwoglubas operator got off the line and the Ora voice repeated, now much louder. “Excellent, Ora, now please connect me to Néfa, please.”

“Right away.” A click and a pause. “Néfa here,” said a man in a crisp Néfa accent.

“Néfa, this is Mélwika, testing the new telephone connection. Can you hear me clearly?”

“Yes, I can, Mélwika. This is a wire connection?”

“It is indeed. You are faint, Néfa. Ora, could you hang up now? Néfa, could you count to ten, please.”

They waited for Ora’s operator to hang up, then the man counted. He was a bit faint, but easy enough to hear.

“Thank you,” said Lubésé.

“Néfa operator, this is Amos Keino. You are pretty clear. Can you stay on the line while we connect to Meddoakwés?”

“Certainly, but I will have to make an occasional connection.”

“Understood.” Amos nodded to Lubésé, who called the capital’s switchboard. She asked the operator there to speak to Néfa, and they all could hear each other reasonably

well. “Operator, could you connect this to General Roktēkēst̄ or his office?” asked Amos.

“One minute,” she replied. The M̄eddoakw̄és operator was actually located in the Palace, and thus was able to connect all the telephones there—a total of six—to the outside world in a private way.

“General Roktēkēst̄’s office, this is Sérantu.”

Amos smiled; Sérantu, the General’s chief of staff, had taken many courses at the génadēma. “Good evening Sérantu, this is Amos. I’m calling from M̄elwika. The telephone lines have now been connected near Tripola and I have Néfa on the line as well. We thought General Roktēkēst̄ would like to know.”

“Yes, Honored Amos, thank you for calling! This is excellent news; I’ll get the General!” Sérantu didn’t go far; they could hear him calling “General! General!” in the background. Roktēkēst̄’s office was at home, only a few steps from the dinner table.

There was a rustling sound over the phone as Roktēkēst̄ picked up the receiver. “Honored Amos, are you in Néfa?”

“No, General, in M̄elwika, but we have Néfa on the line, and the call did not go over the cellular telephone link; the wire line is now completed.”

“Néfa here,” exclaimed the operator at the other end.

“Praise be Esto, I hear you, Néfa!”

“Néfa, can you count from one to ten so the general can hear you?” asked Amos. The man counted, and then Roktēkēst̄ exclaimed, “Loud and clear! I hear him well, praise be to Esto! When will service start?”

“I think it has,” replied Amos. “Engineers, are you still on the line? What more do you have to do?”

“This is Rudhkrisu. The telephone line is finished, so service on it can begin now. The electric lines will take another two hours to connect, then we have to tell the people at Endraida and Weranopéla to throw the breakers and connect them, because right now this stretch is dead so we can work on it. Then we plan to head back to Melwika and get drunk.”

Amos laughed. “You are free to take some time off; you have done excellent work.”

“So, are you taking back the cellular telephone in Tripola?” asked Roktkester. “Because I think we’d favor a connection for Isurdhuna. Her Majesty was complaining yesterday that we can’t call the holy city.”

“General, this is Chris. We can continue to loan the cellular telephone to the telephone company, but Isurdhuna doesn’t have much of a phone system.”

“I’ll tell Estoiyaju, and I am sure he will send a letter on her behalf, and Honored Amos will receive a request from Lord Gnoskéstu in a week or so.”

“You have the other spare radio in Belledha, right?” asked Chris.

“Yes, and I suppose the logical question for you to ask is whether it will be used for civilian communications. Yes, it will be. Of course, at the moment the city has neither telephone wires nor a switchboard.”

“Understood.” Chris looked at Amos, who sensed where Chris’s thoughts were going and nodded. Chris said, “General, we’ll donate a used switchboard and some wire to Belledha, and I will personally donate five thousand dhanay to building a new génadema that is not part of Lord Sondanu’s palace. The génadema will house the telephone system as well.”

Roktkester paused to consider the idea, and one could almost see him smiling. “You are very generous, Lord Mennea. I will inform Her Majesty of your gift. The army will guarantee the safety of the génadema and of the steam wagon cutting and hauling timber.”

“Thank you, Lord General, you are generous. Are you planning to come to Melwika tomorrow to witness the first tests on the glider?”

“Oh, is it being tested tomorrow? I was not aware. I doubt I can make it. But please keep me informed; it is very significant.”

“We will. We should probably close this line now so it can start making money for us. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye,” replied a chorus of voices.

Amos hung up the phone. “Five thousand? That is generous, especially this time of year.”

“Well, we have it to spare. I sensed that Roktkester was in a very good mood; it was an impulse. Aniu doesn’t want to go back to Belledha any time soon, so it’s time for a new head of the génadema there. Ékwégéndu is the logical choice; his interests match the city’s needs and he’s ready for the responsibility. If we pay for the génadema, it won’t

be dependent on Spondanu, and cutting timber for it can jump start some construction in the city because people will use some of their earnings to buy wood.”

“That’s true.”

Amos took the next day off from classes and administration of the engineering school and the telephone company in order to focus on the glider. Chris stopped by for part of the afternoon after a strenuous day of driving all over Ménwika to see how the farm work was going and help resolve the numerous, frustrating bottlenecks. Thornton found a substitute teacher for his courses to help as well.

Getting the glider out of the construction workshop and the city was the first challenge. The wings were too flimsy to allow one to pull the glider from the end of one of them, so the whole thing had to be placed on a wheeled cart and carefully pushed sideways by hand by a team of volunteers, mostly curious students. The fifteen-meter long object obviously was meant for flying—anyone could recognize the wings as wings—so a crowd soon followed along.

It was barely possible to push the glider down the alleys and streets to the gate. The city’s south gate was seven meters wide and the length of the fuselage was eight and a half, but in anticipation of the problem, a hinge had been included in the tail. The crowd cheered as they managed to get the glider out of the gate. The team slowly pushed the aircraft westward until they had crossed the southward running Royal Road, with its beautifully smooth concrete surface but its dangerous power and telephone lines. A graveled road leading to the farms westward along the Péskakwés had been chosen as the

runway for testing. Its surface had been smoothed and refreshed with small stones just a few days earlier.

Amos and Thornton got in a rover and attached a sixty-meter rope to the glider. Okpétu climbed into the cockpit, which was a rather simple affair; the canopy was a simple frame of thin metal pipes covered with thick cellophane that Behruz had been able to make. Several students stood around the glider to keep people away; it was a flimsy structure of copper and steel pipe and bamboo covered by material from the parachutes the aliens used to drop supplies, which was very tough, thin, light in weight, and white in color; it turns out one could sew it together fairly well, so much of the effort to construct the glider involved hours of sewing with strong thread.

Chris, in the other rover, drove two kilometers down the road and made sure there was no one riding, walking, or driving up it, then blew his horn loudly to indicate all clear. Amos, in the back seat, looked at Okpétu and waved. “Okay, he gave thumbs up,” he said to Thornton. “Let’s start forward and slowly accelerate to twenty kilometers per hour.”

“Okay,” said Thornton. He put the rover in gear and moved forward very slowly until he could feel the tow line tighten. It was hard to tell when he was pulling the glider because it weighed only 300 kilograms, including Okpétu. He glanced at the rear view mirror often, but Amos kept saying “good, good.”

“We’re at twenty kilometers per hour.”

“He’s bouncing a lot. Speed up gradually until she’s airborne; I’ll tell you when.”

“Got it.” Thornton slowly put his foot on the gas and watched the speedometer, the road ahead, and the rear view mirror. When they reached almost fifty kilometers per hour, Amos said “That’s it, he’s up! Hold this speed!”

“What’s he doing?”

“Learning how to keep the wings level; he’s oscillating a bit! Be careful, Okpétu! Okay, that’s better. . . just hold this speed.”

“We’ve got about a minute and a half before we reach the far end, remember!”

“I know. Hold onto this speed, he’s learning.”

“Okay.” Thornton kept the speed steady. He could see Okpétu going up and down a bit as well, either because of wind or, more likely, because he was practicing with the flaps. Then suddenly the pull lessened.

“Keep going!” said Amos. “He pulled the lever and released the tow rope. I think he just wants to experiment.”

“My God, he really is flying the thing,” said Thornton, amazed.

The glider didn’t go up much, though; it was only ten meters above the ground and slowly sank back down. Okpétu struggled to steer and keep himself over the road, and soon found himself drifting over the fallow field to the left of the road. He came down fairly gently on the field.

“Wow, he was aloft for about thirty seconds!” exclaimed Amos. “Drive over to him.”

“Okay!” Thornton felt the excitement as well. He slowed, steered off the road and onto the field, and headed back to the glider.

Okpétu slowly opened the canopy. His face was white. The rover drove up and Amos jumped out. “Congratulations, you just flew!”

“I know. It was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time! It’s *hard* to control where you’re going; very hard! And when I started to come down I realize that I could crash!”

“The landing looked good to me.”

“It was. I bounced a bit, but I did the right thing landing, I think.” He climbed out of the glider and walked around it, inspecting it for any damage and trying to calm his nerves.

Chris drove up. “Wow! Incredible! An historic day!”

“Was it?” asked Okpétu. “Well, yes, I guess it was.”

“Okpétu, you’re the first Eryan in history *to fly!*” said Chris.

“The variometer worked pretty well, but I really wasn’t in the air long enough to get a sense of what it was telling me.”

That stray comment made Thornton chuckle. Clearly, Okpétu was so overwhelmed that he was disoriented. “Do you want another flight?” asked Amos.

Okpétu looked at the glider. “No, not today. It was too frightening. I need to calm my nerves and think about what I experienced first!”

Chris looked at the crowd racing down the road toward them. “Just as well, we have a very excited crowd on its way and we’ll have to deal with them!”

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Miracles

Soru was curious to see who the newly admitted patient to the hospital was. He was working his way down the hallway, checking on everyone, providing them with water or minor assistance, chatting with them and sometimes family members, when he could hear a patient being placed in room 8. The voice was high; it was probably a young girl, though the sounds were more animal-like than human and conveyed the impression of anxiety. A deeper woman's voice was coming from the room as well; presumably the mother. She was talking to Dr. Lua. Then their voices retreated down the hall and the girl's voice switched to a quiet moan.

That speeded up his curiosity; he didn't like to hear someone suffering. He stopped into room ten quickly to make sure the young mother who had had a very difficult labor was alright; she was asleep, so he was able to hurry to room eight.

The girl looked up with fear in her eyes when he appeared in her doorway. She seemed to be about ten; her right arm was heavily bandaged and the bandages were already turning yellow with puss. A bad infection, apparently. The girl did not have an intravenous in her arm, but then he saw that she had a small wound where one belonged; perhaps they had tried.

“Can I be of any help to you, dear?” he asked. That didn't produce a response, so he moved a bit closer, and that generated anxiety, expressed in terms of moaning sounds. “I'm sorry, I mean you no harm. I'm not trying to frighten you.” He retreated a bit,

wondering whether he should talk to Eryandukter, the nurse on duty, for his friends Aréjé and Stauréstú had returned to Mædowglubas until the fall. The girl opened her mouth and uttered a series of sounds that sounded a bit like talking, but they were indistinct; they weren't quite letter sounds. And that reminded him of the indistinct syllables his father, who had been deaf since adolescence, had made. "Can you hear me?" he asked, clearly, loudly, moving his lips distinctly.

No response. He repeated himself; no response. So he walked back to room ten where there was a pitcher of water, poured a cup full, and returned with it.

"Do you want to drink?" He held up the glass, but made the motion to scoop water with his hand and bring it to his mouth. She looked at him, then the mug, then nodded. He had connected. He approached slowly with the cup, put it down within her reach, then retreated back to the door.

The girl looked at him warily, then took it and drank. He smiled and she smiled back shyly.

"My name is Soru." He formed his right hand into a sign that his father had invented for "antelope"—for that was what Soru meant—with his index finger pointed upward like a horn and the other four fingers pointed downward like four legs, touched the sign to his chest, and made the hand gallop in front of himself. She smiled and made the sign as well; he could tell that she used gestures to communicate a bit. He nodded and pointed at her. That startled her; she did not have a sign for herself. So he smiled again.

“More water?” He pointed to the mug and made a drinking sign again. She nodded, so he went and got more. By then, Dr. Lua and the mother were returning, talking as they approached. They had gone to Lua’s office to sit briefly.

“Are you sure you can’t do something about her deafness?” the mother was asking. “Now we can make a man fly, and we can’t cure deafness? And your healing skills are legendary, Dr. Lua. My close friend, Okwané, her daughter came her over the winter suffering from terrible, terrible pains. You and Dr. Stauréstu operated on her and she left here a week later, fully recovered. Okwané was sure she would die.”

“I remember. She had appendicitis, so we removed her appendix. But your daughter’s hearing is almost certainly gone forever; you said she had a terrible fever when she was two? That is the most common cause of deafness I’ve seen here. It is irreversible.”

“I see.” The mother was disappointed. They reached the room and started to enter; the mother was about thirty years old and dressed in very expensive robes. When she saw Soru she was startled. “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“This is Soru; he helps take care of the patients,” explained Lua. “Soru, this girl will require extra care. She has a severely infected arm and she is deaf, so we can’t explain to her what we have to do.”

“Yes, I know she is deaf; my father was as well, so I recognized it in her right away.”

The mother looked at her daughter’s calm face. “You have managed to calm her, Soru; that is not an easy thing to accomplish. I am surprised.”

“I asked her whether she wanted water and gave her two glasses. She was quite thirsty.”

“What do you mean, you asked her?”

“Like this. It was how my father communicated.” He repeated the gestures. “My father even gave me a gesture-name.” And he showed them the finger-antelope.

Lua smiled. “I’m relieved to see you can help with her. In the emergency room, she fought with the nurses and pulled out the i.v. We had to force a pill down her throat.”

“I was wondering about that. I could see from the bandages that she has a very serious infection.”

“She got cut at home; she refused to obey us and we had quite a tussle,” said the mother.

“What’s her name?” asked Soru.

“Wiressé,” replied the mother. “And I am Smiré.”

“Wiressé.” Soru thought about it, then raised his hand so that it was vertical, formed his fingers into a circle of petals, and rocked it slowly in an arc like it was following the sun; a wiressé or sunflower.

Lua smiled again. “Very good. You have a knack!”

“Sometimes it helped us communicate with father. He could talk; he went deaf when he was a teenager. But he couldn’t hear or understand us, so we had to use gestures to respond.”

“I have used a few with her, but she doesn’t understand usually.”

“Maybe I can help her,” he said.

“You know, Soru, maybe you should learn more signs,” said Lua. “On Gedhéma there was an entire sign language for the deaf. It had hundreds of signs; it was very sophisticated. They even signed poetry and songs.”

“Really?” he said. “How could I learn it?”

“That will be hard because you don’t know English. But Estodatu could help you; he can translate anything, and he can use the computer to find the information for you.”

“Who’s Estodatu?”

“One of the génadéma’s teachers, of English and of Translation. He’s incredible. Here, I’ll write it down a note for you.” She pulled out the little pad and pencil she always carried around with her and jotted down a note, partly in Eryan, partly in English, then handed it to him. Soru looked at it; he could read the Eryan slowly, but the English was baffling, except for the vowel letters.

“Thank you. I’ll go look for him after I finish my rounds in a few minutes.”

“That’s fine. I suspect Smiré will be glad to have you around, because when she is absent her daughter gets pretty agitated; this is a strange place for her. But you managed to calm her.”

“I understand deafness a bit. I’ll look into this right away.”

“Thank you, Soru,” added Smiré. She looked at the young man, obviously of “low” birth, with some grudging respect.

He noticed her change of reaction toward him as he walked out of the room. He wasn’t sure why he wanted to try to teach the girl sign language; perhaps because he sorely missed his father, who had died just seven years earlier, when Soru was fifteen.

The fever that had taken away his father's hearing when his father was also fifteen was common enough and Soru had feared getting it. It was a chance to do something to remember his father, who had been only 32 when he had died from an outbreak of pelui; a chance to battle the disease a bit and get back at it; and, he sensed, a chance to do something he would enjoy. He hurried through the rest of his round of the rooms, then picked up the note Lua had written, headed out the door, and ran as fast as he could to Estodatu's office in the Humanities Building. He ran so fast, he surprised himself; this was *important* to him.

His office wasn't hard to find. Estodatu was in. The room and its chief resident smelled of stale wine. Soru greeted him and handed him the note. Estodatu ignored Soru's explanation; he looked over the young man in a way that made Soru uncomfortable, then read what Lua wrote.

“Sign language for the deaf, huh?” He thought about it. “She says it was called ‘American Sign Language.’”

“What's ‘American’?” asked Soru.

“It's a place on Gedhéma; a very important and powerful place, too. Okay, let's go take a look. Follow me.” Estodatu rose and led Soru out of the office and down the hall to the computer room. One computer was always at the Mennea house, but the other was always in its own room in the Humanities Building. A student was in the room, busily running the printer, which rarely rested. At the moment it was spitting out the pages of an anatomy book; the illustrations had been transferred to a file by a student who knew the computer well and the English text replaced by an Eryan translation by Estodatu, who

translated everything with incredible speed and ease. Estodatu sat in front of the computer and Googled “American Sign Language.”

“Oh, you’re in luck; here’s some video.”

“What’s that?”

“You’ll see.” Estodatu did some clicking and the images on the screen changed. He read aloud the English text in Eryan as he went with a speed that amazed Soru. When he clicked on one of the first signs in the dictionary, Soru was shocked and amazed to see a little picture of someone making the sign.

“This thing has pictures in it?!”

“Not just pictures; moving pictures! You should come some Suksdiu evening. We gather about twenty people around this thing and play a ‘movie’; it’s a one or two hour thing, like a play, with people acting out different parts, and you get to see pictures of parts of Gedhéma, and I translate the whole thing aloud.”

“Really? What sorts of plays?”

“Everything; love stories, adventure, funny things. . . everything. Maybe some day if we can figure out how to, we’ll take a ‘movie’ and add written translations under the moving pictures. But never mind. Let’s concentrate on this. You’ll have to spend a lot of hours here watching and learning signs, if you want to be able to use them. You’ll have to learn how to read English letters too. I can always write a translation of all these terms into Eryan, but if you don’t know the letters it won’t help.” He clicked on a few of the signs and they watched while he translated the English description of each one.

“The descriptions use only ten or twenty words, I think, like ‘right hand’ and ‘left hand’ and ‘move up,’” Soru observed.

“Yes, you can probably learn a limited amount of English vocabulary and manage pretty well. I really don’t have time to help you with this very much, but I’m teaching an Introduction to English course and have six students in it. I bet one of them could help you.”

“Could I take the course?”

“Maybe; we’ll have to talk to some people about that. It meets 9 to 10 bells every morning except the first and last days of the week.”

“I think Dr. Lua would let me do that.”

“How well can you read?”

“Some. I just started to learn a few months ago.”

“Maybe you can sit in on the class. You don’t need to learn all of English, after all, just the English you need for this project.” Estodatu looked at the student sitting in the room, studying. “Trisunu, you took English 1. Can you help him with this?”

“Sure, it sounds like pretty simple English. I think I can handle it.”

“You’re being paid to run the printer already.”

“Yes, but I’m also trying to study!”

“Well, study a little less. I have to get back to my translating.” He turned to Soru. “Trisunu can help you. Good luck.”

“Thank you!”

Ornéstu came out of Melwika School soon after twelve bells sounded at the Foundry.

With him was Albé, his administrative assistant, who helped run the school in his absence and often served as substitute teacher when a regular was sick. They came out of the main entrance, which opened onto Foundary Square, which as usual was noisy with steam wagons moving iron, coal, limestone, wood, and other commodities. As soon as they stepped out the door, they found a steam wagon parked in front of them.

“We can squeeze by,” said Albé, pointed to a narrow path between the vehicle and the Miller house.

Ornéstu shook his head. “No, that thing might exhaust steam out one of the cylinders and scald our legs! I hate these big things. I’ll have to talk to Lord Miller, he said he’d put up barriers to keep them parking so close to the door.”

“They’re so noisy, too; it’s hard on the classes.”

“I know. Let’s go out the other door instead.”

She nodded and they went back inside and down the corridor past four pairs of classrooms, then down one flight of stairs to the back entrance. Since the building was built into the hillside along the north side of the Miller house, both floors had their own entrances; a wise precaution in case of fire.

They stepped out the back entrance and faced yet another parked steam wagon. “At least the engine seems to be turned off,” he grumbled. “Miller has to make a parking lot for these things somewhere.”

“Too many things are happening in too little space,” she agreed. She pointed to the construction that was adding two more pairs of classrooms to the school, and three

floors of them instead of two. “The construction’s pretty noisy, too. The little ones can’t take their naps.”

“Even shifting their nap to lunch hour?”

“That has helped.”

“Well, once these classrooms are done, we won’t be adding more classrooms to the school for a long time.”

“How are the plans for the high school?”

“The foundation is looking good and when I visited this morning the foreman said he’d have the walls up in three months. So it’s moving along. While I was over in Ménwika I searched for stray kids, so we don’t have to walk that part of the city today.”

“Find any?”

“One mother was out with a six or seven year old. They had just moved into town; unusual, to find arrivals with kids. I told her about the school and asked her to come by and visit any time, but reminded her that the city has made education compulsory for ages six through thirteen.”

“But it hasn’t!”

“Never mind.” He smiled. “I said it was ‘virtually compulsory,’ actually, and that’s true. Are the third grade teachers still planning to meet after school?”

“Yes, and they want you there. They know the reading and math books will be used by older kids in the villages.”

“Older kids? How about teenagers, even adults! For that matter, a village that has the third grade curriculum but not the first and second grades’ will use it with younger

kids! But we shouldn't worry about that too much because we can't accommodate everyone, and we won't be able to revise for a long time. Modolubu will give us the plates so that we can order reprints."

"The fifth grade teachers and even the sixth grade teacher are still pushing to systematize their lessons as well."

"I know. We have money through fourth grade this year, but I'm still hoping to get some time with the Consultative Assembly when they meet and I'll *beg, beg* for money to print curriculum materials through sixth grade. If we can get that done, it'll revolutionize the village schools."

"Assuming money to buy the materials is also authorized!"

"I know. But even without, a few villages will buy a pile of texts and a lot will at least buy one or two, and make the kids copy the texts onto their own pieces of paper; if they can get paper, anyway."

They turned left and started up hill by East Gate. They passed through East Gate and into Citadel Square. A passenger steam wagon was just leaving; they hurried through the gate to get out of its way. They had to walk into the square farther than usual, because their destination—the entrance to the citadel—was on the right, and they had walked into the square on their left. The passenger wagon passed through the gate and they turned to the citadel door to find the two soldiers who would help them comb the town for kids not attending school; they couldn't force them, but they could exhort. The soldiers were scheduled to make their police beat around town, anyway. But before they could walk to

the citadel, Ornéstu spotted a boy leaning against the outside of the genadëma's classroom building, crying. He was perhaps nine or ten. Ornéstu walked over to him.

“Are you alright? Are you lost?”

The boy looked up at him. His eyes were red from crying. “My aunt is supposed to be waiting here for me!”

“Oh? What's her name?”

“Mitré.”

That was a very common name. “Do you know her family name? Her mother's or father's name? Her village, her husband?”

He thought. “My grandfather was named Primu. I don't know Mitré is married; mom said she lived here in Mélwika, so she put me on the steam wagon.”

“From where?”

“We live in Boléripura; it's half a day's walk from Néfa.”

“You came all the way here from Néfa on the steam wagon? Are you hungry?”

He nodded and tears came to his eyes.

“When did you eat last?”

“Three days ago.”

“You poor boy. What's your name?”

“Primantu.”

“Alright, Primantu. You and I will walk over to the school, where the kids are eating lunch. You can eat lunch there and sit in a classroom with the other kids your age

until the end of the afternoon. I'll ask the soldiers here to look for your aunt, and I'll ask around for her. Don't worry, we'll find her, and you'll be in a safe place. Alright?"

Primanu looked at him tentatively. "Alright."

"Did your aunt Mitré just arrive here, or has she been here for a while?"

He paused. "I don't know. I don't remember her. I thought she died of pelui in Néfa a few years ago."

That worried Ornéstu. "Let's not worry about looking for kids who should be in school today; I think we found one," he said to Albé.

"I'll take him to the school while you check with the soldiers," she replied.

"Wait until we talk to the soldiers." He led the three of them to the entrance of the citadel, where two soldiers were standing and watching. "When did this boy arrive?" he asked them.

"I think he was on the steam wagon that just left the square," replied one soldier. "He wasn't there before then. It was the western shore wagon."

"Now? It's due after 4 bells."

"It was due after 4 bells *yesterday*. I think I heard someone complaining about mechanical problems at Belledha."

"I see. This is Primanu from Boléripura, a village half a day's walk from Néfa. The steam wagon just left him here. His aunt, Mitré, is supposed to meet him. We're taking him to the school to have lunch because he hasn't eaten anything at all for three days. Does that name ring a bell?"

The soldier shrugged. “I’m from Néfa, and I’ve never met anyone in Melwika from Boléripura. Mitré’s a very common name.”

“Ask around, okay?”

“Sure. But Boléripura’s getting flooded by the sea right now. People are moving to Néfa. There are some in Meddoakwés, too.”

“Ask around and let me know if you learn anything.”

“Sure.” He looked at Primanu. “Boy, you’re lucky Ornéstu has found you, because he’ll take care of you.”

“Thank you, sir,” the boy said, a bit shy and frightened.

The soldier smiled. Ornéstu said thank you and they headed across Citadel Square. When they reached the Flower Court, Ornéstu entered the town hall while Albé took the kid to the school. She told him about the sights around them as they walked, to help make him comfortable.

Ornéstu headed inside town hall and straight to Wéranolubu’s office. He was talking to his assistant, Walu, a big man who was indeed strong, as suggested by his name. “Hail, Honoreds,” he began, and rather than wait for the usual polite smalltalk, he said, “Do either of you know of a Mitré here in town from a village named Boléripura, which is on the new seashore a half day’s walk from Néfa?”

Wéranolubu and Walu looked at each other, then shook their heads. “She could be here, though. Did she just arrive this spring?”

“I don’t think so. In fact, I wonder whether it’s a story. I just ran into a boy about ten years old in Citadel Square, crying. He had just gotten off the Néfa steam wagon. His

mom put him on it three days ago and said aunt Mitré would meet him. We're taking the boy to the school for lunch."

"Good, he's safe there," said Weranolubu. "Kids get abandoned all the time, as you know."

"I've never heard of a kid being put on a steam wagon, though!" said Walu.

"It's a new way to abandon them," replied Weranolubu. "Two dhanay and they're gone. We better talk to Mitru; he should alert his drivers."

"I think I'll call Kérdu," said Ornесту. "He and Sareidukter know all the families in the Grange; all of them. If they don't know of a Mitré from Boléripura, I'd worry. And they would know couples who'd be willing to take in a ten year old."

"Insist he go to school too."

"Of course! He can eat at school, so it won't cost them that much, and he can work for them."

"Check Modanu, too," suggested Walu, pointing to the post office across the hall. "He might know if any letters addressed to a Mitré have arrived."

"And check with Wokwéstу," added Weranolubu. "As génadema registrar, he will know if anyone from Boléripura has even taken courses in the génadema, so he might know if there's a school teacher in the village. If there is, you can send a letter."

"I have never heard of a school there, and the place is being flooded, so I suspect the village is being abandoned. Thanks for the ideas, I'll pursue all of them." He nodded goodbye and headed across the hall. Modanu knew of no one named Mitré from Boléripura, so Ornесту used his phone to call the grange, where Sareidukter also didn't

know of anyone of that name, though she did know someone who could take in the boy. He promised to bring the boy to the grange after school and headed back to the school to see how Primantu was doing.

As soon as he stepped outside, he looked up and saw the glider flying over town, making a big, slow circle over the red roofs. He was a bit thankful Primantu didn't see it; the boy could absorb only so many new sights in one day.

Much of the town, however, paused in its tasks to look up and watch Okpétu ride the thermal created by the city's red roofs. Soru was crossing Temple Square when the glider flew over, just fifty meters overhead. He had just left the Humanities Building, where he had taken the English class and spent two and a half hours on the computer learning signs. Even though he was in a hurry to get back to the hospital—he had some ideas how to teach them to the little girl, who was excitedly learning them—he stopped to watch, like everyone else.

“Amazing, isn’t it?” It was Gwiwēru, a professor of physics and meteorology at the génadēma in Meddoakwés. Soru had met him the day before and had been impressed by the man’s passion for science.

“How does it work?” asked Soru, baffled.

“Well, the weight—the mass, to be exact—has to be as little as possible, and it has to find rising air and ride the air upward. Air rises because it is heated and the roofs are darker than the ground, so air over the city is warmer and rises. Also, horizontal winds are forced up when they encounter a mountain, and right now the wind is blowing westward and hitting city hill, so that forces the air upward right here as well. The trick is

to use the updrafts, because the glider, unlike a bird, cannot flap its wings.” He pointed to a little speck. “You see that hawk? It’s doing the same thing.”

“But sometimes it flaps its wings.”

“For control. Okpétu can pull levers to change the way wind flows over the wings to steer. It doesn’t give lift, though.”

“But how can it get up, then?”

“It has to be towed by a rover to a fast enough speed to get up. Then the pilot has to be very, very clever. Yesterday Okpétu couldn’t find an updraft and came down in a field.”

Soru shook his head. “Amazing.”

Gwiwéru smiled and nodded. Then he turned and headed for the génadéma. Soru watched the glider soar toward city hill, then spiral upward.

He felt someone bump into him. He turned to look at a cleanshaven man with very short-cut hair, wearing a long knee-length shirt, a common worker’s outfit. He frowned, not recognizing the man whose bobbed blondish hair was unusual, who was looking at him closely. Then he smiled.

“You don’t recognize me. Good.”

“Lujékwu. I recognize your voice.”

“I can’t change that.” He looked down at Soru’s bare legs. “So, you didn’t lose it. I thought you’d be dead for sure.”

“The new medicine. The steam wagon took me straight to the hospital. My leg is almost back to normal.”

“You’re lucky. So, you have a job?” He fingered Soru’s toga. “You look like one of those génadéma boys.”

“I’m working at part of the génadéma.” That was a true enough, he figured, and would keep Lukékwu away.

“How’d you manage that?”

Soru shrugged. “Esto provides.”

“Well, you’re smart enough.”

“What are you doing?”

“Odd jobs,” Lujékwu replied, mysteriously. “Did you hear what happened to us?”

“I guess the army caught up with you.”

“You could say that!” Lujékwu shook his head. “They slaughtered us.”

“How many escaped?”

“Skita! Maybe five or six of us.”

“That’s pretty bad. Well, this is a good place to be; a lot of strangers in one place, people don’t know each other. Lots of land to farm, lots of factory jobs—”

Lujékwu laughed. “You think I’m going to be a dirt farmer? And those factory jobs. . . you have to work *hard!* No thanks. There are better ways to earn a living.”

“Indeed there are. You’re smart, Lujékwu. I think you’d like the new knowledge.”

He scowled. “No thanks, génadéma boy.”

Soru shrugged. “Suit yourself. Good luck, Lujékwu.”

“Hey, you, too.” Lujékwu hesitated in saying it; no doubt he was hoping Soru would help him commit crimes. Soru headed eastward on the Péskakwés Rodha, the

exact opposite direction he wanted to go, then walked through the Engineering School, westward across campus, and back to the hospital, hoping Lujékwu wasn't following. One thing he didn't need now: having his past exposed.

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For the next two days, Soru stayed in the hospital as much as possible. When he had to go to the génadëma he went out of the hospital's rear entrance, followed narrow alleys as far as he could, and avoided open public places, to minimize contact with the public. The more he thought of his encounter with Lujékwu, the more he shuddered. He had no idea how many of the other prisoners were in town, where they were staying, and whether they might try to do something to him. Walking to the Humanities Building, he inevitably stopped at the Bahá'í Center to say a prayer for protection.

It was the sixth day of the week when a big change occurred at the hospital: Wiresé was discharged. Five days of antibiotics were sufficient to beat the very serious infection that had spread in her left arm. Smiré asked for Soru as soon as she arrived.

“How many signs have you taught Wiresé?” she asked.

Soru considered. “About twenty. She couldn’t use her left hand very much and she has had to sleep a lot.”

“How many more signs are there?”

That surprised Soru. “There are thousands! It’s a language. Eryan has thousands of words; this sign language has thousands of signs. But many of them don’t work very well in Eryan, either because our grammar is different or because you have to spell out the word. Every English letter has a sign, too. We need to develop a sign for every one of our letters; then she could spell words with signs.”

“She could learn to read and write and communicate that way. That never occurred to me.” Smiré considered. “These signs seem to be hard to learn, but I have picked up ten or eleven of them.”

“You have to practice, that’s all.”

“I suppose if I practiced, I’d learn them. The only problem with her communicating with signs is that no one else knows them, so they limit her so much.”

Soru nodded. “But there must be other deaf people around who could communicate with her this way, and if you and your husband learned the signs you could communicate with her. That would be important to all of you, wouldn’t it?”

“I think so. My husband gets very impatient with her and beats her when she doesn’t understand and obey him. He keeps thinking she really can hear and is just pretending she can’t.”

“My father couldn’t hear for my entire life; he wasn’t pretending.”

“How did he work?”

“He was very poor, but he was able to work with his brother. My father could hear until he was fifteen, so he understood speech and sometimes could read lips a little. My uncle was good at explaining things to him with gestures, too. But then my father got pelui seven years ago and died.”

“And what did you do?”

Soru looked down on the floor. “Well, I starved a lot. The pelui carried away my uncle a year later, too. But now I’m here and I’m doing something that is of service to others.”

“Indeed.” Smiré stared at him a moment. “My husband is the hereditary Lord of Wéranguagras, a village of 900 people in the middle Dwobrébakwés about forty dékent east of Méddoakwés. Our family was given the village by Mégékwés himself, over five hundred years ago. We usually live in Méddoakwés; we have a new house in the new quarter just built. My husband visits Wéranguagras once a week in his carriage for two days and spends the rest of the week with us in the capital. Sometimes we all go to Pérkas, too; we have a summer place there. We know of a deaf boy in Pérkas, but otherwise we don’t associate with people who have deaf children. I suppose there are others in Méddoakwés, though.

“What I’m wondering is whether you can continue to teach Wiresé and me these signs. We can pay you to do it; I asked my husband. If you could come to our house four or five mornings every week and give us lessons, I think it would help us a lot.”

Soru was surprised by the offer. “I . . . I’ll have to ask Dr. Lua. I would love to learn the signs and teach them to her. It has given me great pleasure.”

“I can see that, and I can see that Wiresé has responded to you unlike her response to anyone else. It’s a miracle. We have much trouble managing her at home; she tends to get wild at times. But here, when she is with you, she is as mild as a kitten. You are the first person I have met in her ten years who can help her. You are our hope.” Her voice broke with emotion when she said that.

“I think she is a bright girl, but it is so hard to be sure because she can’t communicate. But it would be a terrible thing to just lock her up in a room at home.”

“And that’s what is happening.”

“That’s what happens to many deaf children.” Soru was surprised to hear emotion in his voice as well.

“Do you think you can come on Tridiu? My husband will be back from Wəranuagras by then. He can see what you can do with her.”

Soru nodded. “I think I can do that. It would be an honor to continue serving your family.”

“Thank you. I think four or five mornings per week are enough, for now, and that gives you time to continue studying the signs every afternoon. The steam wagon goes between the cities in less than an hour.”

“Can you write down how I get to your house?”

“I’ll ask the nurse to write it for you. Our telephone is 126, so you can call us. If we have to change the day, can my butler call the hospital and leave a message for you?”

“Yes, I live upstairs. Lady Smiré, do you think we could find a few other deaf children? It would be easier for Wiressé if others were learning with her because they could gesture to each other.”

“Perhaps eventually, but right now we’re not thinking about a school, just some lessons for Wiressé and me.”

“I understand.” Soru smiled. “Thank you, my lady, for this offer. I can’t tell you how happy I am to continue working with Wiressé.”

“I am happy, too.” Smiré smiled. “Now, I have to get Wiressé ready to go home.”

“I’ll see you Tridiu, then.” Soru walked out of the little girl’s room and went to find Dr. Lua. When she came out of a patient’s room he said, “can we talk for a few minutes?”

“Yes, sure. Is this about Smiré and Wiresé?”

“Yes. Smiré asked me to come to their house to teach Wiresé four or five mornings a week.”

“She spoke to me about it. Come on.” Lua led him to her office and closed the door. “Here, sit down. I hate to lose you, Soru, but I think you should take this offer for two reasons. One, I see your talent, and it is important to do something you love to do. Two, someone needs to establish a system for educating deaf people on this world, and I think Esto has chosen you to do it.”

“Do you really think so?”

“It is possible. You must arise and do your best.”

“I want to do that. We spoke of other deaf children in the area.”

“Good. Don’t worry about that for a month or two; get Wiresé started and make sure her parents are happy. But then find other kids and ask whether they can join the class. I’ll ask Wérétrakester if he knows of others. I am sure he will. The incidence of deafness here is about 1 person per 1,000, so Meddoakwés should have nine deaf people, and the entire area should have forty. Ten of them will be children.”

“That’s a class, then.”

“Exactly. The family will want to pay you. Don’t accept less than a dhanay per day. A dhanay and a half would be better, or a dhanay with meals or lodging. If you start

working there half a day and taking classes or studying signs the other half, you won't be able to work in the hospital. You can stay here a month or so, but you really should pay us for lodging, meals, and classes. This family can afford a dhanay per day, believe me."

"That's very helpful," said Soru, nodding. "Alright, I'll do it."

"It's a big change."

"It's *another* big change."

Lébé watched Thornton packing his leather suitcase with two changes of clothes. "Do you *have* to go? The geology class really doesn't need you; it's a routine trip. Rudhisuru can handle everything."

"He can, but Rudhisuru is an army officer and everyone knows it. If he leads the expedition, the Kaitere will assume the army is scouting out their territory to take their nickel-iron."

"And a gedhému is less suspicious?"

"With my accent and beard, I really don't look or sound gedhému."

"Don't think you're fooling people, Dhoru." She used the Eryan version of his name, which didn't sound like any Eryan name anyone had ever heard of.

"Look, I'll be back in two days; Primdiu night. It's a quick trip."

"And I'm going to have a baby in a month and a half."

"Well, it's still a month and a half away!"

"Thanks a lot, things are beginning to get pretty difficult, you know! I *need* you around."

He turned to her and came over to her. “I’m sorry, Lébé, I know it’s hard and I didn’t mean to suggest it wasn’t, or that I haven’t a responsibility to help. But—”

“But what?”

“But I have a class to lead, and I won’t be gone very long, and you have an entire family—two families—to help.”

“I see.” She pouted; he hadn’t seen that for a while.

“It won’t be long, and I’ll be safe, don’t worry.”

“Well, you have to be careful; you’re about to become a father again!”

“I know.” He leaned over and kissed her. “I know. We’re taking a phone along in case of trouble.”

“You’re going for the adventure, to see a new place.”

He didn’t reply, but he did smile. “Seeing a new place is always exciting,” he admitted. “But that is not the main reason for going. We’re exploring a new area, we’re doing something together as an advanced geology class, and we’re possibly securing an important resource for your father’s iron foundry. And I’ll be back quickly.”

“I wish you weren’t going at night.”

“It’s best because of the time zone changes.” He walked back over to his suitcase and latched it shut. “I’ve got to go; I promised to get to the Physical Sciences Building by midnight.” He came to her and embraced her, a long, tender embrace, and kissed her.

“Be safe and come home quick.”

“I will.” He kissed her again. Then he kissed sleeping Jalalu, grabbed his suitcase, and walked out of their apartment. He had one rover parked in the courtyard, so he opened the house’s outer door and drove out, heading for the génadema.

The other rover was there and students were loading it with clothes, supplies, and equipment. They were fortunate to be able to use both rovers, which had been retired from all heavy work because of their age and the ample supply of steam wagons. By 1 a.m. they had everything packed. They climbed in and headed down the Royal Road under a half-full, brilliant Skanda.

In a few minutes they reached Deksawsupérakwa, where they turned left and headed east on the Gordha Road. Thornton was in the lead and kept a close eye out for domestic animals asleep on the road; Tutane herders often camped close to the road at night, especially if they were driving animals to the capital for slaughter. But even without headlights, for the first few dozen kilometers they had plenty of light; Skanda was forty times the diameter and 1600 times the area of a full moon and because of its clouds it was brighter than a gray dirt surface; wherever it was visible, it was twilight all night. In less than an hour, however, they drove so far east that Skanda set and the headlights threw their only light.

Gordha was eighty-five kilometers and three time zones to the east. When they drove past it an hour and a half later, it was 5:30 a.m. there and the high, thin morning clouds overhead were already illuminated. They drove around the main street of the settlement, already crowded with animals and people, then up the new switchbacks of the Royal Road over Gordhamonta, the long north-south ridge east of town. On the other side

they could see the rapidly expanding reservoir flooding semiarid brushlands. Gordha was so far from the sea that its climate had been little changed by the sea's expansion; the Spine Mountains still wrung most moisture from the planet's prevailing easterlies, and the occasional westerlies rarely brought clouds this far.

They crossed a wide, rolling valley and as the road rose up the other side, they saw sunrise. The next ridge was broader and more gradual, forested on top, with snow still thinly blanketing the ground: the Kaitamonta or "Forestridge," so named because it was the first with a cover of trees. Then the Royal Road headed back down. Another broad-shouldered north-south ridge lay between them and Kostamonta, "the Spine Ridge," Éra's highest mountain range.

But they weren't driving to Kostakhéma. Once the road had wound back down Kaitamonta and to the banks of the Majakwés, the Kaitakwés flowed in from the south. A bridge of heavy timbers spanned the Majakwés immediately upstream of the junction, which the rovers crossed. They rolled down the unimproved dirt track more slowly—thirty or forty kilometers per hour—through rolling prairie with scattered trees. Scattered Kaitere herds grazed, watched by boys.

In half an hour the valley floor began to rise and get rough and rocky. Thornton looked ahead and could see that the land rose more and more steeply ahead of them and that the ridge was curved, crossing the valley and pushing up the sides. When they reached the crest the land suddenly dropped away and the valley was replaced by a large circular basin, twenty kilometers across. They stopped to admire the flat green basin covered by

scattered herds and dispersed huts. The Kaitakwés lazily meandered across the plain.

“Gimutroba,” said Magékeru proudly. He was sitting in front next to Thornton.

“It’s beautiful,” said Thornton. “This must be the best land in the Highlands.”

“It’s rainier here too; then drier on the south side of Gimutroba.”

“That’s because this is on the equator, where the sun is overhead. There’s more rain on the equator.” He traced the circular crest on which they had stopped. “This is definitely a *crater*.”

“As you suggested in class. And the mountain that fell here was made of nickel-iron?”

“Most likely. Let’s stop to stretch and take some pictures, then head down.”

In a few minutes they followed the dirt track down the crater rim—about one hundred fifty vertical meters—then set off with greater speed across the crater’s flat, alluvial floor. The rim was lightly forested, but one could see that the tribe was cutting too many trees for firewood; in consequence they were few and far between and the rim was extensively gullied.

Magékeru pointed to the left branch of an intersection and Thornton turned. In twenty minutes they approached a village built next to a large structure: Lord Méneghues’ residence. Countless horses grazed in the bottom land along a creek and a dozen wagons were parked. Men lounging about stood to stare at the two rovers as they approached.

“Someone has called a *kowokwa*,” observed Magékeru.

“Really?” Thornton didn’t like the sound of a “talking together” or “parliament.”

“Yes. Any of the six clan leaders has the right. It looks like over one hundred men have gathered. Father knew the metal would be controversial.”

They parked the rovers and stepped out; eight young men, all unarmed, as the Kaitere quickly noted and the eight were immediately aware. Magékeru played the genial host, shaking hands with friends and distinguished visitors, introducing Thornton to a dozen men with Kaitere names, which usually ended in “-ekwu” or “-stélu” or “-ékeru,” “horse” or “stallion” or “stag.”

They entered the compound of Méneghues and found the courtyard full of even more men. Magékeru led Thornton and the others straight to his father, who was seated at the far end. The Lord was ancient and had the most magnificent white beard Thornton had ever seen. He was flanked by six sons, some middle aged; Magékeru was the Lord’s youngest.

“Father, I return home with Dhoru of the House of Mennéa, heir of Lord Kristobéru,” said Magékeru, bowing.

Méneghues looked Thornton over, then nodded. “Welcome Dhoru. It is good to see you again. You are under my protection while in the lands of the Kaitere.”

“I am honored to see you again, Lord Méneghues,” replied Thornton. “I bring greetings from my father, Lord Kristobéru, from my father in law, Lord Jonu Milleri, from my brother in law, Amosu, and from my sister, Dr. Lua. Amos and Lua remember meeting you in Gordha last year.”

“I remember meeting you and them at that gathering where we discussed the future of Gordha. I am sorry they could not visit this time.”

“They regret it as well. I also bring gifts from the two lords of Melwika.” He turned and two of the students came forward with boxes. “Lord Miller wishes to present you with this.” He took one box and presented it. Méneghues took it and opened it, to find a beautiful set of Melwika steel knives.

“Magnificent,” he said.

“And the Mennea family offers you this.” He handed Méneghues a box of wood and leather that was beautiful in its own right, The Lord opened it and was puzzled by the neat rows of jars. “These are delicious jars of sweetened cooked fruit called *sérис*. You take off the metal top and remove the wax, then put the *séri* on bread.”

“We will enjoy them,” replied Méneghues, though he obviously liked the knives better. “Who are your companions?”

“Allow me to introduce them.” He went around the circle and introduced the students. Rudhisuru’s army uniform was particularly noticeable.

“And all of you are students of *érgénto*, geology?”

“Indeed, my Lord.”

“And you are here to look at the rocks made of iron?”

“Exactly, my Lord.”

“Tell us why they might be valuable.” Méneghues gestured at the large, hostile audience.

“As blacksmiths know, iron comes in different forms.” Thornton pulled out a piece of meteoritic nickel-iron. “This form has advantages and disadvantages, compared to the others. It is very hard, so it is difficult to extract from the ground, and it is very

heavy, so it is hard to move. It requires a very hot fire to work. But the items forged from it are very strong; they rust very slowly or not at all; and if made right, the steel is very flexible as well as strong. Lord Miller's iron and steel foundry can make the high temperatures and knows how to make it flexible."

"So they will buy the iron rock from us."

"Indeed, Lord."

"But will they teach us how to make steel from it?" asked Stéldamu, one of the chiefs of a clan dominating the center of the basin.

"I am here to see whether there are large quantities of the iron rock here, not to settle questions such as that. But with this thing, we can talk to Lord Miller and ask him." Thornton reached into his pocket and pulled out the cellular telephone he had brought.

"It's a telephone without the wire," added Magékeru. "I now know something of the process of making steel. They use very powerful blowers—much bigger than anything we have ever made—to drive great quantities of air on the fire, and they make a special material from coal—coke—that produces great heat." That statement startled Thornton, who wondered whether his friend was a sort of Kaitere spy.

"If they can buy iron rock from us, they can sell us coke," observed Stéldamu.

"Perhaps," agreed Méneghues. He looked at Rudhisuru. "I know the army won't sell us explosives, but will it come here with explosives and blow up iron rock for us?"

"Yes, for a fee. We do that at the Dwobergoné copper mine every month," replied Rudhisuru.

"How much?"

“About three dhanay per day for every soldier who comes here. If four are needed and they are here four days, it costs about fifty dhanay.”

Méneghues nodded. Stéldamu spoke up again. “Moving all this iron rock will require a real road, will it not? And I am sure the foundry uses electricity. If Melwika wants our iron rock, will they pay part of the cost of the road?”

“Usually, building a road is not part of the deal,” replied Thornton. “But you can ask. The army may be willing to pay part, also, and the Queen may be willing to apply some of your taxes to the work.”

“We should not have a road and we should not sell the iron rock at all,” urged Andamu, chief of the “East Kaitere” clan whose lands lay mostly in the Kaitamonta. “The road will bring us trouble; it could even bring the army to Gimutroba. Taking the iron rock will wound the Earth mother and bring attention to our land.”

“The army can already get to Gimutroba if it wants, but the Kaitere have always been loyal to Her Majesty,” replied Rudhisuru.

“And so we will remain,” agreed Méneghues. “This is an issue we must debate. The iron rock will bring money to our land, and that will create dependence.”

“You’re not here to do a census, are you?” asked Stéldamu skeptically. “Because we do not approve of one.”

“We are not here to do a census,” replied Thornton. “And we have no representative of the census with us. We have no plans to count houses and animals.”

“What, exactly, will you do?” asked Andamu.

“Examine the rocks of the Gimutroba basin, determine whether there is a lot of iron rock or a little, and study the geological history of the area,” replied Thornton. “Magékeru will have access to all our information and we can provide Lord Méneghues a copy if he requests.”

“That is essential,” replied Méneghues.

“How much will Lord Miller pay for our iron rock?” asked Stéldamu.

“The range he pays for iron ore, coal, and limestone now is one to four dhany per hundred lèdhi. One does not get rich from selling iron rock.”

That generated grumbles about fairness. “Let them use their own iron ore, then,” concluded Andamu. “And leave us alone.”

“No, we must learn the art of making the steel,” replied Méneghues.

“The army will not permit it!” insisted Andamu.

“Do not make such an assumption,” replied Rudhisuru. “The army bans Tutane and Sumi from taking classes on chemistry, but there is no ban on Tutane attending the engineering school and learning how to make steel.”

“The world has started to move and we must keep up,” exclaimed Méneghues. “We have had steam wagons stopping here every other week for half a year, now. It has helped us sell our leather and woolen goods and buy useful things. The army will extend the telephone and electrical lines to Kostakhéma this summer and lines to here could be built as well. The road can be improved as well. Dhoru, how much will these things cost?”

Thornton thought. "What you are asking about is not cheap. Graveling the road to Gimutroba will cost 80,000 dhanay and the lines will be 8,000. These are not tasks to complete in one year. Steam wagons already can get here, so you do not need a complete gravel road; you need to have the bad spots improved. Ten years of improvements and you will have a good road."

"Lord Kristobéru has often said that when a village or tribe makes plans, they often choose that which is prestigious over that which is useful," added Magékeru. "We are a small community and we are isolated. We must be wise."

"The best way to be wise is to stay away from all of this," said Andamu.

Méneghues raised his hand. "Andamu, perhaps you fear that your clan's land has none of the ironrock. But you have been very happy to embrace the sudden increase in demand for coffee growing on your mountain slopes. Do not oppose something needed by much of the rest of the tribe." He looked around the gathering. "I have heard from a few clan chiefs; now I want to hear a few brief words from everyone."

The Kaitere *kowokwa* consumed the entire first day of their precious two days, much to the frustration of the geology class. But by sunset a consensus was emerging among the tribe's men that the class would be free to explore the crater. A large feast was prepared for everyone and while consuming it, dozens of Kaitere men stopped by to point out large nickel-iron concentrations on their map and tell them about important features. Estonpréku had brought his large telescope—Skanda's glare limited observations made

from Melwika—and a long line of men waited patiently to look at Werana, a particularly bright planet that was high in the sky that night.

As a result, the next day's expeditions were fairly efficient. Thornton and one rover explored the eastern half of the basin while Rudhisuru and the other rover explored the western half. The floor itself represented a flat accumulation of lake sediments and was devoid of nickel-iron except a trio of rich central peaks. The inside slopes of the crater rim had important concentrations as well, and the deviations of a compass from true north indicated that some bodies were very large; thousands of tonnes of nickel-iron or more. But unexpected was the discovery of frequent lenses of soft coal where marshes had ringed the ancient lake. The Kaiters were sitting on fairly large coal deposits; plenty for an indigenous steel industry, in fact plenty to meet their own fuel needs in place of scarce firewood.

The sun was westering as they explored the northern rim along the dirt track heading back toward the Royal Road. In twilight they scoured parts of the northern ejecta blanket and hiked along the canyon through which the Kaitakwés forced its way out of the crater; a true water-cut canyon, not an artificial gluba. Darkness prevented exploration of the delta of ancient flood deposits that spoke of a sudden draining of the lake thousands of years ago when its waters had finally overtopped a low spot in the rim. The flood explained why rusted nickel-iron boulders could be seen scattered in the bed of the Majakwés all the way to Gordha.

By the light of headlights they did stop briefly to see a hot spring that was right off the road near the junction of the Majakwés and the Kaitakwés. Then they drove back

to Mélwika, their rapid progress slightly exceeding the rotation rate of Éra, so that their home city hove into sight half an hour after local sunset. They stopped at Roundtop to drop off Marku and one other student who was residing at Five Windows to protect the villa from vandalism; they had managed to clear two of the main buildings of loose rocks and debris and had found thousands of artifacts. Everyone else was anxious to get to the génadëma, however, so their stop was brief.

They entered town when it was in the midst of considerable excitement. A blaze consuming two buildings on Town Hill was easy to see from the south. Thornton and Rudhisuru drove straight to Foundry Square where the fire department was located, but quickly determined that the Fire Department had no need of the rovers. Potanu, the fire chief, had plenty of water because the city's water cisterns on top of the hill were full and there were ample hydrants available. Thornton and Lébé hurried up hill to watch the fire fighting; the streets were crisscrossed by fire hoses and Aisu's battalion of soldiers were out in force to keep the crowds out of the way. They couldn't get very close, even as members of the Lordly family in charge of Mélwika, but they could see that the fire fighters were getting the blaze under control.

Heading back downhill only a half hour after they started up, Thornton said to Lébé "Well, now we've had an adventure together."

"Now, don't think this will make up for you being away two days!"

"No, I'm sure it doesn't, but it's a little something. How was Jalalu?"

"He was fine. I'm sure he's still awake; he's waiting to see you!"

"I'll spend the next hour or two with him, then."

“And put him to bed. I’m leaving you in charge.”

“Fine.”

“How was the trip, anyway? I never had a chance to ask.”

“Frustrating. Yesterday all we did was answer questions from a hostile crowd.”

“I heard about that from father! He was not happy about being put on the spot by a lengthy phone call, even with your quick background in English. It sounds like the Kaitere will sell nickel-iron for as much as they can, and will go into the steel business for themselves, thanks to the engineering school he funded!”

“The school will break up monopolies because of information sharing. He knew that. But they’ll only make small items Melwika can afford to subcontract, like stainless steel knives and tools. They aren’t about to build a rolling mill or purchase lathes. And it’ll be a few years before the road will make transportation cheap. The steam wagon going to Gimutroba can haul only four tonnes of cargo, not ten, because of road conditions.”

“And the Kaitere are too proud to do that kind of work.”

“Exactly, even for pay. The army will have to use recruits or the Kaitere will have to subcontract with someone to haul in Fish Eryan workers.”

“If you can convince the Fish Eryan they’ll be safe. Still, I bet Magékeru will go home this summer with a lot of new ideas.”

“No doubt. He’s planning to take an agriculture course in the second spring term; he thinks corn will grow there quite well. The Kaitere are about to be exposed to a lot of new ideas, and I suspect they’ll build a dozen one-room school houses around Gimutroba

Basin in the next few years. But it'll take a while for the ideas to bring about much change."

Lébé nodded. "Like everywhere."

[Mar. 12, 2006; reread and edited 5/21/13, 7/29/17]

A Passing

The fire gave the hospital its busiest peacetime night ever. The owner of one house, a farmer named Tritanu, had run back inside to rescue a cow and had gotten trapped under a collapse; he arrived at the hospital with burns over seventy percent of his body. A four year old child in the neighboring house was brought out unconscious from the smoke and was on oxygen. A fireman had been badly cut by falling wood. Soru was pressed into service to fetch things, calm and feed relatives, and run messages back and forth between the medical team and the relatives. Three soldiers were summoned to keep hysterical people out of the rooms while the patients were cared for.

By morning, the four year old was beginning to wake up, but Tritanu, whose case was hopeless, was slipping. His wife, Kanawé ("Nightingale") came across the hall to look at the four year old, whom she knew. At the moment the boy's mother and father were out, so Soru was with the semiconscious boy. She looked at Soru with eyes full of pain. "Is there nothing they can do?" she asked him about her husband, in a desperate whisper.

"I'm very sorry," said Soru. "I grieve for you. The doctors are trying to make him as comfortable as they can. But skin is a very complex part of the body. It protects us; guards us from sickness. It has a remarkable ability to grow back. But when most of it is burned, and burned deeply, it cannot recover. I think we all must pray to Esto for a miracle."

She nodded, and her eyes filled with tears. "When he is awake, he is in terrible pain."

"The medication they are giving him will permit consciousness and will control the pain, but it takes away much of his mind for a time."

"At least he recognized me."

"Esto is kind."

She turned away from Soru and looked at the little boy. "I pray Kapu recovers."

"It's looking good for him." Soru hesitated to continue the earlier discussion, but decided he should. "Is your house destroyed?"

"I hear that only a shell remains, but I haven't gone to look."

"Was he a member of the Grange?"

"Yes. He moved here two years ago from Terskua and joined then."

"You should talk to Dr. Lua. The Mennea family will help, in these circumstances."

"God bless them, for I am a poor woman without a husband for protection."

"They will help, I am sure." He made a mental note to talk to Dr. Lua himself. "You have family in Terskua?"

"Two brothers who split the family farm between them when dad died last year, so there is no land to support me."

"I understand." He paused, wondering what to say, thinking about the counseling the doctors gave people. "Tell me about your husband."

She looked at him, puzzled. “He is a good man; a third son, like so many men here, so he had no land. He came here and got land in Melwika, built a house, brought in a big harvest, and came home with a dowry for me. Last year he had an even better harvest; we bought an iron stove, a beautiful bed, three lovely blankets, some pots and pans and dishes, a milk cow . . . and we wired the house for electricity. I bet that’s how the fire started.”

“The city has been talking about inspecting all wiring; this may be the incident to force the matter.”

“Lightning in a wire; it is very dangerous.” She shook her head. “We were very happy and hoping for the blessing of a child. He just planted twenty agris of wheat. At least the Grange will harvest it for me.”

“May Esto bless them. I will pray for you, goodwoman, and for your husband.”

“Thank you, Honored.” She turned and walked back to her husband’s room. A few minutes later the boy’s mother returned and Soru continued his rounds; he had two days left at the hospital and even though he was incredibly excited about his new job, he would miss the hospital very much. He planned to continue working at it when he could, in fact, partly to retain the room as long as possible.

He stopped in to look on Tritanu when Lua was talking to Kanawé about her husband’s condition. Kanawé acknowledged his presence with her eyes, so Dr. Lua continued to explain how only Esto could save him and that Priest Sarébjnu was on his way over to pray with her, and a traditional healer was coming as well. Soru knew that both of those steps signaled an impossible situation. When Lua left, he stopped her in the

hall and in a quick whisper informed her of Kanawé's situation. At lunchtime, when Lua ate at home with some of the family, she told her mother and father of the situation.

"I'll stop by about three bells," said Chris. "And I'll call Kérdu to make sure the Grange will take care of the crops. It is their policy to do so; it's one reason people join the Grange, they know their harvest will come in if they are sick."

"I should talk to her, too," said Liz. "Would she be open to joining the Women's Circle?" They had stopped calling it the "Widows" because of the stigma.

"I don't know. I'll broach the subject with her. She needs to do something. She has no family in town and I don't think she wants to go home."

"How old is she?" asked Chris.

Lua thought a moment. "Seventeen or eighteen. She's been married a year and a half."

"So young, to be on her own."

"If she stays, she'll be able to choose any husband she wants," noted Lua. "I suppose I should point it out to her, too. The town has a shortage of women and she'll inherit twenty agris."

"Unless her husband's family contests the ownership," said Chris. "What's the buzz about the fire? What have people heard?"

"I get the sense the town's mostly ecstatic," said Lébé. "I was talking to some people in Temple Square on my way to the génadëma. Everyone was saying that this was the sort of fire that would have burned up all of Town Hill; maybe a quarter of Melwika.

It demonstrated the power of fire fighting when you have iron pipes and water under pressure.”

“It beats bucket brigades,” agreed Liz. “The Women’s Circle was the same; they had a renewed confidence living here.”

“But Kanawé says she thinks the fire started because faulty wiring,” noted Lua. “Dad, the City Council has to do something.”

“I agree. I’ll bring it up. We’ll have to schedule hearings, though, to bring the public along. At least this pushes forward the case for a regional fire fighting system. I already got a call from an east Arjakwés village—Terskua, ironically enough—asking how much it’ll be to join. And Sulanu has already gone to interview the firefighters for the next edition of *Melwika Nues*.” He turned to Thornton. “So, I never heard about the trip.”

“There’s plenty of nickel-iron; tens of thousands of tonnes at minimum. But the Kaiters want to send students to the engineering school to learn how to make steel from it, in addition to selling the ore to Miller.”

“Good, that will benefit them. I heard there was a big Kowokwa.”

“Yes, attended by almost half the tribe’s men. Méneghues was subtle, but prevailed. Miller agreed to pay five dhanay per hundred ledhi, which is a lot, but worth it because there will be lower smelting costs. He wants a thousand ledhi per month starting in the summer. Magékeru needs your help, dad; he has to figure out what the tribe needs and recommend it to his father.”

“Tell him to make an appointment some late afternoon and I’ll be glad to talk. You found coal too, huh?”

“Yes, a lot. They told us of a hot spring that’s either on their land or the Késtones—but I think it’s Kaitere—and we stopped to look. We should visit it again. It’d be a good location for a spa, dad, the water coming out is hot and only a little sulfurous. In the dark I think I saw some old ruins. It’s only five minutes off the Royal Road. I should tell you about Estonpréku and his telescope, too. He set it up and a hundred Kaitere men looked at Werana through it, and were fascinated. But Estonpréku could not believe how much better the dark skies were for astronomy. Now he wants to go east to do serious observing. The obvious place to go would be the Royal Road where it crosses the crest of Gordhamonta. He could take the steam wagon out, stay a few days with a few hired kids from Gordha to help him and protect him, then take another steam wagon back.”

Chris thought about it. “We could accommodate that in the budget. His wife will kill him, though.”

“He’s already mentioned that! He wants to write the Gordha Génadema; if they support it and we can pay for the program, it would be a great collaboration. He could teach geology, biology, and physics while there. We’ll need to build an observatory where the telescope could be mounted when he’s there, and rent a wagon and horses to get him to the observatory from Gordha and back.”

“That should be possible. Gordha’s not a bad place; reasonably safe. Estonpréku should take his wife along. Maybe she’d feel better about it!”

Saréidukter entered the hospital's main door and stopped at the desk where Lubésé ran the city's telephones. "Hail, good widow," she said. She and Lubése, as fellow working widows with children, were friends. "I'm here to see Kanawé; she's staying here, right?"

"She's been sleeping on the floor in his room, but he just died an hour ago."

"Oh, how terribly sad."

"Goodwoman, it is a gift from Esto, believe me, if you had seen him. . ." her voice trailed off. Then the switchboard beeped. She raised a hand to Saréidukter, spoke to someone, and made their connection. "It's been so busy in here lately, it's been very hard to run the telephones and help people arriving at the hospital! At least the little boy went home today."

"Oh, good. Where are they staying?"

"Ménu and his team organized a house raising and built them a new house in the new addition. It's not finished, but they're moving in anyway. The husband worked for the foundry, so they've organized a response."

"Well, Tritanu worked for the Grange, and we're organizing our response as well. That's why I'm here. How's Kanawé doing?"

Lubésé shook her head. "She's nineteen, maybe twenty, she completely depended on him for money, even for the shopping . . . she was a good village girl, and now her world has collapsed."

"Of course. We've both been there."

“Exactly. She needs your help, Saréidukter. The doctors and nurses are trying, but they’re educated and that makes them too. . . different. They’re very loving, but. . .”

“I know, I understand that, too. Okay, can I go in?”

Lubésé glanced at the fancy new clock on her desk. “It’s been an hour and they were going to wash his body. I think they should be done by now. I’m not sure how they *can* wash him, the skin was falling off him.”

“I don’t need any details. Where am I going?”

“Room ten.” She pointed down the hall and Saréidukter nodded.

She walked across the emergency room and into the main ward. She visited the hospital every month or two and it gave her the willies; she was very fearful of sickness and death, and the hospital reminded her of them. She looked up at the numbers on top of the doors; she could now read numbers quite well and letters well enough if she took her time. Odd on the left, even on the right; she saw that right away. Another useful and new organizational concept.

The door to room ten was closed. The nurse Eryandukter saw Saréidukter approaching it and said, “Knock. They just finished washing his body and wrapping it in burial shrouds. We just called the Grange to ask about burial.”

“I’m sure Kérdu will send over some men right away. Do we have a plot?”

“No, and Brébanu has no access to a phone. We sent a student to find him with a message. We’ll also call the Fire Department. Potanu said when the time comes to move the body to the cemetery, he’d send over a fire engine.”

“That’ll be impressive. What about the temple?”

“Both priests will join the procession.”

“Good. I hope she can handle it.”

Eryandukter nodded. “She’ll handle it, she’s strong.”

“Thanks.” Saréidukter turned to the door and knocked.

“Come in.” A wavering, thin voice.

Saréidukter opened the door and entered. She saw a young, thin woman with a tear-streaked face and exhausted eyes. On the bed next to her, wrapped head to toe, was her husband’s corpse. She walked over. “I am Saréidukter and I work for the grange.”

“My husband mentioned you; you work for the Lord, too.”

“No, not for the Lord. I was appointed by the Lords to the City Council. I have two daughters, aged ten and seven. My husband died of an infection four years ago. It was a terrible, black time in my life. My daughters and I went to Meddoakwés and almost starved to death, so we came here. And here we have gradually built a new life.”

“And you have a new husband?”

Saréidukter smiled. “Not yet. I’m twenty-nine and raising my daughters. But maybe soon . . . we’ll see.” She shrugged. “The Fire Department will send a fire engine with a trailer to carry you, your husband, and anyone else to the cemetery, and the Grange is sending over some men to bear him from the trailer to the grave. The two priests are coming, also. And after the cemetery . . . it is up to you, but I want you to come to my home if you wish. It is a modest home near here. I have a second floor under the roof that is unfinished and have wanted to convert it into an extra room. It even has a window. You can come and go as you please.”

“But I have no way to pay you, to pay for food—”

“No, you can pay for food if you wish.” Saréidukter pulled out a small leather book and opened it. “This is a bank book. Here is your name: Kanawé, daughter of Saru, from Terskua. Here it says you have fifteen dhanay and twelve dontay. The bank tellers are telling everyone they can donate as little or as much as they want to you or to the family of Kapu. You can go in with the book and they will update the amount you have by writing it in the book. You can take out as much or as little as you want any time. The Grange has donated ten dhanay, and of course they will handle the harvest on your land. You are not helpless. You will not starve. You just need some help, and the Grange will help. So will I, if it is your desire.”

Kanawé smiled gratefully. “Thank you. I really have no idea what to do. I don’t want to go back to Terskua, but I don’t know how to stay here.”

“Stay here. If you want to farm your land, you can learn how to do that; the Grange has three women farmers and about a sixth of the farmers’ wives are actively involved in their farms. Or if you want, take classes and learn to read and write, then get a job in the hospital or the school or the bank . . . there are many possibilities. You have time. The harvest will pay your taxes and bring you enough to live for a year if you are careful with the money.”

“The nurses have told me this, too, but I don’t even know how to live if I have money! If I had a husband—”

“No husband yet! You need time to heal. Come to my house. My daughters will love to have you around and you will enjoy their laughter. You help me with them and with the cooking and I’ll help you with the shopping.”

Kanawé smiled. “Alright. I can do that.”

[Mar. 14, 2006; reread and edited 5/21/13, 7/29/17]

Central Spiritual Assembly

The clock at Foundry Square rang out six bells and Soru began to pace around Citadel Square worriedly. The Southern Shore's passenger wagon was now an hour late. His friends Stauréstú and Aréjé were both supposed to be on it, bound for the Bahá'í Convention that was to start that evening. He wondered whether it had broken down, or stopped by robbers, or worse.

Then he heard a steam whistle toot to the south; it was coming up the Royal Road from Dëksawsupérakwa as expected. A few minutes later it chuffed through the East Gate and into Citadel Square.

The passenger wagon was stuffed with more passengers than he had ever seen before. They were standing inside rather than sitting because there was so little room. And the majority were singing *Alláh-u-Abhá*, a Bahá'í song. Half the western shore had come!

The steam wagon stopped in its usual spot and Stauréstú stuck his head out an open window and waved. "Hey, Soru! Are you waiting for us?"

"Yes, I'm here to escort you to the Center!"

He laughed. "Then get on! As soon as the non-Bahá'í passengers get off, the driver is driving all of us over!"

"Oh, okay." He watched three businessmen climbing down with their bags of clothes and samples, a chorus of "goodbyes" following them. They smiled and nodded

ambiguously and one had to wonder what sort of experience they had had, stuffed into a passenger wagon for about six hours with excited Bahá'ís. Soru climbed on—it was hard to get in because of the crush—and the driver started forward. The Bahá'ís all greeted him with a chorus of “Alláh-u-Abhás.”

“So, you've been crushed together like this for hours?”

“Yes, of course, we all wanted to come!” replied a woman. That surprised Soru; women didn't usually speak up like that.

“We've been singing and praying!” replied Stauréstü. “So it wasn't too bad.”

“I think those businessmen never quite got used to us, either!” added Aréjé, with a laugh.

“We're late because the steam wagon had to go slow, with this many people on board,” added a man nearby.

“It's so good to see you again,” said Soru to his two friends.

“It's good to see you, too,” said Stauréstü. “What's new?”

“Well, I have a job. A young girl—ten years old, from Méddoakwés—was a patient at the hospital a few weeks ago. She was deaf and so was my father, so I was able to communicate with her a bit, mainly with gestures. So Dr. Lua told us about sign language and sent me to the génadema to get information, and I started learning the signs and teaching them to Wiresé, and when she was discharged from the hospital her family hired me to teach her to use the entire sign language. So I'm going to Méddoakwés five afternoons a week—they wanted me mornings, but I'm taking classes mornings—and I

teach her. We know about a deaf boy in Brébestéa and a teenager in the capital and maybe we'll invite them eventually."

"Fantastic!" said Aréjé. "We have a deaf child in Meddwoglubas; maybe she can learn the signs as well."

"Our big news is this: we've opened a hospital in Meddwoglubas," added Stauréstu.

"Really! I thought you just had a clinic."

"Well, we now have a hospital. We have temporary quarters in the old fort on top of the hill above town, but we've broken ground for a twenty-four bed hospital. We've even performed two operations. People are coming from Ora and Tripola; we've even had a patient from Néfa."

"I thought they had a hospital in Néfa," said Soru.

Stauréstu shook his head. "Not really. We can do operations using ether; they can't."

The steam wagon slowed as it passed through Temple Square, startling a very busy crowd that rarely saw vehicles in that intersection. In another minute it stopped and dropped everyone off a few paces from the Bahá'í Center. Soru led the crowd over to the building. Modolubu saw them coming and was shocked. "Soru, what's this?"

"Fifty or sixty Bahá'ís from the western and southern shores."

"Esto protect us. The dorms are full, except for delegates."

Soru looked at the large tent that had been erected against the side of the Bahá'í Center. "They all probably have blankets, and it's pretty warm. The women can sleep inside the Bahá'í Center and the men out here."

"I'll ask Lord Kristobéru about using classrooms, too. And we'll have to feed them. Do you know Snékwu? He's in charge of food. Tell him we have sixty more."

"Okay." He looked around. "Wow, we have quite a crowd!"

"The 4:30 passenger wagon from the western and northern shores was just as packed. We might have 350 people at this convention."

"How many Bahá'ís are there?"

"More than we thought!" Modolubu waved his hand and Soru hurried to find Snékwu, who was an officer in the Grange as well as a Bahá'í.

Following him from the passenger wagon had been a Tripola journalist named Brébekester, "Lion Slayer," who wandered through the crowd, listening to the conversation and taking mental notes. Then he spotted May Keino talking to two women and walked over to her. She looked at him, puzzled, a moment, then said "Oh, I'm sorry. Brébekester, am I right?"

"Yes, you are, Lady May. I'm here from Tripola to cover the convention for the *Bédhe*."

"Oh, really?" she was surprised by that.

"Yes. I assume that will be alright?"

"We haven't thought about that. I'm pretty sure the convention will be considered closed and private, but in fact that will be impossible because everyone won't fit inside

the Bahá'í Center; too many people have come. So we will have the windows open and people will be listening out here. And we can't stop you from standing out here and listening.”

“I see. Isn't the *Nues* covering the convention?”

“Yes, but Sulanu, the general editor, is a Bahá'í. We weren't planning to cover it very much; we didn't want to look like we're boasting.”

“Good, then the *Bédhe* will have a story!”

“I've been impressed by the last few issues, Brébekester. Your series of articles about the census have been fascinating.”

“Thank you. It was the perfect story for us: we're looking for something with an edge to catch the attention of the reader, and in this case there was something Her Majesty's government wanted to get out that the Lords didn't, so we could upset them and not worry about a fine! I was impressed by the *Nues*'s article about the problems of village teachers. Because you have teachers coming here all the time for courses, you have access to information we don't.”

“Well, you're not doing badly! You may have seen our article on the Melwika census; it was our response to your series. Of course, we don't mind publishing census data.”

“You're lucky. Yes, I read it yesterday. Four thousand people; this place is getting very big, already bigger than a shrunken Belledha. So, how's circulation?”

May looked around; that was information rarely shared. “We're doing better, mainly because the *Bédhe* was shut down for a while. We're printing coupons offering

free issues, just like you are; that was a great idea. And we're getting a lot more village subscriptions. So we're up to 400 weekly sales."

"Better than us; we're printing 250. Let's hope more people start reading."

"It's picking up. The paper is now covering its expenses when you include reprints and advertising. And we're starting a column called *The Farmer's Companion* in the next issue, offering advice. The editorial section will probably expand soon. We're doing pretty well."

"I saw the ads in the last issue! We'll start to do that, too." He looked around. "Any idea where I can stay?"

"Oh, that is a problem." She considered a moment. "The dorms are full. Come with me. That building over there is the Humanities Building of the génadëma and Lébë has an office. I bet she wouldn't mind if you slept in it for a few nights. She won't be using it. The building has a toilet, and the génadëma baths are nearby, I'll show them to you."

"How's the génadëma doing this term?"

"You were here last year, right? We have 250 out of town students staying in the dorms and in rented places around town, which is more than we expected. So we're doing very well."

"You're sucking students from the other génadëmas, though. Tripola's only has fifty."

"Néfa is down, too, but the others are doing alright. There are forty Sumis at Isurdhuna! Meddoakwés is holding its own. As the quality of teaching continues to

improve, the other schools will do fine. Our Women's College, by the way, has fifty students. That has been our great pride."

"I'll have to write about that, too."

"How's Kameru doing?"

"Angry that he's been relegated to teaching writing and literature. He hasn't worked for the *Bédhe* at all since it was shut down. I gather he's writing a book."

"No doubt it will upset people, too." She sighed and led Brébekester to the Humanities Building.

Another man was walking through the crowd as well, drinking in the sights, surprised and wondering about this great gathering. He had been to Mélwika only once before and otherwise had never left Meddwoglubas, except for a three-day trip to Ora with an uncle when he was fifteen and a day-long hop to Tripola back in the fall.

Manejnu was looking for Lady Liz, because he had good news for her. Finally after ten minutes he spotted her and walked over. When she saw him, she immediately recognized him.

"Manejnu, Alláh-u-Abhá! How are you?"

"Alláh-u-Abhá, Lady Liz. I am very well. How are you?"

"Fine. Very excited about this gathering. How is your family?"

"We are all healthy, praise be to Esto. My wife just had our third child two months ago and she is doing well. This is indeed an amazing gathering. We have more Bahá'ís in Meddwoglubas than ever—about one hundred—but we still feel like a little band when we meet. This is so much larger!"

“It is. Have you been inside? There is quite a book display. We now have Ruhi Book 2 printed and a Bahá’í prayer book. They’re selling fast.”

“I saw them briefly, but I was looking for you. I have good news for you. Last week we finished the piano.”

Her face lit up. “You did! How does it sound?”

“Pretty good. It’s hard for us to tune it, of course, because we’ve never heard a piano before. But the sound quality is impressive. We think you will be pleased. We had planned to bring it on the steam wagon today but there were too many people on board, so it will arrive tomorrow instead.”

“It’ll be here tomorrow? Fantastic! Maybe we can have it ready by the end of the Convention!”

“We’ll need a few hours to tune it, of course.”

“We can do that.” She smiled. “How much, finally?”

“Nineteen hundred dhanay. That’s our cost to make it. If we make another one, it’d be half that; a thousand with a modest profit.”

“Good. If it sounds as good as you say, we’ll order a second one.” She pointed. “Oh, it looks like we’re starting. Thank you again.”

He nodded and bowed slightly, then retreated. Grandmother Mary had gone up to the stage, which was festooned with several huge bouquets of flowers and a huge sign saying *Alláh-u-Abhá*, “God is Most Glorious.” Accompanying her were three young Bahá’ís known as excellent chanters. When she couldn’t get everyone’s attention she picked up a little bell and rang it. The pleasant tone quieted the crowd.

“Alláh-u-Abhá, dear friends. I am Mary Cartwright—Marié Wognukwéri—the grandmother of the Mennea family. Since I have asked everyone not to elect me to anything because of my age, I have been asked to serve as chair of this convention until the delegates can elect one of their number as permanent chair of the convention. That election, and election of a convention secretary, will be our major task this evening.

“We will begin with prayers.” She stepped back and the focus turned to the three young Bahá’ís with her. Each, in turn, chanted a Bahá’í prayer in Eryan in the style of the hymns of Widumaj. Then together they chanted a passage from Bahá’u’lláh’s writings in three part harmony, an innovative form that startled and pleased the audience.

When they finished the audience collectively smiled. Convention had started well. Mary stepped forward again, and this time she picked up a microphone Amos’s crew had made from telephone parts. “This device should make it easier to hear the speaker,” she said, and she waited. There was a speaker in the back and another one outside the main door. She could hear that it had indeed helped those outside. “Excellent. The purpose of this convention is to elect a Central Spiritual Assembly for the Bahá’ís of Éra. The convention also exists to consult with and advise the new assembly. Only the nineteen delegates can vote. Only the nineteen delegates can speak; the rest of us are observers only. It is important to emphasize this; this meeting is not like a Feast where everyone can contribute. We have elected our delegates to speak on our behalf. Because this convention has two purposes—to elect the Assembly, which means the delegates need time to get to know each other, and to advise the Assembly, which means they have to be able to meet with that body—the election will occur in the middle of the convention, on

the evening of Penkudiu. That will leave Suksdiu and half of Primdiu to consult, and then we will get on our passenger wagons and go home.

“We begin our convention with much good news to celebrate. Last week, on the first day of Ridván, the Bahá’ís around this world elected eleven local spiritual assemblies: in Awsnamelisér, Béranagrés, Charnéfa, Frachvála, Isurdhuna, Meddoakwés, Meddwoglubas, Néfa, Ora, Mélwika, and Tripola. It appears this world has about 550 Bahá’ís. We are still trying to determine all the places where there are Bahá’ís, because many declared their faith at génadémas and then went home to their villages. Éra needs the new spiritual knowledge at least as much as the new material knowledge, for the hymns of Widumaj have proved to be subject to many different and contradictory interpretations by people. We must win the respect and ultimately the adherence of our neighbors through virtue, caring for others, and living the life, so that Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation will transform this entire world, one soul at a time.”

That brought sustained applause from the audience. Mary nodded and paused for them to finish. “Let us now call the roll of the delegates. We have chairs up front for them to sit together, so they can consult more efficiently.” She put on her glasses and began to call out the names. The nineteen raised their hands; some came forward to sit. It was a remarkable collection, including two Lords, Chris and Estodhéru; three doctors, Mitretu of Meddoakwés, Lua, and Stauréstu; Ejnu of Néfa; Modolubu the paper maker; Estobaisu, a philosophy student from Isurdhuna; Estoiwiku, an engineer from Ora; Brébéstu, a Tripola businessman and Stauréstu’s brother.

Pencils and paper were passed out and the delegates were instructed to vote for the delegate they personally thought should be chair. There was a round of prayers, then everyone wrote down the name of their choice. Two delegates counted the votes, with Mary's help.

"Stauréstu has been elected chair with five votes," Mary announced.

There was a stir of murmurs in the room and Stauréstu was startled to be selected. An Eryan had been selected, not a Mennea! Chris smiled, pleased with the result. Stauréstu rose and came forward.

"I will need Mary's help, I am sure. Shall we proceed and elect our secretary?"

The paper was again passed out, there was another round of prayers, and the delegates wrote down their choices. A few minutes later the two tellers stepped forward and Stauréstu motioned to them to make the announcement. "Modolubu, secretary of the Melwika Assembly, is secretary."

Another electric charge passed through the crowd. Soru was startled. "I thought Dr. Lua was the logical choice," he whispered to Snékwu.

Snékwu shook his head. "Let the Eryan do it. We'll do it just fine."

Soru nodded in agreement, excited that voting could let people choose anyone.

Saréidukter's shopping basket was quite full, but she did need some fruit. She looked at Kanawé's basket. "Let's see how you do," she said. "Want to bargain down Yimusunu?" "Sure; for what?"

“Let’s get three oranges. I can usually get them for a dontay each, though the price may be higher today.” She glanced at a stall across the aisle in the market where another vendor had a sign: “four oranges, four dontay.”

“Why don’t we go there?” asked Kanawé, looking at the same vendor.

“Because he won’t bargain much; that’s what you know from the sign.”

“I really don’t want to bargain!”

“I love it. Look, give it a try.”

“Okay.” Kanawé walked up to Yimusunu’s stall and picked up a few oranges to assess their quality. They had oranges in Ora all the time, and oranges were cheaper there, but they were new and imported in the Arjakwés Valley. She gave the quality a critical eye.

“Can I help you, goodwoman?” he asked.

“How much are your oranges; say, a half dozen?”

“I can get them to you for eight dontay.”

“Eight? But I can do better than that a few stalls down, I think. There’s someone who starts their bargaining at six for six.”

Yimusunu glanced at the sign across the aisle; he could read well enough to know what it said. “Then five dontay for six, but I can’t go any lower than that. It would be robbery.”

“Of whom? Tell you what. Three dontay for four oranges; that’s about what you just offered me.” She reached down and selected four oranges.

“Three? That *is* robbery!” She pulled out three dontay. He looked at it, then picked up a soft orange, substituted it for one of her good ones, and took the coins.

Kanawé turned away and put the oranges in her basket with a sense of triumph. “You did it!” exclaimed Bloré, Saréidukter’s older daughter, who was ten.

“I did!”

“Of course, Yimusunu’s got a family to feed; we don’t want to bargain with him *too* hard,” said Saréidukter. “He’s also a member of the Grange.”

“He is, working here?”

She nodded. “He has ten agris and plants vegetables, which he picks every afternoon for sale the next morning. It’s a perfect combination because the Grange gives him support; if he dies, for example, he gets a funeral.”

“And I suppose he buys a lot of produce from the Grange.”

“He gives us preference, but he buys a lot of stuff from other cities; even Gordha. They have apples.”

“But not now?”

Saréidukter laughed. “Of course, not now! Abelménu; the month tells you when there are apples!”

They walked out of the food market and into the bustle of Temple Square, heading home with several days’ food. A few steps along they came to Sterané, the wife of Snékwu, one of her fellow Grange chiefs. They exchanged hails. “So, are you working your butt off?” asked Sterané.

“Yes, as long as the Bahá’ís are meeting, the Grange is understaffed! I was up an hour before dawn to get to the Grange and take care of business. How’s your little helper?” Saréidukter looked at Primantu. The ten year old that had been living with them for a few weeks.

Sterané smiled at him affectionately. “He’s a good boy, a good worker.”

“He should, he has a full stomach!” said Saréidukter, with a smile. “And he’s in school?”

“Of course,” replied Sterané.

“The teachers like him,” added Swadé, always interested in joining into adult conversations, unless her mother gave her a certain look.

“Really?” Sterané seemed happy to hear that.

“I already know all the letters,” exclaimed Primantu, proudly.

“But he can’t read yet!” teased Swadé.

Saréidukter tapped her daughter on the shoulder admonishingly. “Don’t worry, it takes a little time,” she said. She looked down Péskakwés Rodha and saw Snékwu walking toward them, accompanied by Soru. “Oh, they must be taking a supper break.”

Sterané watched her husband approach. “Bored, or hungry?” she finally asked.

“A bit of both. Talking all day; it wears you out, especially when all you can do is listen. They have taken some breaks to hear chanting of hymns, though.”

“So, is it over? Are you coming home now?”

“It isn’t over, but the session after supper is for the delegates only. They’re going to vote to elect the Spiritual Assembly of Éra.”

“And the Lords don’t tell them who they can vote for?” asked Kanawé.

Snékwu shook his head. “No, in voting, everyone is equal. Two nights ago when the delegates elected a chairman for the convention, they elected Stauréstü, and everyone was surprised a Mennea wasn’t chosen. But I think Lord Kristoféru was relieved.”

“Well, let’s head home now, then,” said Sterané. “I was about to go cook supper.”

“Alright.” Snékwu nodded to the others and they started home together.

Soru smiled at Kanawé. “How are you doing?”

“Alright. Saréidukter is helping me.”

“Good, Esto bestows his blessings.”

“You’re not at the hospital any more, right?”

“Correct, I’m teaching a ten year old deaf girl how to use signs to communicate.”

“She’s deaf?” asked Swadé, interested in the girl her age.

“Yes, and pretty lonesome as a result. Maybe you should come play with her some time.”

“But if she’s deaf, she can’t talk!”

“She can with signs. Maybe I could teach you a few signs, too.” Soru smiled; it was a good idea, for Wiresé was a lonely little girl.

“That might be hard to arrange; she’s in school,” said Saréidukter.

“Well, I could take her down after school, or on a Primdiu,” said Kanawé. “How hard is it to take the steam wagon to Méddoakwés?”

“Oh, easy,” replied Soru. “It’s one dontay each way, two for a round trip. Since I’m going five times per week, I’ve bought a book of tickets; twenty-five trips for one

dhanay. I could always give you four tickets for three dontay and save you a bit of money.”

“That would help, thank you,” said Kanawé.

Saréidukter didn’t say anything; she wasn’t sure what she thought of her daughter playing with a deaf girl and was not comfortable with a ten year old going to Méddoakwés, even with an escort. “Maybe you should bring this girl here, some time,” she suggested. “Take her to the school and show her the maps, globes, and books.”

“I may do that, once her parents are comfortable with the idea. We’ll probably start by making a trip to the Méddoakwés school that the génadéma opened back in the fall; it’s within walking distance of their house. There’s also a seven or eight year old boy in Brébestéa who’s deaf and we’re trying to get him to my class; her parents are talking to his parents. So I may soon have two kids. He seems to have other problems, though.”

“I am impressed by your efforts to help this child,” said Kanawé. “In the past, children like this would be ignored or even locked up.”

“People thought they were bewitched!” exclaimed Soru, forcefully. “Many people still think that, too. Wiresé just had the misfortune of getting severely sick when she was little and it damaged her hearing. The same thing happened to my father. He lost his hearing when he was fifteen after getting a severe illness. Wiresé’s family knows of a family with a four year girl who is blind; a wealthy family with royal blood. We hope the family will take the little girl to Dr. Lua to see if anything can be done, but if not, at least the parents will know *why* she is blind. Right now they say it is the will of Esto sometimes, and the spell of a witch other times.”

“That’s common,” agreed Saréidukter. “And both statements may be true, but either way, one still should help the child and not isolate it.”

“I agree,” said Soru.

“What are you doing for supper, Soru?” asked Saréidukter. “Because we’re about to walk home. Please come eat with us.”

“You are very kind. I was going to grab something here at Temple Square, then go to my room at the hospital. I’m still staying there.”

“Well, come with us,” said Saréidukter. “I live right up the alley not far from the hospital.”

“Thank you, you are very kind,” Soru replied, acquiescing to her request.

As the Bahá’ís gathered the next morning in the Center, excitement ran high. The election had occurred, but no one knew who was elected. Rumors circulated around the crowd because a group of nine was seen walking to the Mennea household about 9 p.m., but in the dark the exact membership had been unclear. A few names were fairly certain, but not all.

Then Dr. Stauréstu came forward with the chanters and the morning session began. After devotions—which included everyone singing two prayers together—concluded, he called forward the tellers, his brother Brébéstu and Mitrubéru from Néfa. The latter stepped forward to read the results.

“Dear Friends, all nineteen of the delegates voted for nine members, so all votes were valid. The following individuals were elected to our first Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís Éra. When I call out their names, I would like to ask each one to step forward.

“Lord Kristobéru Mennea, 19 votes.

“Dr. Lua Shirazi, 19 votes.

“Dr. Stauréstü Aywërgui, 19 votes.

“Lord Estodhéru of Mëddwoglubas, 16 votes

“Modolubu Paperkwéri of Mélwika, 14 votes

“Dr. Mitrétu of Meddoakwés, 10 votes.

“Ejnu of Néfa, 9 votes.

“Estoiwiku of Ora, 6 votes.

“Brébéstü of Tripola, 6 votes.”

The nine—eight men and one woman—stepped forward and stood in a row together, facing the crowd. Everyone spontaneously rose to their feet to applaud and some cheered as well, so thrilled was the crowd. “A divine institution,” said Soru to Snékwu.

“You can feel it!” he agreed, nodding.

The applause died down and Stauréstü stepped forward. “Your assembly met last night for several hours for the first time. We agreed we would meet once a month, alternating between Mélwika and Mëddwoglubas. We elected our officers as well; I am chair; Modolubu is secretary; Lord Kris is treasurer; and Ejnu is vice chair.” He had to

pause again for applause. “Our first act was to draft a letter to Her Majesty announcing our election and pledging our hearts to her in complete loyalty to the crown. As you know, in the fall the Consultative Assembly approved the granting of a royal charter to the Assembly. But we have not actually received such a charter and the Réjé’s secretary told us it was because there was no body yet to charter. Now we exist and hope to receive the charter shortly.” He paused again for applause; the crowd was immensely excited. “Now we have a treat. As you can see, the Bahá’í Center has a new piece of furniture; this large object is called a ‘piano’ I am told, and Lady Liz will demonstrate to us the music it can make. Lady Liz.”

Stauréstu stepped down and Liz came forward, dressed in her finest clothing. She sat at the piano and paused a moment. They had tuned it half the night using Thornton’s computer to generate the correct notes for comparison. She was a bit disappointed by the quality of sound; the piano didn’t quite sound in tune, no matter how hard they tried. It was probably because of the materials used to make it. But it was a huge step forward and could always be improved on.

She spread a song sheet before her and began to play part of Handel’s *Messiah*, whose solemn but triumphant notes seemed particularly appropriate for the occasion. The audience was spellbound and absolutely silent, entranced by this new musical instrument. When she finished they all applauded vigorously. Then she played the tune of a popular hymn of Widumaj, slowly and solemnly, and the entire audience spontaneously broke into song. It seemed a fitting way to celebrate the establishment of their supreme institution.

[Mar. 16, 2006; reread and edited 5/21/13, 7/29/17]

Hunting Incident

The steam wagon and its large trailer chuffed out of Foundry Square as the sky brightened from the approaching sun. Packed in the back were ten hunters with their longbows and twenty-five lumbermen with their long-handled steel axes and saws. It rolled out the northwest gate and headed up the Arjakwés. It made its first stop in fifteen minutes at the edge of a clear-cut area that was now almost three dökent across. Then it continued uphill, across the watershed to the Péskawés drainage, and up that river a dozen dökent. It crossed to the eastern bank and stopped to drop off the remaining six lumbermen; there was a fine grove of oaks they were chopping down. Two hunters jumped out as well. Then the steam wagon continued east and uphill into an area the hunters entered only about once a month. Hunting had gotten noticeably more difficult since the snowmelt, so they had spread out over a wider area and were rotating through different territories every two or three days.

The steam wagon chuffed up and up, stopping at a very large prairie halfway to the alpine meadows, where half the remaining hunters jumped out; the other half waited until they reached the meadows where they hoped to find mastodon, which crossed the mountains in early summer. Then the steam wagon headed back down. It would load up with oak logs, haul them to town, go back to the lower clear cut area to haul a load of timber from there, then return to the alpine meadows for the hunters.

Blésku Miller was very happy to see that the mastodons had indeed arrived. It didn't take them more than fifteen minutes to spot a big one to concentrate on. The longbow was a magnificent instrument for hunting; it allowed the hunter to accurately place a sharp arrow very deeply into an animal from a safe distance. The seven of them made noise from a safe place to frighten a small herd of mastodons toward the dirt track, since a one-tonne carcass was not something seven men could move on their own. Once the selected animal was at a spot where the steam wagon could roll up to it later, the seven of them spread out to circle the animal at about fifty meters distance and began to sink shafts into it. The mastodon screamed and charged toward one of them; he dashed into a nest of boulders where the beast could not pursue. The other animals fled the scene and the hunters concentrated on their victim. In five minutes he had twenty-five arrows in him, including one in his neck and one in his face. The twenty-sixth arrow entered his right eye, penetrated his brain, and he went down.

They cheered, circled the monster, moved in to touch it once they were sure it was dead, then pulled out their food and drink to celebrate around a fire—a big one to keep any wolves away—while they awaited late afternoon and the return of the steam wagon. The monetary value of the mastodon was staggering—more than two thousand dhanay, between the two tonnes of meat, a huge hide, and two long, curved, ivory tusks—and the royal tax system was not set up to tax the results of hunting. Even paying for the steam wagon—ten percent—left them with three months' income each for half a morning of work.

By the time the steam wagon approached—very late afternoon because they were quite far northeast of Melwika, and thus were three time zones ahead of town—they had used up all their food and drink and were a little drunk. They cheered and waved and the steam wagon responded by tooting its whistle, then rolling across the meadow to them. The driver saw the mastodon and emitted a long and loudy celebratory toot. Then he backed up to the animal, the hunters put down the tailgate to make a ramp, and they jacked up the front of the steamwagon so that the spinning middle axle could reel in a steel cable. It could pull a heavy log onto the flatbed, so it could pull a mastodon as well.

In fifteen minutes the steam wagon and cable were ready. The driver released a full head of steam into the cylinder powering the central axle and it began to turn, pulling the carcass onto the flatbed by its back legs. They cheered when the mastodon was secure.

They began to lower the jacks so the steam wagon could move and as they finished the task a dozen Dwobergone hunters entered the meadow. They were jogging to get there as quickly as they could. Leading them was a large Dwobergone hunter known in town from his frequent visits selling meat and hides: Rudhroklu, “Red Bear,” named for a particular species of large bear in the mountains. “Hey! Stop! That mastodon is ours because this land is ours! Can’t you see the dwo bergas! And we’re the Dwobergone!”

That claim startled Blésku, but only for a second. He knew the “two mountain” people derived their name from two distinctive mountains in their territory, but it had not occurred to him his hunters had strayed so far east as to be in the heart of their land. And

he had no intention of acknowledging their ancestral claim anyway; the Dwobergone had five hundred people, but Mélwika now have eight times more.

“This is our mastodon and we’re taking it home!” he shot back. “Don’t interfere or you’ll regret it!”

“This is our land!”

“Get on board, everyone, we’ve got to go!” exclaimed Blésku to the others. They had just finished lowering the axles to the ground; the steam cylinders could now move them forward. The driver tooted the whistle loudly to warn the passengers, then engaged the cylinders. They lurched forward.

Rudhrokту drew his sword and the other Dwoberegone pulled out axes as they raced toward the steam wagon, which was rolling at a jog on the rough ground. Blésku and the others knocked their bows or pulled out swords or axes. The result was a brief, chaotic clash with swords being parried against bows, and arrows being pointed at warriors anxious to strike but not wanting to be shot through. Blésku screamed as Rudhrokту’s sword slashed his arm. Rudhrokту groaned and went down, an arrow in his thigh. The Dwobergone retreated and there was an exchange of arrows. The driver was almost struck; a passenger got an arrow in the side; a Dwobergone was hit in the leg. The hunters huddled on the trailer floor behind the mastodon carcass, which quivered from several new arrows, and they rose to shoot, then got back down.

The arrows were fired for a few seconds only. Then the steam wagon made a mad dash to town, interrupted by stops to pick up hunters and prey, with victims writhing in pain and passengers swearing revenge.

In Foundry Square, the clock sounded five bells. Chris Mennea plodded home slowly from his Advanced Business course at the génadema, but stopped in Temple Square long enough to buy the latest copy of the *Tripola Bédhe*, which had arrived in town from the latter city just half an hour earlier. He sat in his easy chair next to the dining room table and started reading the long-anticipated article about the Bahá'í Convention. Brébekester had gotten back to Tripola a day after the deadline, so the article had had to wait an entire week and was now appearing ten days after Convention ended. As he read, Chris turned red. Just then Liz and May came home from the women's college.

"By Esto, you've got to read the article about convention," he said to them, angrily.

"Why?" asked Liz.

"The overall facts are more or less accurate, but the slant . . . he makes it sound like we're out to take over the entire world by the next year!"

"Oh God," said May, in English. She took the outer sheet of the paper and sat. She and Liz read it together while Chris looked at an article about the upcoming Consultative Assembly on the paper's other broadsheet; like the *Melwika Nues* the paper consisted of two printed sheets and eight pages altogether.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed May.

"It's also clever," said Chris. "Brébekester knows the paper needs readers and controversy sells, and an article like this won't result in a lawsuit by us or a fine from the Réjé. We've been exploited in order to sell papers."

“What’ll we do?” asked Liz. “The *Nues* can respond.”

“Oh, we will! We could publish an editorial!”

“And you’ll confirm the suspicions of your readership that the *Nues* is a biased paper because it is run by Bahá’ís.” Chris shook his head. “Any response has to be in the *Bédhe*. That’s the only way to reach the same audience anyway.”

“They won’t publish a retraction!” said May.

“We can ask. We should start with that. We should demand a correction. If they refuse, we can buy an ad and print our correction that way.”

“This has to go to the Assembly,” added Liz.

Chris nodded. “Absolutely. The Assembly meets in ten days, but that may be too long. If the four Central Spiritual Assembly members here get in a rover and drive to Meddwoglubas, and if we pick up the members in Tripola, Ora, and Néfa, we could meet this coming weekend. Or we could do a telephone meeting; it’d be expensive, but easier.”

“You have to send someone to Tripola to talk to the newspaper staff, or even to Lord Gugéndu,” suggested Liz.

“No question.” Chris tapped the other article. “And if that weren’t enough bad news, read this one. The Tripola members of the Consultative Assembly plan to propose a series of special taxes on products of the new knowledge—like woven cloth, steel tools from here, etc.—to pay for the new services, like improved roads, schools, and hospitals.”

“Easy for them to say!” exclaimed May. “Tripola doesn’t make any of those things!”

“It’d be a tax of Melwika and, to a lesser extent, Meddwoglubas,” said Liz. “Just what we need.”

“Weranolubu will be busy fighting that bill,” said Chris. “He told me earlier today that the Réjé had told Lord Kandékwas that the royal purse would authorize 125,000 dhanay for the development budget and authorize the assembly to raise more using special taxes. This Tripola proposal probably reflects the same royal conversation.”

“What will this do to, say, sale of bikes?” asked Liz.

Chris shrugged. “Make it harder, depending on the additional tax. If new products are more expensive, their market penetration will be slower. Of course, if some of that came back to the hospital in the form of a bigger subsidy, that wouldn’t be so bad.”

“Robbing John to pay Chris; it won’t go over well with John,” noted Liz.

Just then the phone rang. Chris rose and walked back to his office. “Hélo?”

“Lord Chris, this is Lubésé at the switchboard. Is Dr. Lua there? A steam wagon just arrived from the mountains with three wounded hunters, including Blésku. They had a clash with some Dwobergone.”

“No, she should be at Meddoakwés or on her way here by steam wagon. She usually arrives in a few minutes.”

“That’s what I thought; she usually stops here for messages before she goes home. I have to call Lord Miller now, then Blésku’s wife. You should come down; they’re talking about revenge and Lord John may not discourage it!”

“Thanks, I’ll be right there. Bye.” He hung up the phone. “A new crisis; Blésku and some of his hunters got wounded in a clash with some Dwobergoné in the mountains, and they want revenge.”

“Just what we need; now that we’re big enough, we attack the Tutane rather than the other way around,” said Liz.

“They’re at the hospital. Call Captain Aisu and ask him to come over.” Chris strode out of the house, adrenaline temporarily neutralizing the exhaustion he had been feeling when he had come home five minutes earlier.

The Emergency Room was chaotic. The only doctor on duty was Lujruktu, and he was very much in training. Lua and Mitretu were both at Meddoakwés. Lujruktu had only two nurses to help him. Lubésé called Meddoakwés Hospital to get someone there to come help. A patient who was ready to be discharged was sent to Temple Square to find the other nursing and medical students, who were eating supper. When Chris arrived, Blésku and another hunter were sitting in wheelchairs holding bandages on their wounds. In spite of his thick, black beard, Blésku’s face was twisted by pain.

“What happened?” Chris said to him.

“It was Rudhrokutu! He demanded the mastodon and attacked us when we wouldn’t give it to them, the savages! They couldn’t have even hauled it back to their village! When we refused he swung his sword at me. It sliced right through my bow and slashed my arm.”

“But he got an arrow in his leg, in return,” said Tritusunu, a hunter with a bad gash in his side. “I got nicked by a Dwobergoné axe.”

“We’ll get them; we’ll go burn their village!” exclaimed Blésku.

“Let’s not think about that now. What happened to the third hunter?”

“Weranukaru; he got an arrow in the side and has lost a lot of blood.”

“We had to leave half the hunters in the hills, we couldn’t stop to pick up their deer and elk!”

“Now, why did they attack you? Did both groups kill the same mastodon?”

“No, they said it was theirs!” replied Blésku, defiant, without elaborating.

“Why?”

“Because they said it was on their land!” he shot back, angry.

“Were you across the Péskakwés?”

Tritusunu laughed. Bloré stared at him. “No one has ever said the Péskakwés is the border in the hills. We’ve been hunting across the river for two years, now. We’ve got tracks all over those hills.”

“I see. How far east were you?”

“We were about sixty dékent northeast of here.”

“Sixty! By Esto, you were almost across their territory and in the land of the Meghendres!”

“No, not really! They have a *huge* slice of hill country, sixty by one hundred dékent, and they can’t *use* it practically at all. There are maybe five hundred of them and four thousand of us!”

“They are using it; for hunting. That’s all you’re using it for.”

“No, we’ve cut timber on that land, too.”

“You’ve cut timber east of the Péskakwés?” Chris was startled by that and shook his head.

The door opened and Captain Aisu entered. No sooner had it closed, than John Miller tore into the building, almost knocking Dr. Lua and Soru over, for they were strolling in as well. “What happened? Those savages!” exclaimed John.

“Seven of them were hunting mastodons sixty dékent east of here, way across the Péskakwés, and a Dwobergone hunting party confronted them and demanded the animal because it was on their land,” said Chris.

“Their land?” said John, almost spitting out the words. “The beasts!”

“How many injured?” asked Lua.

“Three hunters,” said Chris.

“And how many Dwobergone?”

“Two or three . . . or four,” replied Tritusunu.

“Okay, Soru, wheel them into examining room number two,” said Lua. “Gentlemen, you can’t settle this here. If you want to stay in the building, go into my office.”

“No; town hall,” said John. “I’m so angry, I need to walk to calm down!”

“Alright,” agreed Chris. He rose. Aisu, John, and he walked out of the hospital.

Mayor Weranolubu was still in his office when they entered. He saw John’s anger, Chris’s worry, and Aisu’s emotionless poker face. “What is it?” he said.

“We’re at war with the Dwobergone,” replied John. “Except this time we’re big and can wipe them out if we want! I can’t tell you how many times my family and I

trembled inside these walls when they rode around outside and stole anything they could!"

"Before then, they wintered here," added Aisu. "The folks in Nénaslua were terrorized every winter."

"Well, the Arjakwés was their border, as I understand it," said Chris. "Then Bérangrés was started and they accepted it; then Bérangrés established Nénaslua and they accepted it; then John built at the gluba and they eventually accepted it; then when we arrived and had some trouble with them, Pérku declared the Péskakwés the border and the Réjé confirmed it, so they had to accept it as well. I had even said to them I would let them winter in the basin this side of the Péskakwésgluba. Since then, some of them have wintered a half dékent farther east, where the land slopes downward and it's a bit greener."

"How far east were the hunters?" asked Aisu.

"Blésku said sixty dékent northeast of here," replied Chris.

"Let's look." Weranolubu walked to the corner and pulled out a big map. He unrolled it on his desk. Chris was surprised to see a lot of lines, representing trails and wagon tracks.

"Wow, they've been getting around," he said.

John pointed to a particular spot. "About here. I talked to Blésku two days ago. There's a low spot in the northern mountains and in early summer the snow melts there and the mastodons come south. He told me that was where he wanted to go. Each beast weighs three to five tonnes; they're worth a fortune if you can get them back here. And

with steam wagons, now we can. They got three last fall and they made Blésku and his team wealthy all winter."

"That's *way* east of the Péskakwés," observed Chris.

John shrugged. "So what? There is no border up here."

"I always assumed my land ended at the Péskakwés."

"I don't care what your assumption is, Chris, they aren't using the land and we are!"

"They hunt it too!" replied Chris.

"There must be a similar conversation going on in the Dwobergone hamlet that sent out the hunters," said Aisu. "With one difference: their three or four wounded hunters had to walk home and have access to no hospital, so some of them may be dead."

"What will we do?" asked John. "We can be sure they won't attack!"

"No, we're too strong," replied Aisu. "But the Dwobergone are allied with the 4,000 Mèghendrè, who are also allied with the 1,000 Krésone. Do you want trouble from all of them? Bye bye, steam wagon traffic to Gordha. Bye bye, electricity from Gordha."

"Bye bye, copper," added Chris.

"What do we do?" asked John.

"Talk to them," replied Aisu.

"Talk to them? Let them come here!" replied John.

"They'd be too scared," replied Aisu. He looked at Chris.

"We could take the rovers," said Chris. "They'd give us some protection, and if you came along they'd be intimidated by your uniform."

Aisu nodded. “Can we get the rovers to them, though? And we don’t know where to go. The Dwobergone have been careful to keep the locations of their settlements secret to outsiders.”

“If we go to Bolériledha, the people mining the copper could guide us to the right hamlet. And I doubt they would even know about the trouble yet,” said Chris.

“Alright,” said Aisu. “We have a plan. We need both Lords.” He looked at Miller, who reluctantly nodded. “What about our Mayor?”

“I’ll support anything the Lords agree to,” Weranolubu hastily replied.

“The Mayor stays, then. I guess someone has to keep the folks here calm. Lord Jonu, you need to ensure that no attack party is organized.”

“I’ll talk to my sons tonight; don’t worry.”

“Then we had better leave at first light tomorrow,” concluded Aisu.

They set out in both rovers the next morning. The Lords and Aisu occupied the first rover; a soldier drove the second one with Béndhu, the army surgeon, and medical equipment to take care of the wounded warriors. They headed for the copper mine, arriving there shortly after dawn.

Arktinogu, son of the Dwobergone Lord and an occasional student at the génadëma, was in charge of Bolériledha or “Greenstone,” a hamlet of twenty houses on the edge of the malachite deposit. They had just started a “heat” of copper; they were pouring crushed ore and coke into the smelter from the top while liquid copper ran out

the bottom and into ingot-shaped depressions in a sand bed. They quickly briefed him and the others, whose faces turned stony with anger.

“Are you *really* ready to go to Roktatroba?” he asked. “Because from what you say, those hunters were in the *heart* of our land, the high meadows between the twin guardians, the peaks that give us our name. If that land isn’t ours, we aren’t the Dwobergone.”

“Arktinogu, our hunters didn’t know,” replied Chris. “The border is in dispute. Let’s talk this through and resolve the matter, so we can be good neighbors.”

He shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

“What’s the point, if we can’t negotiate the border?” asked John. “If you want to claim the high meadows between the two mountains, there’s no reason to go; they’ll kill you,” said Arktinogu.

“No, I think the border should be the Péskakwés,” replied Chris. John glared at him. “Even more reason not to go if you plan to give away everything!”

“John, we have to resolve this crisis!” replied Chris, angry. “I’ll guide you to Roktatroba because I trust Chris,” replied Arktinogu. John moved to the back seat and the Tutane took the front passenger seat. They headed down a worn trail that was barely wide enough for the rovers; indeed it often wasn’t and they crushed brush as they went. They had to stop after an hour to change a flat tire, which was pretty unusual with the tires the aliens had supplied them. They passed through a gluba that broke through the same mountain ridge that passed Melwika; the

trickle of water was tiny and the creek rarely flowed all the way to the Kheroakwés. They went up and up into the pine-covered hills until they came to a pretty valley where the creek emerged from the ground at a large spring. Scattered across the valley floor was fifty or sixty small houses of stone and logs with thatched roofs: Roktattroba or “Bear Settlement,” the headquarters of the Bear Clan, the largest of the three Dwobergone clans. Each house had a fenced in field full of cows, sheep, or horses and fallow fields for vegetables and wheat.

Near the middle of the valley, next to the creek, was a larger stone stronghouse and they headed toward it. The sound of the rovers brought out the entire village, which must have housed two thirds of the entire tribe. Men came with their swords and axes.

Lord Andruleru came out of the stronghouse as the rovers approached the door. He put his hands on his waist in surprise. “Mennea is a brave man!” he exclaimed. He was not pleased to see either Miller or Aisu, though. He approached the rover on the driver’s side, slowly.

Chris rolled down the window. “Hail, Lord Andruleru. Are there any injured men here?”

“Three, one near death because of your hunters.”

“Dr. Béndhu, an army surgeon, is in the other rover. May he treat the men?”

Anduleru glanced at his son in the rover with Chris, then nodded. Arktinogu got out. “Take the doctor inside the house,” the Lord instructed him. Arktinogu ran back and got them. They watched the physicians go inside.

“Lord Andruleru, we came to talk about this incident. We did not come to lecture you or beg you. We came as neighbors would, when their families have gotten in a fight.”

Andruleru looked at him. “Very well, come inside. You will be safer there.”

They got out; Chris locked the rover, knowing that would do little good, and they walked into the stronghouse. It was dark inside the windowless building except for a little sunlight filtering in through slit-windows, a dozen candles, and a blazing fire in the hearth. The main room had three wounded men and their sullen, angry wives. Béndhu and his two assistants were working fast; they were already setting up an intravenous in order to give Rudhrokту blood, who was unconscious.

Andruleru led them across the main hall and into a smaller room; his private audience chamber. He pointed to the bear skins on the floor; they all sat. “The issue is not the mastodon your hunters killed yesterday,” he began. “It is a pattern of violation of our land and rights. It goes back three or four years, but got worse two years ago when your lumbermen began to clear wagon tracks. You must hear me out about this, my Lords. We have wanted to attack Melwika on several occasions, but knew we could not. I cannot easily restrain my men today, either; it is almost impossible.

“Your hunters have ranged over our land as if it were their own. If we were to do that to any of our Tutane neighbors as often as you have done this, we would face a war party.

“And now that your hunters have longbows and steam wagons, they are slaughtering the animals incredibly fast. Starting in the summer our hunters began to complain about how difficult it was becoming to hunt deer, elk, and bison. It takes a

hunter a week to bring back as much game as he used to get in two days. The animals run away before we can even get in bowshot of them because they know your longbows too well.

“And then your lumbermen began to cut *our* trees! How dare they haul them away and *sell* them! And if that weren’t enough, now they have hurt three of our men who were out hunting!”

“My Lord, three of our hunters are severely injured as well, including Blésku Miller, son of Lord Jonu,” exclaimed Chris.

“They said they had fought, so I am not surprised.”

“The border between the lands has never been finalized,” added Aisu. “This is the cause of all these problems.”

“Our land had always run all the way to the Arjakwés. We surrendered the lowland parts all the way to the exit of the Péskakwés from the mountains, but we never surrendered the hill country between those rivers. Never.”

There was a pause. “But surely you recognize that the land along the Arjakwés just upstream of Melwika belongs to that city?” said Chris. “Your people have never tried to use it over winter there in the last four years.”

“We did not want to risk it, but that is not the same thing as renouncing our ancestral claim.”

“Obviously, we will not give up the Arjakwés drainage,” replied John. “We have used it for years; years before the Menneas arrived I cut timber up there and my sons hunted there. Melwika needs that land.”

“Then perhaps you should have asked us about it? Our claim goes back centuries.”

“The Réjé recognized our claim to the water of the Péskakwés,” said Chris.

“Water is not the same as trees and game. We are not stopping the water.”

Andruleru raised a finger to wag it at them. “Captain Perku was very clear when we camped at Péskakwés Gluba, three years ago. Mélwika’s eastern border runs from Péskakwés southward to the Tersakwés—now everyone says Majakwés—and northward from the gluba to the Arjakwés. That’s not much land.”

Chris was startled, but he thought back. “I believe that is indeed what Perku said.”

“Lord Kristobéru is an honest man, as well as brave.”

“Regardless, we have been using a lot more land than that, and we will continue to do so,” replied John, defiantly.

“And the Army will recognize the Péskakwés as the boundary,” added Aisu. “That’s a simple, clear boundary, is it not? Hunters may miss a boundary blazed through the forest, but they can’t miss the Péskakwés!”

“That is true,” agreed Andruleru. “But if you want us to give up all the land between those rivers, surely we should be paid for it? It is worth several tens of thousands of dhanay.”

“What? Robbery!” exclaimed John.

“That’s fair,” replied Aisu. “It has been Dwobergonë land all this time, and it is now missing a lot of game and trees.”

“John, ten thousand dhanay of products of our industries, with a gravel road to Roktattroba and a power and phone line might not be a bad idea,” said Chris. “How far are we from the Péskakwés? About half a day’s walk, I bet.”

“That is correct,” said Andruleru. “But ten thousand isn’t enough. We will want something for all the animals and timber cut on the land we are giving up.”

“That is not acceptable,” replied John. “If it’s our land, it makes no sense for us to pay to use it.”

“I have a suggestion,” said Chris. “The hunting is getting worse and worse, and it is not surprising; the hunters have gotten very efficient with the longbows and steam wagons. I suggest that no one hunt the Péskakwés drainage *at all*. The animals will need a refuge. They will come out of it, we can be sure.”

“That is wise. But if you’re going to provide us goods, and nothing for the timber, we want fifteen thousand.”

“Alright fifteen!” John shot back. “A steam wagon, power, phone, gravel from our equipment, sixty or seventy iron stoves . . . and the génadëma will provide educations.”

“We’ll want some cash, too, so our people can buy things. That’s the only way to sell this deal to my people; they have to be able to buy things for their families.”

“Fine,” said John.

Dr. Béndhu stuck his head into the doorway. “Lords, I don’t mean to interrupt you, but Rudhrokту is in very serious condition and must be transported to hospital immediately. I will need both rovers to get the injured to safety.”

“Then let us resume this discussion in Mélwika, where I can consider the choices of items and we can write down a final agreement,” suggested Andruléru. “We can loan the three of you horses. If we ride due west to the Péskakwés road, we might get to Mélwika before the rovers.”

[March 18, 2006; reread and edited 5/21/13, 7/29/17]

Prophets and Babies

Thornton, Behruz, and Perku alternated scanning the horizon with the binoculars. When they heard the Foundry Square clock chime out four bells, Thornton said, "He's getting late; I'm worried."

"So am I," said Perku. Behruz nodded and scanned the sky with his naked eye, then, startled, pointed.

"By Esto, there he is; *way* up there!"

"By Esto, can he breathe that high?" asked Thornton, startled. The glider was, in fact, close to overhead; it wasn't on the horizon at all!

In the next ten minutes they watched it descend lower and lower in great circles. The residents of Melwika barely gave it any attention at all; they had seen it almost every day for two months, now. Perku had rarely come to town to watch, however, and was mesmerized. Finally, Okpétu made a perfect approach toward the new concrete runway they had poured across one of Miller's fields west of town. He made a perfect landing and rolled almost right up to them.

As they ran over, he opened up the canopy and laughed. "This was an incredible flight, just incredible!"

"How high did you go?"

“Eight thousand meters! I’ll tell you, I could barely breathe up there, and I froze! It’s cold that high! The canopy began to get covered with frost on the inside, too, so I couldn’t see and had to come down.”

“I thought for sure those thunder storms would give you trouble!” said Thornton. They had had some very light showers about 1 p.m.

“I rode their updrafts high; that’s how I got to eight thousand! I stayed away from the real clouds, though, I could see there were some very powerful up and down drafts. I’m not sure she’d hold together in them.” He tapped the glider affectionately.

“Did you take pictures?” asked Pérku. That was the reason he had come to town. Okpétu nodded. “I used up all twenty-four shots, and some of them were taken from pretty high!” He turned back to the glider, reached down, and loosened a series of clamps that held a special camera to the floor and pointing straight down. He pulled it out; Behruz took it.

“The army wants the negatives too, as well as blow-up positives,” said Pérku. “We’ll have them tomorrow,” said Behruz. “We can keep a set for the college cartography library, right?” asked Thornton. “Sure,” said Pérku, though he obviously was unhappy with the request. “How many shots did you take of the Ornakwés and lower Arjakwés?”

“Ten each,” replied Okpétu. “From about two thousand meters; they should overlap all the way down the valley. The last four were of the Méddoakwés area, from very high.”

“Why does the army want pictures of those areas?” asked Thornton.

“I don’t know; I wasn’t told. I understand the order came from the Queen’s office, though. My guess would be development.”

“I could see the old irrigation canals from the air,” said Okpétu. They go at least half way up the Ornawkwés; in other words, almost to Mèdhela.”

“Really?” said Thornton, surprised.

The pilot nodded. “And just southeast of here, in Dwobergone territory, I could see a series of three or four ruined towers; probably they were the limit of Sumi settlement. When I was all the way up, over the lower Arjakwés, I could see all the way to the sea! It was quite something. I think I’m ready to fly across the sea, or almost ready.”

“Well, if this experiment with aerial photography works, you may get a lot of experience,” said Perku. “General Roktékester is very excited with the possibilities.”

They attached the glider to the rover, climbed in, and towed it to its hanger, a little stone building built for it just a few weeks ago. The army, in a fit of generosity, had paid for the concrete, thousand-meter runway and hanger; they were busy building two other facilities at Ora and Endraida, which would include a big steam engine, a thousand meters of cable on a spool, and a cabin with a gearbox so a man could accelerate the glider fast enough for it to take off. They locked up the hanger and drove back to Temple Square, which had the nearest gate into town. Thornton dropped Okpétu off at his dorm on campus and Behruz at Karu’s Photography Shop; it was the latest Mennea family industry and involved the manufacture of real celulloid film and development of the

pictures taken on it. Karu's building was across the street from Behruz's chemistry lab, and Karu had been one of his employees for two years.

"Where shall I take you?" Thornton asked Perku. "The Citadel? Or do you want to have tea with dad?"

"I'd like to have tea with your father, if he's home."

"He should be by now."

"Good. I can introduce you to Kalé."

"Oh that's right! How old is she?"

"Three weeks. Dad and John Miller came back from the Dwobergone settlement to find Lébé at the hospital in labor. The baby was almost born before they returned, in fact; it was a fast labor. May had her baby four days later."

"It's a pretty name, I've always liked 'Kalé.'"

"It was Lébé's mother's name; she died of an infection when Lébé was four. And May's girl is named Marié, after our grandmother, Mary."

"How old is Mary, anyway?"

"Eighty-five Earth years; that's almost eighty Eryan years."

"And how old are you?"

"I just turned twenty-one Eryan years old."

"Ah-hah. I'm twenty-eight. Or twenty-nine, I forget and have to figure it out."

Perku watched the town pass his window for a moment. "Two children; how did you feel about number two?"

"Very excited. You've got four, right?"

“Indeed, and two servants to help take care of them. I suppose you have servants as well.”

“Two to maintain the house; we now have all Mennea kids in school or next door in the Miller household during the day. Awsé runs a formal day care operation with two daughters and a daughter in law and they take care of the entire clan.”

“More kids?”

“Lébé wants one or maybe two more, but we’ll try to space them out a bit so she can work, too. She wants to continue teaching.”

“Huh. A strange notion. So, what’s your next project?”

“The upper Arjakwés all the way to the crest of the northern mountains. Lébé wants me to stay close for a while, and now that we have an eastern boundary, John wants to know what we have by way of timber, minerals, and snowpack. We also have to consider what western boundary to argue for; there are rival claims by Yimuaidha, Nénaslua, and Mègdhuna to consider. The first priority is to survey the route to Roktattroba, because the Dwobergone are already clearing the track on their side.”

“How did you get them to do that work?” asked Perku, amazed.

“Lord Andruleru did it. He insisted that the land settlement include cash that he would distribute to every family; three thousand dhanay, and they have about ninety households so that amounts to thirty dhanay per household, plus a bonus of one hundred for each family of a warrior wounded in the clash. You can buy a lot with thirty-three dhanay, but you can’t get it home without a track capable of handling steam wagons, especially the iron stoves Miller is including as part of his contribution to the fifteen

thousand dhanay. So the Dwobergoné are clearing a track to the Péskakwés; it's the shortest route to Roktatroba. John doesn't want our part of the route to run down the Peskakwés, he wants it to cross the hills to the Arjakwés and run down it instead. We have to settle the route in the next week and get started on it. By the end of summer we'll have a gravel road running northeastward twenty kilometers from town but still on our land, then thirty kilometers more on their land, and the whole route will have power and telephone service as well. We're actually getting pretty excited about the project because it'll open a lot of land to settlement."

"And with peace, the Dwobergoné will not be a threat; people will be willing to buy the land, work it, even live on it. That's the real value of this peace treaty your father wisely pushed. Mélwika feels safer than it ever felt before. The other Tutane tribes are pleased with the agreement also and they are less disposed to give you trouble as well."

"That's true. Father got a very nice letter from Lord Walékwés the other day, and it basically thanked him for his fairness and asked for additional collaboration between Mélwika and Gordha. I get the impression the villages and towns of the Méddoakwés area are pretty upset with us, though."

"A lot of public opinion is mad at Mélwika; the attitude a lot of people have is, the Tutane have terrorized us for hundreds of years and we should crush them when we get the chance, not deal with them fairly as equals. But the army and the palace do not share that opinion. I think this lower Ornawkwés project is one response; I think the Réjé wants to buy some of the land claimed by the Médhelone, but never used by them. They

could use the money to fix up their oasis and the Réjé could assign the land to some aristocratic families who are loyal to her, but who have little resources.”

“Interesting.”

“The glider figures into the new approach to the Tutane, too. Rather than forcing them to participate in the census, we’ll just photograph their herds and count animals. They have a lot of land and a lot of hidden hamlets; the army has never even been sure where the Tutane all live! But now we can treat them as regular subjects and expect them to pay regular taxes. And if they refuse, a glider can drop bombs on them.”

“I see,” said Thornton, not liking the last comment at all. He stopped in front of their main entrance and got out to open the door wide. Then he got back in the rover and drove it into the courtyard. They no longer garaged both at the house; the two garages were now living space, but they kept a parking space for one in the courtyard.

Perku looked around as they got out. “Wow, you fixed this place up!”

“Yes, all fall and winter. We have more room for the three families now, and it looks much better.”

“It does, it’s quite attractive!”

“Well, we had to look like Lords.”

Chris came out of his office when he heard the rover and walked over to greet General Perku. Thornton asked about Kalé and was told Lébé had taken her next door, so Thornton opened the door connecting the Mennea and Miller complexes and entered the latter. He headed for the “New Courtyard” first, but not hearing her voice there, he walked to the “Old Courtyard” instead, where he found Lébé, May, Awsé, Luké, and

Glosé talking. Luké was Awsé's daughter; Glosé was the daughter of John's other wife Marié. She had just moved to town with her husband and three children from Morituora, where her husband was the brother of the current Lord, Mitrudatu.

"It has to be something he can make a lot of money doing," Glosé was saying. "Sarédatu doesn't want to be the poor son-in-law. The Foundry has been good work, but it's a salary, not profits."

"Draperies, linens, and bedding," said Awsé. "There's a huge need in town for these things. People have the money to buy them, but I am amazed how hard it is to buy items of quality. The quality of stuff imported from Ora is much higher."

"That's true," agreed Glosé. "Quality seems better in Meddoakwés, but even there it's limited. I think he doesn't want to go into those kinds of items, though. He's more familiar with paints, plaster, mortar, good wood. . . those kinds of things."

"Then he needs your help," said Awsé. "Because you have good taste in decorative things."

"I don't think he wants my help."

"Insist! And I'll talk to him," Awsé promised.

"Home improvement," Thornton said. "It sounds like that's what Sarédatu needs to open; a store that provides everything people need to improve their homes. Because that's what everyone here is doing. Every year they're plastering, painting, putting in glass windows, installing wood floors, adding pipes and lamps, buying drapes and beds. . . everything."

"He's right!" exclaimed Awsé. "One store to provide everything! It's perfect!"

“Don’t think my husband is a genius, though,” said Lébé. “Chris was talking about different kinds of stores on Gedhéma at supper last week.”

“He had me do some web research about home improvement stores for his advanced business class. They were discussing ‘business models.’ In the last half century there has been a trend toward ‘chain stores’ where one local store establishes itself with a combination of goods or services that is popular, then opens branches in other cities and becomes known throughout the land for selling something.”

“I see,” said Glosé. “And ‘home improvement’ is one of those types of stores?”
“Exactly. They sell building materials, to expand the house, finishing materials to make the interior surfaces look pretty, decorations, and furniture.”

“We’ll have to design most of the things it sells,” said Awsé. “But the Miller and Mennea households now number twenty and all of us have had the same problems, so if we create things for our houses and then sell them in the store, it’ll be cheaper for us and we’ll make money.”

“What I saw on the web was interesting,” said Thornton. “Let’s say you have items for the bedroom to sell. What you do is create a big bedroom and decorate it with four different kinds of beds, you put the sheets, blankets and pillows on the beds, you put up window curtains around a glass window next to the bed. . . in other words, when people walk in they see how everything looks together, and of course they want it.”

Awsé laughed. “Of course!”
“But remember, what our twenty Miller families will want may not be typical; we’re wealthier and have a different culture,” pointed out Lébé. “Father talks a lot about

marketing, which means figuring out what your audience wants and selling *that*. I think Glosé and Sarédatu should talk to Lord Chris; in an hour he'll give them a lot of ideas."

"Oh, I'll insist!" agreed Glosé.

"Can I take Kalé?" Thornton asked Lébé. "I want to show her to General Perku."

"Sure." Lébé rose and transferred their sleeping daughter to Thornton. Kalé cried briefly—she was cold—but then went back to sleep. Thornton carried her back to the Mennea side of the compound, where Perku was being entertained by Chris and Grandmother Mary.

"Have you any idea what the problem with the Peace Corps is?" asked Chris, gently. "It could do so much good, especially in Belledha. That place is still ruined."

"I know." Perku paused to consider how to phrase his answer, then saw Thornton and the baby. "Ah, so this is the new addition to the Miller-Mennea families!"

"Yes, Kalé Elizabéte Ménnéa."

"Of course, she isn't my most recent great grand daughter," added Mary.

"I heard about Marié as well." Perku took the little baby—something a man would normally do with a boy, but not a girl, prompting Thornton and Chris to wonder whether Perku's attitudes had changed a bit—and kissed her several times. "She reminds me of my three girls when they were little."

"Good girls, too, I hear," added Chris.

"And doing very well in school. All three want to come to the Women's College, you know." He handed her back to Thornton, who settled in to hear the answer to his father's delicate question. "Let me give you the big picture," began Perku. "Prince

Méméjékwu is a very proud and capable man. He received the absolute best education available to him when he was a youth; he learned fencing, archery, the hymns, rhetoric, counting . . . then he went off to Ora to be the viceregent and governor of the western shore, and then you arrived and everything changed. . . now his superb skills in the old ways are partly obsolete and he's too proud to be educated in the new ways.”

“That says something about the difference between the Prince and the Queen,” observed Chris.

“Indeed. She can read the new system quite quickly, now. Estoiyaju runs a staff and implements her decisions. But Méméjékwu’s secretary spends most of his time—hours and hours a day—reading things aloud to the Prince, summarizing them, or taking dictation, rather than implementing his decisions.”

“And the Peace Corps?”

Perku shrugged. “It’s a good idea and he has no idea what to do with it, so no one else can implement it either. Roktekester suggested I serve as his second in command and organize the Peace Corps; Méméjékwu said no. Roktekester doesn’t really want the Peace Corps either; he wants the engineering corps to take on those projects.”

“And no one can help the Crown Prince with his skills?”

Perku shrugged. “Even the Réjé has tried. Maybe Gawéstu can do something; he just arrived in Meddoakwés yesterday.”

“Really? I hope I’ll see him. I always enjoy meeting him.”

Three days later, Chris drove to Meddoakwés to meet with the Consultative Assembly. To say he had trepidations would be an understatement. It was six months earlier when he last visited the Assembly and was nearly killed when he exited the palace grounds. His treatment in the gathering was only slightly less kind. His outsider status could never be wiped out and made him perpetually uncomfortable; his accent, search for words, and perfect teeth made him stand out in a crowd of Eryan peers. This time, the “invitation”—it could possibly also be called a subpoena—was vague as to the purpose of his visit and the nature of the questions.

Lua insisted on coming with him, shifting her usual visit to Meddoakwés Hospital from afternoon to morning. Father and daughter had a rare, quiet talk together during the half hour drive to the capital. After dropping Lua off at the front door of the new hospital building—Lord Mayor Kandékwes had spared little expense to equip the city with a prestigious facility—Chris drove the rover into the new military annex and parked there, walking to the meeting hall of the Consultative Assembly.

He was a few minutes early and found a place for himself in the visitor’s gallery with Werétrakester. The widu seemed very reflective and laconic that day.

Lord Kandékwes called the gathering to order and summoned a representative to chant a hymn they often started with. The sacred words, at least, got everyone started on a note of serenity.

“Before we turn to our main items of business, Estoiyaju is here with an announcement from the Queen,” exclaimed Kandékwes. He turned to the royal secretary, who rose and stepped forward with a proclamation.

“Her Majesty has just issued the following proclamation,” he began, and then he unrolled the scroll and began to read. “I, Dukterésto, monarch over of all Éra, queen of the Tutane and Sumi, having been petitioned repeatedly in the last year for grants of land for the settlement of farmers and herders, hereby announce and proclaim the following: Henceforth, Tritu, son of Mitresu, General of the Army and member of the Supreme Military Council, is Lord Tritu of Swadlendha. Swadlendha is defined as follows; from a point north of the Swadakwés due north of Endraida, it extends along the northern bank of said river eastward for thirty dekent, westward to the sea, and northward thirty dekent. Endraida occupies a block of similar dimensions south of the same river. Whereas the land of Endraida was confiscated from the Kwolone for their rebellion against this monarch, Swadlendha is to be purchased from the Kwolone for fifteen thousand dhanay, constituting a five thousand dhanay reduction in their taxes for three years. We thank General Tritu for his long years of outstanding and exemplary service and loyalty to the royal house. Gelnébelu of the Army Engineering Corps is elevated to the rank of General and added to the Supreme Council.

“Second: Aryékwes, the Lord of the House of Dwobrébas, is hereby granted land on the southern bank of the Arjakwés from Perkas to a point twenty dekent distant from the same, and to a line twenty dekent south of the river. Third: Gurwekester, son of Yusdu, is granted a twenty dekent square of land on the south bank of the Arjakwés west of that of Aryékwes. Fourth: Roktekester, son of Yusdu, outstanding General in our army, now elevated to Supreme Commander of the Army, is granted the square of land west of

his brother and is granted the title of Lord of Ornawkwés. The lands of the last three settlements are to be purchased from the Médhélone for fifteen thousand dhanay, constituting a five thousand dhanay reduction in their taxes for three years.

“All four of these Lords are exhorted to populate their territory with army veterans and farmers through enducements of land, and their villages are exempted from royal taxation for five years. Furthermore, the Army engineering corps is called on to build gravel roads and irrigation ditches as necessary so that these new settlements may be filled with people and flourish.

“Signed and sealed by me on this day the 25th of Dhébelménu in the year 623 of Widumaj.” Estoiyaju lowered the scroll. “May Esto save the Queen!”

“May Esto save the Queen!” echoed the assembled delegates. He stepped off the floor while everyone turned to their neighbor to exchange comments.

“Interesting; Tritu is out and Gelnébelu is in,” whispered Werétrakester. “That should be good for us.”

“They’re settling a huge stretch of the lower Arjakwés; they’re confident the water is back,” whispered Chris.

“You can’t make desert bloom by the stroke of a pen,” said the widu. “They’re counting on the wealthy families in Brébestéa and Perkas to buy large estates and equipment to run them. Farmers will move to Melwika instead unless they offer a very good deal, and I doubt they’re willing to do that.”

“Interesting,” agreed Chris.

Kandékwes stepped forward, cutting off further discussion. “We have invited a guest to speak with us today: Lord Kristobéru of Mélwika. In the last three weeks we have debated several matters that touch on the new knowledge. In particular, we are considering a law that would impose a ten percent surcharge on products stemming from the new knowledge. We seek his ideas about the law, and then the floor will be open to questions. Lord Kristobéru.”

Chris rose and headed for the place the speakers usually stood. At least he now knew why he had been invited. He had been prepared to discuss the topic, but Estoiyaju’s announcement and Werétrakester’s analysis gave him some new ideas. He thought furiously about the matter as he walked slowly to the speaker’s stand.

As he reached the stand he saw movement at the front door and Gawéstu entered. The great widu spotted Werétrakester and headed toward the open seat next to him, Chris’s old seat.

“Honored ones, before I speak, we should greet Gawéstu,” he said. All eyes turned, giving him another moment to reflect. Gawéstu nodded in thanks and sat.

“Honored ones, I am very grateful to our Queen for this proclamation. It marks the resettlement of a major part of the Arjawkés Valley for the first time since the Great Drying a thousand years ago. It also brings forward all the questions about the new knowledge that the Consultative Assembly has been debating over the last two years.

“We know the lower Arjawkés and Ornawkés drainage better than ever before because over the last two years we have mapped it in great detail. We know where the old roads and irrigation ditches were located because of geology, surveying, photography,

and ecology. We know the key to the irrigation of the area: a major viaduct carrying an irrigation canal from Moritua to the Dhudhuba, now a giant dry hole, but once a huge, deep reservoir storing two years of irrigation water. The area will still need the Dhudhuba, but the Gordha dam and reservoir to some extent replaces it.

“The area her Majesty has assigned to each Lord is twenty dékent square. The Arjakwés Valley in that area averages about six dékent wide, so we are talking about one hundred twenty square dékent of irrigated farmland, totalling, if I can do the math right in my head quickly, ten thousand agris; the area of our new farmland in Ménwika. The three new townships will have about the same amount of farmland as currently is under cultivation in the Meddoakwés region. In addition, the hill country to the east, another fourteen dékent wide, now brush and cactus, is rapidly become grassland as a result of the increased rain, and with the peace we have established with the Tutane, farmers can raise thousands of head of cattle and goats.

“The potential wealth is immense. But how will we develop it? Following traditional methods of dry land farming and some irrigated agriculture by peasants living in small adobe houses, who pull the plows and cut the grain themselves, maybe with the help of a mule? We can do that, but each township will require one thousand families. Where will we get that many peasants? And what will the land yield? About one million dhanay a year of grain and other produce, perhaps a million and a half when one includes the cattle and goats.

“Will the new knowledge help? Of course, quite a bit, but it will cost as well. Since Ménwika is the same size as these new towns, let me use it as an example. Three

quarters of our ten thousand agris is now assigned to farmers, but we have roads and irrigation reaching all of it. The gravel roads cost a thousand dhanay per dekent and we have twenty-eight dekent of them. The irrigation ditches cost half that much per dekent; fourteen thousand more. Our farmers use six steam wagons with plows, threshers, harrows, and other attachments; at six thousand dhanay each, that's thirty-six thousand dhanay. In reality we need to buy four more because we have severe shortages of equipment and we are constantly renting steam wagons to make up the difference. Add garages and grain storage and Ménwika has needed almost one hundred fifty thousand dhanay of stuff to farm its land.

“But how many farmers do we need? A thousand? No. We have five hundred and over the next few years I think we will be down to about two hundred fifty, with each farmer handling forty agris of land. The farmers need another hundred dhanay of steel shovels, hoes, and other farm tools, and they spend fifty dhanay on fertilizer and seeds every year. But honored ones, each farmer is producing almost twice as much per agri, and with two harvests a year they produce almost four times as much. That means that each farm is producing not one thousand dhanay of food per year from ten agris of land, but almost four thousand dhanay; for those farmers managing forty agris, they are producing fourteen thousand dhanay per year of food! After taxes, fees for use of equipment, a cut for me to purchase the land from me, and purchases of seed and fertilizer, these farmers still have four thousand dhanay for their families. No wonder they are adding a second story to their houses, marrying second wives, buying iron stoves, and installing electricity. And what will Ménwika produce every year? About four million

dhanay in food, compared to one million produced by traditional methods. Does the Lord who runs the area make more money? Indeed, four times as much. Is the one hundred fifty thousand dhanay worth the investment? Definitely; one has no need of the new knowledge to figure that out!

“Can farmers produce this much for a Lord if they are landless tenants sharecropping? No, they cannot, and for several reasons. First, farmers work harder if they have the pride of land ownership. If he is told his labor is needed to deepen the irrigation ditch supplying *his* land with water, if the gravel road reaching *his* farm needs more gravel, if his neighbor needs his help today so that the neighbor will help him tomorrow, he will be much happier to do this work than if he is serving a Lord’s vast holdings.

“Second, landless peasants cannot use steam-powered equipment as efficiently. If you tell a man that the steam-powered thresher will come to his land next Dwodiu and he doesn’t know today is Tridiu, he won’t know when the steam wagon is coming. Farmers will produce more, will work smarter, if they can read a calendar and can write notes on it telling them what they need to do each day. If they can read the prices of grain and vegetables in the newspaper every week, they can decide what to grow themselves. And if they are choosing the people who run their grange—the organization that buys the steam-powered equipment, builds the grain storage, pays their taxes, and sometimes negotiates sales prices for them—they will have confidence in their leaders, because the leaders are other farmers. Even if they can’t read and write, they have friends they trust who can.

“Furthmore, the farmers can work harder because they are not hungry. The farmers sleep better at night knowing that if they get sick, the Grange will pay their hospital fee. If they feel funny, the Grange will pay for them to go ask a doctor to check them out. If they get a toothache, the Grange will pay for the cavity to be filled, so they don’t lose their teeth. If they can’t see well, the Grange will pay for glasses. And if they die, the Grange will pay for their funeral and will harvest their crops that year. The grange charges ten percent of their crop, but it is worth it. Mélwika farmers will live to be about sixty years old, on average, and they will be able to farm all that time. They can afford to send their children to school. They will see their grandchildren. And when they go shopping, they have money to buy clothes, blankets, beds, iron stoves, and many other things. Merchants love Mélwika; they tell me it now has a bigger market than Meddoakwés.

“Honoreds, is this not a good thing? Does not the new knowledge make a better life possible *for everyone*? You will be richer, yes; but so will the people. Is that not what Widumaj would want? The key, honored ones, is not just the new knowledge; it is also the *old knowledge from Widumaj*. The two must work together. Otherwise we have huge estates with very rich families worked by poor, ignorant people who die young. If the rich families give the farmers some support and some freedom, the farmers will be richer, but so will the rich families. That is the promise the two knowledges bring us.”

He stopped speaking and looked toward Wérétrakester. He was very pleased. Gawéstu’s face was harder to read. Several representatives applauded and many had been

nodding as he spoke. But others sat stony faced. Kandékwes rose and the red-tipped staffs went up. Kandékwes pointed to Lord Albanu of Néfa.

“Lord Kristoféru is very persuasive in the picture he paints, but it obviously is a picture and not reality. I run one of those big estates he describes. My peasants are not of the quality of the ideal farmers he describes. Mélwika is not a typical case; it attracts the ambitious, leaving the rest of us with the lazy. There is no way it can serve as a model for the rest of us. There is no way it can produce the crops he describes, and if it did, the price of farm produce would fall and all farmers would become poorer, not richer. Sixty year old farmers? I have a few at that age and they can’t even chew their food, let alone work! Farmers who can read? What ideas will that give them? And this *Grange*; what sedition will it produce, along with crops? The manure his farmers spread on their fields is perhaps as fragrant as what we have heard today!”

He sat and Chris turned to him. “Was that a question, my Lord?” He paused; a few laughed. “In fact, there is truth to Lord Albanu’s comments, though perhaps I would have said things differently. Mélwika attracts second and third sons, landless and sometimes desperate, sometimes with secret criminal records. They are not ambitious, as the Lord claims, but they are willing to work hard if they are given a second chance. And work hard they do; Mélwika does not have a problem with crime. A Lord with a large estate cannot easily give his people a second chance; the Lord is right about that. Mélwika cannot be a model for Néfa. But I did not say it should be; I was speaking of the new townships that Her Majesty has just commanded. They are almost empty of people

right now, so if they are to be settled, they *will be* a second chance. Or they can be a repeat of the estate Lord Albanu has, and which enriches him quite adequately, I am sure.

“It is true that Ménwika and the three new lower Arjakwés townships will increase the food production in this area two or three times. What will we do with all this food? Ménwika has a bumper crop of grain coming late next month and I think the price of grain will drop. I have warned the Grange of this. The farmers can do something about this, too. Some are beginning to plant olives, grapes, apples, and peaches on their new land; they will raise less grain for a few years, but benefit from a different crop later. Some are switching to vegetables, which require more hand labor but fetch better prices, and our wealthier population can afford vegetables and fruits. The grange is also supporting chicken production; one farmer has built a building in Mélwika itself and he hopes eventually to raise ten thousand chickens per year. He will buy a lot of grain, hay, and other food for his birds, he will produce thousands of eggs a week, and he will produce quality chicken at half the price of the barnyard birds. The birds will never leave the building they are raised in; they won’t have much of a life; but chickens don’t have much of a life now. I have been urging the Grange to find a farmer willing to do the same thing with pigs, goats, and dairy cattle. Soon our diets will be better, but the animals will require a lot of grain and other farm-produced feed.

“As for sixty year old toothless peasants, I see my Lord Albanu is missing quite a few teeth himself—I can hear it in his speech as well—and I assume he was speaking from the point of view of personal sympathy. My Lord, I invite you to come up front and examine my mouth as closely as you like. I am fifty-five years old. I have had only two

teeth pulled from my mouth in my life, but over half my teeth have big black fillings in them; they started to rot and the dentists stopped it before I had to have the teeth removed. I enjoy hot foods and cold foods; I chew tough meat fine; and my teeth almost never hurt. My Lord Albanu, come to Mélwika hospital before you leave and our dentist will be happy to fill cavities in your teeth. I will even pay! You may have to wait; there may be farmer being worked on when you arrive. And when you are done you will get a free toothbrush, just like the farmers.”

The audience laughed at that, though Albanu was not amused. Kandékwes nodded to Lord Spondanu of Bellegha, who rose. “People do not normally live sixty years, and we interfere with Esto’s will when we change their life span. And consider the danger if they live longer; where will their children and grandchildren farm? There is a serious long-term danger to this course.”

Chris nodded. “These are serious questions to consider. But honored ones, when someone gets sick, we do not just sing the hymns and pray to Esto; we call for a healer. The new medicine is just healing that is better in some ways and more scientific; it is not different otherwise. My wife and I had three children. All three are now fully grown, and they have given me six grandchildren so far. All the grandchildren are alive and healthy. Last year Mélwika saw the birth of eight hundred children. In a typical village, four hundred of them would not live two years. But last year in Mélwika we had only forty infant deaths. We want to reduce the death rate to half that in a few years, when more of our people trust and use the hospital. Come to the hospital and see the records; come to the cemetery and see the graves.

“For an adult, the average chance of dying in a rural village is about three percent; three in one hundred die every year. Mélwika now has 2,500 adults. Last year we should have had seventy-five deaths. We had fifteen, mostly related to excessive drink.

“The Lord asks, where will all these people live? The ancient irrigation ditches tell us that this world once had many, many, more people than it has today. This is a question to ask a century from now. But I will give you one piece of business advice: buy land just outside our cities, because they will grow to be ten times bigger than they are today.”

Kandékwes pointed to Isursunu, Isurdhuna’s chief priest. Chris glanced at the Lord Mayor, wondering when he would select a questioner who supported his perspective.

“My Lord, I have a very different concern; that the new scientific knowledge is *not* being combined with the old knowledge, but with your new Bahá’í knowledge. As we all know, the Bahá’í custom has been growing very fast here and Mélwika has two hundred Bahá’ís, according to the *Tripola Bedhe*. All this growth is weakening the way of the hymns and of sacrifice, the path Widumaj set for this world.”

“Honored priest, the Grange is run by Kérdu, assisted by Saréidukter, Werétranu, and Snékwu. Only Snékwu is a Bahá’í and he is the newest member of the leadership team. Of my five hundred farmers, maybe fifty are Bahá’ís; most of Mélwika’s Bahá’ís are not farmers. I wish more were because I love agriculture. Good priest, if the Grange were dominated by Bahá’ís, you would have something to worry about; it might suggest that the only way to become prosperous and live in a just society would be to become a

Bahá’í! But my people are usually traditional in their religion, and they are prosperous and organized according to consultation of the people. The teachings of Widumaj provide a solid foundation for them.”

“Lord, how can we expect anyone to work for us when some peasants earn thousands of dhanay per year!” demanded a representative from Ora without waiting for permission to speak.

“Honored, the average Melwikan earns about twice as much as a rural farmer elsewhere in this world. Only an ambitious few earn several thousand. It is good to make such achievement possible; it encourages people to lift themselves up. Our purpose of life on this world is to live comfortably and help others do the same. If your purpose is to keep people poor, I don’t know what to say to you.”

That caused a furor in the hall and Kandékwes had to bang his staff repeatedly. Chris had perhaps been too frank, but Gawéstu seemed pleased, and his presence muted the anger.

“Order! Order!” demanded Kandékwes. “Lord Estodhéru now has the floor!”

An ally of Chris rose to speak and glared at the others until they quieted. “I commend Lord Kristoféru for his courage to come here and face us. Our experience in Lewéspa confirms in general his observations. We are beginning to use fertilizer and steam-driven equipment for farming and are seeing dramatic increases in harvests. Tax collections are increasing every year. We have a strong hospital and have had no pəlui for two years. Infant and adult death rates have dropped a lot, but I do not have numbers. Our people have iron stoves for the winter and more blankets and clothing than ever before.

Most adults in Meddwoglubas can read at least a little and it has changed the town in many ways. People ask why? and how? a lot more than before. When they come to understand, they work harder. As a result, people are moving to our region. If you want to populate new towns, you will need to give people a reason to move to them; and if you give people a reason to move, others will have to give their people reasons to stay.”

He sat and Kandékwas pointed to Lord Gugédu. “My colleagues, I think the worries are, to some extent, misplaced. Reading is a good thing because it brings knowledge. Rather, the issue is how our society is organized. There is growing pressure for elections, at least in my area. I suspect others are aware of it as well. We must manage and limit elections. One nation on Gedhéma, Francia, had a terrible revolution where most aristocrats had their heads cut off. But others have refused to allow revolutions by keeping power under central control. That must be our path.”

That comment startled Chris. “My good friend Lord Gugédu has been reading Kaméru too much. It is true Francia had a terrible revolution, but Anglia, the country next to it, never had a revolution, and has had a parliament and a monarch for over five hundred years. It has both to this day, and very active elections, and it has Lords. The countries to the north of Anglia and Francia mostly had no revolutions and have kings and Parliaments as well. Japana, in an entirely different part of Gedhéma, is the same. Other countries had terrible bloodshed. I think Éra is much like Anglia and can follow its history.”

“I have a question myself,” said Kandékwes next. “Lord Kristobéru, what is your opinion of the proposed law that will impose a ten percent tax on sales of items produced through the new knowledge?”

“This is a matter for the Consultative Assembly, of course,” replied Chris. “I suppose the first question is, what will you tax? Steam wagons, yes, but steel axes, made of new steel but otherwise looking like old axes? It will be a difficult law to implement. It will make the new tools and equipment more expensive, and that will delay their spread. And that is bad. On the other hand, if the additional money is used to pay for graveled roads and teachers, perhaps it will balance development and progress more. Hospitals badly need more money because they can’t charge the average farmer or city dweller enough to cover their costs. Villages can’t keep teachers, who move to the nearest city instead. As long as the money raised goes back to development, the law may be a good thing.”

That position startled many in the hall, who were sure he would oppose the law. Kandékwes glanced at the clock on a table in front of the gathering. They had been talking over an hour. “I think we have grilled Lord Kristobéru enough,” he said. “Let us thank him for his testimony.” He began to applaud and the rest of the gathering followed. “Now I think we should hear from the honorable Gawéstu, who has come here as an observer and who is known to have wisdom on every occasion. Great widu, will you speak?”

“I will,” he replied from the gallery. He rose. “And I will speak from here. I much appreciated Lord Kristoféru’s frankness and honesty. These are qualities we all need to

cultivate. I also was interested in his offer of free dental care and hope it can be extended to me as well, because I have quite a tooth ache.” The audience laughed and Chris nodded. “I also much appreciate the candor of the exchange we have had today. This is what our kingdom needs if it is to advance. I hope these new *nuespapers* cover the debate fully. Let the entire kingdom read and talk about these subjects.” He paused to look at the audience. Reporters had been excluded from the visitor’s gallery, which had been opened to invited guests only. Several representatives had taken on the task of providing summaries to reporters, but access to the deliberations had been limited. “There are times this body must close the doors and talk privately, and other times the doors must be open to all. Today was one of those times.

“On my long walk from Isurdhuna to here, I received innumerable kindnesses from people on the way; meals, beds to sleep in, blankets when it was very cold. Our people are generous, resourceful, and loving; or they can be when prompted. It is easy to be kind when you see an aged widu. It is harder when the other person is dirty, ragged, emaciated, of a lower class, or has a darker skin. The debate today about how wealthy our farmers and Lords should be, and whether everyone can be wealthier at the same time, is really another form of this ancient problem of kindness. Wealth, like kindness, can be created; everyone *can* have more. While I am good at creating kindness, others must be the experts at creating wealth. But I do know something about the damage done when unkindness prevents people from having wealth.

“I saw this problem in great abundance when I passed through Belledha. The city is still in ruins. It is shocking that much of the burned area is still not rebuilt. The reason

is because of selfishness; the land owners want the people to rebuild the houses they live in, but don't own; the tenants want the owners to start the process. My friends, *this* is something you must debate in this assembly. Her Majesty's government can and must do more. The cycle of mutual kindness can be started through gifts. It is already too late for some people, who have moved to Mélwika, Mèddoakwés, or other places. But most homeless people have moved to relatives in nearby villages and can be attracted to return to the city.

“I would like to see Lord Spondanu be as bold and articulate as Lord Kristoféru and stand here before his peers to answer their questions and take their criticisms. I challenge you, Lord, to give an account of your efforts. The army has done much more than you. Mélwika Hospital has tried to help. The Mélwika Génadéma is helping students in Belledha. The people of Mélwika, who are fairly comfortable, have given blankets, clothes, even money; their temple is collecting these things. Mélwika is a long way from Belledha. Why has the temple in Néfa not helped? The temple in Ora is new and richly decorated; why has it not played a role? What about Tripola? Lord Estodhéru has repeatedly assured us his region does not need a temple at all; why has not some of that extra wealth gone to Belledha? Above all, why has this body not allocated some of its precious ‘development funds’ for Belledha? Where is our kindness? The poor people of that city took this widu into their broken homes, covered him with their ragged blankets, and fed him their crusts of bread. We who have so much more: Can we not be kind to them in greater measure? If the problem lies not with the availability of the wealth, but

the problem of distributing it fairly, who will solve that problem? Perhaps the Réjé herself will have to get involved; do you want that?

“That is the main concern I have for this body. But I will comment on the new towns. Her Majesty is immensely wise to create them. I have walked this entire world, from Isurdhuna to the cloud forests of Sumilara to the snows of Kostakhéma. This world is mostly empty. Let the people express their genius and spread over the land, be fruitful, and multiply. We now have the safety to do so: nothing can stand up to the army. If Her Majesty creates towns, the expansion will be orderly.

“Let the people learn to read because they can learn the hymns much better, and that alone guarantees that reading will be of benefit. This body needs to create a better way to get reading to the villages. Promise rural teachers a certain salary in dhanay if they stay; that will keep them there. Then obtain that money from local and regional taxes as much as possible. The temples, also, should teach reading and encourage their students to return to villages to teach the adults and children there. Let them play a larger role.

“As for this tax on products of the new knowledge: Lord Kristoféru notes that by raising the price of these new things, you will slow their spread. Perhaps a little slowing is a good thing. We have had this new knowledge for less than five years and we are already shaking from all the changes. He notes that some aspects of the new knowledge make money while others—roads, schools, and hospitals—do not. But they are just as important, maybe more important. If we can balance the ‘development’ let us do so. We need to fund temple génademas and philosophical génademas, as well as génademas of the new knowledge.

“In our hands lies the power to shape this world’s future. That power has always been in our hands, but the responsibility of this generation in shaping our future is greater than any other generation since Widumaj and Mégékwes established the current order. The consultative assembly must lead us.”

He sat and no one knew whether to applaud or simply think. Gawéstu, as usual, had shaken up everyone’s thinking.

[March 21, 2006; reread and edited 5/22/13, 7/29/17]

Chris was not impressed by the road to Roktattroba. The Dwobergone had done a hasty job of clearing the track, bending it around obstacles as simple as fallen trees and boulders, with the result that the road snaked from one natural wide spot in the forest to another and ran straight only across meadows, which fortunately were fairly common. The stumps often had not been cut very low and he had to steer the rover around many of them. Déru Miller's road graveling team had not improved the situation much, either; they had left long stretches ungraveled to concentrate on low spots, which were surprisingly common. The graveling truck hauled thirty tonnes of gravel at a time, enough to lay two meter-wide strips of gravel about one hundred meters. At least there was little mud.

The forty kilometer drive took a bit more than an hour, and no doubt it would be faster once the graveling was finished in late summer. The old route, via Bolériledha, had taken almost three hours, and even the old route was going to be graveled later in the year, along with a thirty-kilometer extension to the hamlet of Berjpéla, "Birch Hill," high in the mountains. At that point the tribe would have fairly rapid access to most of their territory via their two steam wagons.

He rolled into Roktattroba as a great herd of cattle, sheep, goats, and horses was preparing to head for higher pastures. Three or four families were going with the animals, their possessions piled high on the backs of the horses and even some of the cows. He

was amused to see dozens of *pewē*, chicken-like birds, legs tied tightly together, slung in pairs over the backs of horses; it was easier to haul them than to herd them.

Chris parked the rover outside Lord Andruleru's stronghouse and left it there in the guard of the one soldier with him, whom Aisu had insisted should come along as a reminder that Chris was a Lord. He had an uneasy feeling about the visit, which had been requested by Andruleru. But the Lord was effusive in his hospitality. "Come, please eat and drink with us, Lord Kristobérū," he urged, after greeting his guest at the door. "We have an entire roasted pig awaiting us."

"I will be honored to, friend Andruleru. How is your family?"

"Well. We are preparing for the marriage of my second daughter. You should come back for the wedding. It'll be in midsummer."

"If I'm not on the western shore, I would be honored to attend."

Andruleru invited him into the Lord's private entertainment room. Seven other men were there, including Arktinogu and Nénaser, "elephant man," now the youngest clan leader, but who had also attended the génadēma. The other clan leaders were present as well.

They filled their plates with chunks of roasted pig, which Chris found was delicious. They offered him local beer and he apologized that he did not drink strong drinks at all, so they made him hot water and he offered all of them tea; it was his way to provide something to a meeting and be sure he was drinking safe water, not an easy accomplishment on Éra. After a round of discussions about family, Andruleru said "Lord,

we are a poor tribe, and many are now asking why we did not demand more money to sell you so much of our land; perhaps a third of our territory.”

Chris had suspected that was the reason he had been invited; it was a delicate and potentially dangerous situation. He looked at the clock ticking in the room, off by five hours—an example of Dwobergone spending on prestige items that otherwise were useless to them—as he considered his response. “It is always very difficult to say how much land is worth. It may seem useless to one group of people and highly valued to another. People might agree on a selling price one day and find, a year later, that their feelings about its value have changed. But all of us agree that once the talking is over, hands have been shaken and the money has been exchanged, the land is sold. Is that not your custom as well?”

“Of course,” said Andruleru. “But Lord, my people have been to Melwika with their thirty dhanay, and they see how much your people have. We are a poor people, Lord. Our taxes to Her Majesty have never exceeded three or four hundred cattle every year. We are proud; we do not want to be treated unfairly. We have made a great sacrifice to sell you so much of our land, and we now see that what we thought was a great sacrifice for Melwika was really a small token.”

“I fear there may be some misunderstanding, for fifteen thousand dhanay is not a trivial sum for us, honoreds. We work immensely hard for the wealth we have, just as you do. The difference is that we work in ways that have brought us dhanay. Bolériledha has done that for you, has it not? Did we not treat you fairly when you began to mine copper there for us?”

“You were honorable,” agreed Nénaser, whose clan was settled at Bolériledha. “And we have done well there. Our miners have had iron stoves and machine-made cloth, for example. But it has been a big change for Roktatroba.”

“Of course,” agreed Chris.

“And naturally we want you to pay more for the land,” added Endru, a middle-aged clan leader, pointedly reminding Chris of the subject under discussion.

“I think what I can offer at this point is limited,” replied Chris. “We have an agreement, after all, one we have begun to implement. Now, I can offer something as a personal gift; for example, two or three more scholarships for Dwobergone students to attend school in Melwika for a year. That is not a trivial thing because the génadema loses money every year. But it conveys something that is immensely precious: the new knowledge.”

“We will accept three additional scholarships,” agreed Andruleru, quickly. “Of course, right now we can’t find three men willing to go.”

“I have two,” responded Nénaser.

“Let those two come for three years, then,” replied Chris. “If they come three years, I will even agree to a fourth year, so they can complete their educations, because we are hoping all our students can attend four years.”

“I thought two years were enough?” asked Andruleru, suspiciously.

“We have different packages, you might say, One year, two, four, and five years: each provides something different. The more, the better. My son is just finishing his four-year degree.”

“You can’t give us dhanay?” pressed Endru.

Chris shook his head. “I think we need to agree that we made an agreement and shook our hands together on it. That needs to be honored. But if the Dwobergone want more dhanay, there are a dozen things they can do to earn them from Melwika. The road makes them possible. You just received a steam wagon and it is sitting here. Let us say that every morning, or every other morning, it makes a run to Melwika, returning here the same afternoon. And let us say you set up an ice house here in Roktatroba; it is just an underground room filled with ice so that it stays very cold all the time. We cut ice every winter and store it; if it runs out we buy it from Kostakhéma in the Spine Mountains or from Snékhpela, very far south of here. With an icehouse you can store meat and milk to ship to Melwika every day or two. We have a serious shortage of cow and goat milk because the hospital encourages everyone to buy it for their children. We have a thousand children in town but very few cows and goats because we feared they would be stolen. You have thousands of cows and goats and huge amounts of milk. The gravel road, also, already opens up scores of meadows to your herds; if they are milked near the road, their milk can easily be sold. You can sell us cheese as well. And your women make beautiful blankets and clothing of wool and leather. Right now we get many of them from Gordha; why not from Roktatroba?”

Andruleru looked at the others, a slight smile on his face. "This is as we have said," he exclaimed.

"We need to complete the gravel roads to Bolériledha and Bérjpéla," added Arktinogu. "Then every morning, steam wagons could depart from both of those places and bring children to a school here; also bring milk, meat, cheese, wool, hides, copper products, timber, and other things as well; from here one steam wagon would go to Mélwika and the other would serve hunters or lumbermen; then at the end of the day the steam wagons would return to Bolériledha and Bérjpéla with school children and goods purchased at Mélwika. This could be done five days a week. It would tie us together as a tribe in a way that is not possible now and will bring us wealth."

"Dhanay," added Andruleru, who obviously had accepted his son's vision. Chris now grasped better why Andruleru had invited him. "Mélwika would welcome this. You are used to thinking of Mélwika as distant, but with a gravel track and steam wagons it is just an hour away. By the first frost, the gravel tracks can be finished. Steam wagons can push their way through snow, too. Perhaps a daily connection will not be practical in bad weather, but two or three times a week would not be difficult. Last winter your steam wagon was making weekly trips to Kostakhéma."

"Earning the tribe dhanay," added Arktinogu, who had been the driver on many of those runs. "Lord Chris, there is an excellent supply of gravel here at Roktattroba. We can't gravel the entire road with gravel hauled all the way from Mélwika. It will take too long."

“Talk to Déru about it,” replied Chris. “Perhaps he would be willing to hire Dwobergone to work his gravel separating equipment in Mélwika for a month, then bring some of it here and run a gravel pit here. Or perhaps he’d be willing to rent the equipment to you. He rents equipment to the army; they’ve started a major graveling operation on the royal road to Belledha. If the resulting cost is the same or cheaper, he might be willing.”

“And what about textbooks, if we start a school here?”

“I’ll see what we can do,” agreed Chris. “You’ll need to build a building for the classes. Someone should come to town and see how our school is set up. We have textbooks available for sale, but we can provide you some for free.”

“That would help greatly,” replied Arktinogu. “We have been running a school at Bolériledha on and off for two years for about twenty children, but the best we could do is have them read old copies of the newspaper.”

“We now have better materials,” said Chris. “In the fall, first and second grade materials were finished; they are for six and seven year olds. This summer we are finishing materials for third and fourth graders and our adult educational materials are being revised now. Every year there is more.”

“As long as we do not require children to go,” exclaimed Endru. “My clan agrees that a school is a good thing for children, especially in winter. It gets them out of our hair, for one thing. But in the summer they are needed for other tasks.”

“Of course,” agreed Arktinogu. “What about the hospital, Lord Chris? Can we send sick people to it?”

“Yes, of course. They are always welcome. But the hospital costs money to operate; unfortunately dhanay are needed for everything. The cost is three dhanay per day. It is a lot, I know. If someone can’t afford it, the city helps us out, and I help cover the cost. But the Dwobergones as a people might need to send a dozen people there every year for a total of a month, so we are talking about a hundred dhanay or so. The tribe can afford that.”

“If the children don’t die and grow up to raise cattle, the cost of saving their lives is much less than what they earn later,” added Arktinogu, who knew Chris’s argument well.

Endru shook his head. “I can see that we will earn more dhanay, but will also spend them!”

“Is that not the way it is with money?” agreed Chris.

Soru and Kanawé walked slowly down the street toward the square, worn out from their afternoon with the kids. “Thank you for coming,” Soru said. “I could never have handled Andranu myself and gotten anything else done. And I’m being paid to educate Wiresé, not Andranu and his brother.”

“And Andranu isn’t even deaf.” Kanawé shook her head. “He’s a little boy possessed by spirits. He isn’t normal.”

“He isn’t normal, that’s true. But Dr. Lua says he isn’t possessed, nor has he been bewitched. She says what he has is a condition of the mind.”

“Really? It’s a kind of sickness?”

Soru nodded. “I described him to her two days ago. She listed a few possibilities. She thinks he’s mentally slow combined with behavioral problems. She wrote down some terms in English so I could take them to Estodatu and he could look them up on the web. I have to learn more English!”

“But Dr. Lua hasn’t examined Andranu?”

“No. I’ve asked his mother to take him to her, but she said no. I think she can be persuaded.”

“I’ll talk to her.”

Soru looked at her, surprised. “So, you’ll come back?”

“Sure, if you need my help. It’d be nice to earn some money taking care of him, but I don’t need any right now. The grain harvest comes in next month and the Grange has given me an advance on it, so I can buy food. I don’t want to live on Saréidukter’s charity.”

“You said you had to go to the farm, though.”

“I do, on Penkudi; two days from now. The Grange is sending over two farmers to inspect my crops and they want me to be there, so I can see what they are looking for.”

“Will you get enough to live?”

“Yes. The Grange will charge a larger fee to do the harvesting for me, but they’ll plant a second wheat crop right away and harvest it for me as well, and between the two

crops I'll be able to live until next spring. What do they call it? *Insurance*. It's to protect the farmer's family."

"Praise Esto. The Grange is great."

"It is. I don't know what I'll do next year. I could farm the land myself with the help of the Grange if I give the Grange a certain amount of labor. But now I am curious about this boy, who may not be bewitched after all."

"If if it is witchery, it may be that proper care can cure it. Sometimes 'witchery' is an excuse to do nothing and pretend you're helpless."

"I think you may be right about that." They had reached the passenger wagon to Mélwika; they were early and there were still plenty of seats. Soru pulled out his multiple ride ticket and the driver punched two holes in it for the two of them, then they headed for the back and sat. Kanawé continued, "I remember when I was a kid back at Terskua there was a child in our village about three years older than me and she would sometimes scream and yell at people, then start uttering nonsense. Her parents were so ashamed they locked her up at home, but one day she escaped and ran through the village naked, screaming. Three or four village boys were frightened by her, or put off by her; anyway, they stoned her to death."

"I saw a madman wandering the streets of Ora and ranting once, too. Usually people with these problems, or with deafness or blindness, were locked away. Now I think about it and realize how terrible that must have been for those persons."

Kanawé looked at him. "Yes, I see what you mean. People can be very cruel when they are afraid."

“But it isn’t necessary with the new knowledge. You were good with Andranu; his mother said so. I think you should study these different diseases of the mind and see whether you can help him.”

“Me?” She laughed a bit, the idea seemed so far fetched.

“Yes, you. Why not? You have an entire year free to take courses at the génadëma. That’s quite a gift!”

“But it’s for men! And I can’t afford it!”

“It’s not just for men. The Women’s Gendha is just for women, but the génadëma is for anyone, man or woman. There are women in the classes; some of them are from the Women’s Géndha, and some are not. And I bet you can afford it. I have a full scholarship to take my classes. They’ll give you a full scholarship, or you can pay part from your harvest.”

“I think Saréidukter said members of the Grange automatically get reduced tuition.” She thought about it. “You know, I would like to see whether I can help this little boy. I bet he can learn.”

“I’m sure one-on-one treatment and a lot of love and discipline and he will learn. No one has ever tried; have you seen the whip scars on his back? They’ve beaten him instead.”

“It would be nice to get paid, though.”

“The family’s rich. I bet they will pay you once you’ve proven to them you can work with him.”

Kanawé smiled. “You know, nothing is lost trying! Alright, I’ll work with him for a month or two.”

“And tomorrow morning, eleven bells, if you meet me at the Humanities Building, we’ll go find Estodatu together, and he’ll find the information Lua suggested we look for.”

“Okay.” She had no idea who this Estodatu was, but she smiled at the offer. She was coming to like Soru, and she could see he liked her as well.

Just then there was a disturbance at the front of the passenger wagon. They looked up and saw an old, white-bearded man get on, smile at the driver, then walk on without paying. Several people shifted around in their seats to see him and one said, “Gawéstu.”

“That’s Gawéstu?” said Soru.

“Who?” Kanawé had never heard of him.

“Gawéstu; he’s the greatest living widu.”

The widu proceeded to the back of the passenger wagon, and the only empty seat was next to Soru, so he sat. It was just before the driver blew the whistle and got underway.

Soru looked at him, startled.

“You can speak, I assume?” asked Gawestu.

“Yes, honored widu; I apologize for being rude.”

“It is only rude to refuse to speak to me. Who are you?”

“Soru; and this is Kanawé; and you are Gawéstu?”

“Indeed. And this is the passenger wagon to Melwika?”

“Yes. . . I mean, indeed.”

“Yes, yes, yes; I hear it so many times on the western shore.”

“It is the opposite of no, and is an ‘Englis’ word. You’ll hear it all the time in Melwika.”

“It is useful. We needed a ‘yes’ I think. What do you do in this new city?”

“I am a student at the génadéma every morning, come to the capital to teach a deaf child how to communicate with gestures every afternoon, and help at the hospital at night.”

“You teach a deaf child? How do you do that?”

“With signs.” Soru made a few to demonstrate. “On Gedhéma there is an entire sign language for deaf people to use. With help of some others, I am modifying it and teaching it to a ten year old girl who can’t hear at all. Now I have two other pupils as well; one is also deaf and the other seems to be mentally slow, but also has serious problems with behavior. Kanawé is helping with him.”

Gawéstu leaned over toward her. “And what are you teaching him?”

“Nothing yet, honored.” She was shy and didn’t know what to say.

“Perhaps you teach him through your smile,” he replied gently.

“I hope I will be able to help him.”

He looked at Soru again. “And you work at the hospital, you said?”

“Yes, every night and on Primdiu; that way I can stay there for free.”

“A good arrangement. Lord Kris said I could have free work on my teeth there.”

“Of course. Khrenéstu is our dentist. He’s just started to learn from Dr. Lua, but he does a pretty good job. He’s filled cavities in five of my teeth.”

“I have a bad toothache in one tooth.”

“He’ll take care of it.”

“You may want to have your eyes tested, too,” added Kanawé. “One of the nurses is learning how to do it. She finds that almost everyone over 45 needs glasses.”

“Oh, I am sure I could see better when I was young. Perhaps. Perhaps.” Gawéstu wasn’t sure what to make of the idea of a widu wearing glasses, even though he had seen Weréstrakéster put on a pair occasionally.

“Where are you staying?” asked Soru.

“Esto knows.”

“Because the Temple has no room; it has newly arrived families staying in it. But the hospital has a prayer room and sometimes the staff put up friends there. No one was staying in it this afternoon. Maybe you could stay there.”

That interested Gawéstu. “I would like that; I would like to see this new thing called a *hospital*.” He used the Eryan neologism, *gosdha*.

“I’ll take you there when we get off the wagon, then.”

“You are very kind.”

He inquired of their families and cities and heard Kanawé’s story. By the time she finished they had passed through Nénaslua and were beginning to approach Melwika. Gawéstu stared. “By Esto, this is a big place!”

“Larger in area than either Méddoawkés or Ora,” replied Soru proudly. “It has almost as many buildings as both, also, but it has half the population because it consists mostly of young people who might not even be married yet, or they are married but have one child. As a result, the average household here has less than three people, whereas in Méddoakwés and Ora it has six.”

Gawéstu nodded. “Then it is a matter of time before this is the largest city in the world.” That surprised and saddened him.

Soru pointed to three houses being built along the road. “The town is beginning to expand outside the walls as well. Now that we have an agreement with the Dwobergoné, people feel safe; more farmers are building houses on their land. Last week the City Council passed a resolution declaring a ‘no build’ zone extending 300 doli outside the city walls, but beyond that people now can build.”

“They say the Royal Road to Nénaslua will be lined with houses in a few years,” added Kanawé.

Gawéstu nodded and wondered what future the city held.

As the passenger wagon approached the walls, inside the city Chris Mennea was driving his rover through the house’s main door and parking it in the courtyard. Liz came out of the kitchen where she had been helping the cook. “That took a long time; we were getting worried.”

“I should have brought the cell phone; sorry. They wanted more money.”

“What did you do?”

“I held the line; a contract is a contract. But I did promise them more scholarships to the génadëma and suggested they make them multi-year.”

“Better for them and us.”

“Exactly. And I gave them ideas of things they could sell here. They have thousands of head of cattle, sheep, and goats; we have inadequate supplies of meat and milk. It’s a marriage made in heaven, if we can make it work. They’ve got game and timber, too. Arktinogu already grasped the possibilities and had told his father, but together they couldn’t convince the other clan leaders; they needed me to make the same arguments. Sometimes Aktinogu was saying almost the same thing as soon as I finished.”

“Interesting. Well, we’ve had some excitement here while you were away. Call Aisu. He wouldn’t tell me what had happened, in typical man fashion, but I could hear the concern in his voice.”

“Okay.” Chris sighed and headed for the telephone. He picked it up and cranked. “Lubésé, please give me Aisu at 265.”

“Lord, he’s with Mayor Weranolubu I think. I’ll try 101.”

“Thank you.”

A pause. A few clicks and Lubése cranked to ring the bell; Chris could hear the rumble. Silence. A click.

“Mayor Weranolubu.”

“Good evening, Lord Mayor. How are you?”

“Reasonably well, my Lord. Aisu called you and he’s here now. Let me put him on.” He handed the phone to the Army Captain and said to Aisu, “Lord Kris.”

Aisu came on the line. "Good evening, Lord. I hope your trip to Roktattroba was successful?"

"Yes; lots of hospitality, lots of roast pig, and lots of patient persuasion. What's happening?"

"Lord, today three houses were robbed. In every case, the robbers waited until the last inhabitant left, usually the wife to go shopping. They took anything of value that they could carry, like money, blankets, and clothes."

"How did they get in?"

"They picked the locks. They must have been quick at it, too; they had practice."

"So, it's an organized gang. Witnesses?"

"None. They must have set up lookouts, picked the lock, everyone ran inside, then made a speedy getaway."

"So, there are no clues?"

"None we can find. My men are about to go talk to neighbors. Maybe you and Amos can come help us with the case tomorrow?"

"We can come first thing in the morning. Amos knows a little about police work; he took a course in it, once."

"Gədhéma has courses in this?"

"It has courses in everything. Maybe we can find some material for you. We'll have Estodatu check tonight."

"Thank you, Lord. Can you talk to Amos and let me know when to have my men ready?"

“Yes, I’ll call you back after supper.” They exchanged a few more pleasantries and Chris hung up. Most of the family had sat at the table for supper and as he sat the food arrived, so they all began to eat. “Make sure there is always someone in this house.”

“Robbers?” asked May, always curious about information for the newspaper.

“Yes; an organized gang, too. They hit three houses today; waited until the wife left, grabbed everything they could, and escaped.” He looked at Amos. “Can you join me and Aisu at nine bells to talk about how to investigate the case?”

Amos thought a moment, then nodded. May said, “We should put an article in the *Melwika Nues*. But it should be careful to inform and warn, not frighten.”

“Exactly,” agreed Chris. “Any news from the Consultative Assembly?”

“Sulanu called Weranolubu when he came back from Méddoakwés a few hours ago. They took a straw poll; they want to raise the tax on products of the new knowledge to twenty percent,” said May, ominously. “He’s planning to work on that problem tonight.”

“Aargh!” exclaimed Behruz.

“Just what we need,” agreed Amos.

“I’m afraid my comments and Gawéstú’s are producing unintended results,” growled Chris. “The Dwobergoné wanted more, too. I gave them a few more scholarships to the génadéma, but otherwise encouraged them to sell us more.”

“Milk?” asked Lua.

Chris nodded.

“Can Sulanu interview you about it anonymously?” asked May.

“I suppose. We’ll have to figure out what to say; we don’t want to upset or insult them, and they *are* reading the paper. I saw one in Lord Andruleru’s meeting room. I suppose Arktinogu’s reading it to him.”

“Good. The last month has been really busy with news and we anticipate the next two months will be as well,” exclaimed May. “So we’ve been printing three sheets instead of two. But I think we need to shift to publishing the paper twice a week.”

“Really?” asked Liz. “Is there enough advertising?”

May nodded. “I think so. With bicycles about to be sold, and cameras, and cheaper light bulbs, there are plenty of new products. The Dwobergones’s spending prompted some merchants to launch sales, too, and they wanted ads, and we introduced to them the idea of coupons, and that boosted paper sales here in town a lot.” She smiled when she said that. “That’s something the *Bédhe* really can’t offer very easily, unless they open an advertising office here in town!”

“Don’t tempt them,” replied Liz.

The phone rang again. “Will we ever have peace?” asked Chris, beginning to rise. “No, leave it,” urged Liz. “Agné, can you answer it and tell them we’ll call back after supper?”

The cook nodded and answered the phone. A moment later she said “It’s for Dr. Lua. The widu Gawéstu came to the hospital a few minutes ago and he has been invited to stay overnight in the prayer room.”

“Gawéstu!” she exclaimed.

“Oh, I said we’d fix his teeth,” added Chris, suddenly realizing he hadn’t told her.

“Should we invite him to come to supper?” Lua said.

Chris nodded, so Agné conveyed the invitation to Lubésé. “She says he’s visiting the patients right now with Soru, one by one, room by room, so she doesn’t think that will work.”

“Let’s take him a gift after supper,” said Chris.

“Something he can give away or share,” suggested Mary. “He’ll want that.”

“Okay,” agreed Chris. “And you come along, mom; he’ll like meeting you. It’s going to be a busy evening.”

Soru walked across Temple Square twice, then along Péskakwés Rodha and Majakwés Rodha looking for Kanawé. It was noontime on Primdiu, the only day of Eryan’s six-day week when people generally did not work. As a result, Melwika’s main shopping district was crowded. Several new stores had signs saying *poldc*: sale. The word had given many people a new motivation to learn how to read.

Clearly, she hadn’t made it to the square yet. Soru stopped to buy the latest *Melwika Nues*, which was appearing a day late but was four sheets—16 pages—long. That impressed him; it had never been so long before. He flipped through the pages quickly. Page three was a lengthy interview with Gawéstu, complete with a quickly executed woodcut; a good likeness of the widu, also. He skimmed it because he spotted the word “Bahá’í” several times; the prophet criticized Bahá’í ideas of equality of women and having no priests or formal sacrifice. Page 4 had an interview with Okpétu about what it was like to fly a glider and a short article about the Dwobergone considering a

request to supply Mélwika regularly with milk. The back page had an account of last week's soccer match between Mélwika and Meddoakwés; he read that carefully since he had enjoyed the only game he had attended and didn't think he'd make it later that afternoon.

Bored, he finally turned back to page one. The lead article was about the consultative assembly and he read it quickly, mostly to see how the rumors were treated. The consultative assembly had made an about-face and approved a ten percent tax on products of the new knowledge after informally agreeing on a twenty percent tax instead. The rumor was that the Réjé herself had threatened to veto the bill and that some representatives were furious she had intervened, but the article said nothing about those details, which were too hot to print.

Next to the lead article was another with the headline "Mélwika, Meddoakwés See Wave of Robberies." A gang was alternating between towns to break into houses when they were unoccupied. His idle curiosity was jolted into fear when he read the description of what an eyewitness said was the gang fleeing one house: three young men, the leader of whom was short and had short blond hair. Lujékwu!

He stared at the paper, wondering, when Kanawé startled him by saying, "There you are. I've been looking all over for you. Sorry I'm late."

It jolted him back to the here and now. "Oh; sorry you didn't see me. I've been sitting here reading the paper."

"What's new?"

“Oh, not too much. There’s a nice article about Gawéstu among the advertisements and coupons.”

“Speaking of which; can I have them? Saréidukter asked me to get a paper, since I was coming here.”

“Sure, you can have this one. I’m pretty much finished with it.” He hesitated, then handed the paper to her.

“You can finish reading it, if you’d like. Let’s get something to eat before walking to the génadema. I’ve got some spare cash.”

“So do I, and I’m starved. I’ve been researching children’s illnesses all morning.”

“What did you find? Anything that describes Andranu?”

“I think so. It turns out Ornéstu has been doing a lot of reading about the subject, since he’s head of the schools here, so a lot of English-language materials have been printed and Ornéstu himself has scribbled Eryan translations on them. That helped a lot; I really can’t read the damn language!”

“Well, you’ve been studying it only two months. What did you find?”

“There were a few English students around and they each gave me ten minutes, jotting translations and explaining grammar to me. One page described something called ‘autism’ and I think it matched him pretty well. He can’t speak well but can use gestures, is super-sensitive to light and sound, is prone to emotional outbursts, repeats words again and again, likes to arrange stones in lines for an hour. . .”

“Yes, that’s Andranu! Is there a cure?”

Soru shook his head. “It’s a brain problem. But we can train him to function in spite of it.”

“That’s hopeful. We should talk to Ornéstu, he might have ideas.”

“I was thinking that as well. Here, this guy sells hot sandwiches, they should be safe.”

“Okay,” she agreed. The hospital had sensitized both of them about germs. They bought sandwiches for four dontay each and turned to some benches nearby, where they could squeeze in around others.

“What were you doing all morning?”

“Laundry for Saréidukter and her daughters. It’s the least I can do. But the washing area along the river was really crowded. I can’t wait for the city’s new laundry area to open! It’ll make everything easier.”

“I just take mine to the Widows’ Laundry. They do a good job.”

“But who can afford that? They don’t pay their workers much, either. Just give them to me; I’ll wash them for you.” She looked at him, smiling. He smiled back.

“Oh, I can’t do that, Kanawé. It wouldn’t be . . . right.”

“I suppose.” She took another bite and chewed. “You know, widows are supposed to mourn for their husbands for six months, and then they are free. Please don’t misunderstand me. I miss Tritanu terribly. But I do want to marry again. Maybe I’m too traditional; a woman’s not meant to be alone.”

“I want to get married some time, too. But Kanawé, I really don’t know what to do. Back at home in Ora, my father would have approached a girl’s father and arranged a

marriage for me. Most of the guys here have a particular girl in mind back in their villages and come here partly to make a bunch of money to impress the girl and her father. Then they return home with a big dowry, after harvest, and bring their bride back to Mélwika. But I'm not saving anything, I don't have a particular girl in mind back in Ora—I don't ever want to go back to Ora—and I have no idea what to do here.”

She nodded. “Hey, I don't know what to do, either! I'm a widow, so most men will marry me only because I have a farm. I'm sure my family is looking around and will propose someone to me when the period of mourning ends this fall. The idea of marrying someone because we might actually . . . want to marry them, and choose to do so . . . that's strange.”

“It is strange, but you know, the Bahá’í Faith says first the couple chooses each other, *then* the parents should be asked for permission. . . not the other way around.”

“Really. Strange. Interesting.” Kanawé really wasn't sure what she thought of that, but it gradually seemed like a good idea, possibly. “How did Dr. Lua marry Behruz?”

“I don't know. Maybe someone should ask. Someone told me Thornton and Lébé decided and asked their fathers. Well, fathers *and mothers*. The Bahá’í Faith says the mother must give permission, too.”

“Really?” That startled Kanawé. She took another bite and thought about the matter.

Suddenly Temple Square got very quiet. The two of them had been sitting, looking at each other, and talking above the usual din, but now they looked up. About

twenty meters away, in front of the Temple, Gawéstu had stood on top of a bench so that everyone could see him. Soru was surprised to see the widu wearing his new bifocals.

“People of Mélwika!” he shouted. “For seven days I have enjoyed your beautiful city and warm hospitality. I had never imagined that our world would have a place like this. It is a place where we can acquire new powers to see.” He pointed to his glasses. “A place where we have opportunities to do new things. A place where we can live in greater comfort than we could have imagined, where our aching teeth and other bodily ills can be fixed in ways even Mégékwes and Widumaj could never have imagined. People of Mélwika, you are blessed, and you must never forget that.

“But you must never forget that these blessings can also separate you from what is real and true. These glasses—” He pulled them off and held them high in the air, “These glasses that help me so much to see, which I appreciate very much, must never prevent me from remembering that spiritual vision is more important than physical vision. When physical vision weakens we can now strengthen it, but physical vision someday will cease, and the new healing cannot prevent that.

“You are a generous people. When Belledha burned, Mélwika did more to help than any other city. But did you do all you could have? Did you really sacrifice? Can you sacrifice more, next time?

“Yours is a city with wise leadership. But neither Lord is a follower of the customs of the hymns. Those customs, those hymns, bring us life and are the certain things we cling to. Do not be fooled into following the way of lip service to the hymns, like one Lord, or the custom of Bahá’í, like another Lord. Center your lives around this

Temple, around its beautiful central space and its image of light, recite the hymns until you know them in your sleep and chant them in your dreams, and *live by them*. They are the true source of happiness, the true comfort, the true opportunity.

“Thank you again for all you have done for me and for others. I hope when I return I will be impressed by the new kind of progress you have made. I look forward to seeing you again.”

[March 24, 2006; reread and edited 5/22/13, 7/29/17]

Graduation

The sun was slanting low over the eastern quadrangle of the génadema campus when the graduation ceremony began. A crowd of four hundred people watched as two hundred students processed into the quadrangle in new robes while Liz played “Pomp and Circumstance” on their new piano, which in the two months since its arrival had been improved so that its sound had become grander and more sonorous. They sat up front and chanters stepped onto the stage to chant hymns of Widumaj and Bahá’í prayers.

Then Kristobéro Mennea welcomed everyone and spoke about the great achievements of the graduating students and the promise they represented. Widéstu, the royal Minister of Education and Health, spoke about the growing importance of the new knowledge and the positive changes it was making. Then John Miller walked up to the podium and its microphone.

“Good afternoon to all of you,” he began. “I am not one to make speeches, so I will keep this short. I also will not expound on the great pride I feel today because my daughter and son in law are getting their degrees. Rather, I am here to help dedicate this new school whose building is in front of us. The Miller Géndha Maganteknói—the Miller School of Engineering—represents the development of an entirely new level of technical capability on Éra. It is still small, but will grow in future years to encompass more buildings and engineering experts. Even more important, the school is a collaboration of people who own their own businesses and sometimes are in competition with each other;

it provides a neutral ground where we can help each other develop new inventions. The school has already helped bring windmills, sewing machines, cotton gins, gliders, and hydraulic equipment into existence. It also was able to play a small role in the design of bicycles, which were first sold to the public earlier today. My family is solidly behind this school and pledges continued financial support for it. Now, if Amos Keino, the school's first director, will come forward, we will officially open the school."

The audience applauded as Amos stepped onto the stage. He and John walked to the back of the stage, which was built against the western wall of the building and its main western entrance. The door had a fancy ribbon tied across it. Together they lifted a large pair of scissors and cut the ribbon, then opened the door. Everyone applauded.

"Please be sure to tour the school after the graduation ceremony is over," John concluded. "We will have refreshments available for everyone inside." He stepped off the stage to yet another round of applause and Liz Mennea returned to play another piano piece, accompanied by a professional singer. The stirring tune and lyrics inspired the crowd.

Then it was Chris's turn again. "We have three degrees to award today," he said. "The *uniyeri*, 'one year,' degree requires twelve courses of thirty hours in the classroom, completed at a minimum level of quality; the *dwoyeri* requires twenty-four; the *kwéteryeri* requires forty-eight, twelve of which must be in or related to a single field of study. All of them are difficult achievements and we can be proud of those who have completed them. Graduates, when I call out your name, please come forward and receive your *wodi*. Uniyeres, please stand." The one-year graduates stood and he began to call out

their names, alphabetized by whatever last name the person chose, and each came up to receive his or her diploma. A cameraman stood in front and snapped a picture of each receiving the fancy paper, with its swirls of border decoration and its bold lettering.

The one hundred twenty-two uniyères were followed by fifty-six dwoyères. Finally, twelve kwéteryères stood. To call them “four-years” was a little misleading; the génadëma was only three and three quarters years old. But it was possible to complete far more than twelve courses per year; the génadëma had two fall terms, two spring terms, two short and intense summer terms, and one short, intense winter term. Thornton and Lébé had actually completed their course requirements during the first spring term. Five of the others—Dwosunu, Rudhisuru, Sarésunu, Weranyunu, and Gwiwëru—were graduating in geology or related fields, like physics and meteorology, because Thornton’s major in that subject had made it easy to develop the necessary courses. Many of the engineers, chemists, nurses, and doctors had stopped with two-year degrees because demand for their expertise had been so high, and literature majors were mostly completing degrees the next afternoon at Gésélékwës Maj Génadëma in Méddoakwës instead.

When Chris called out Lébé’s name, then Thornton’s, the applause was thunderous; it surprised all three of them. Chris handed them their diplomas with tears in his eyes as well as a loving handshake.

The granting of diplomas done, Chris sat and Liz went to the stage again with a flutist and a drummer for the third and last musical piece. Werétrakester, who had been seated in the front row next to Chris and Liz, leaned over. “Congratulations, father. You looked so proud up there, and you have much to be proud of.”

“Thank you, my friend.” He smiled and tears came to his eyes again.

“Dhoru has been an exemplary student and I have watched with wonder as he has blossomed into full manhood. In a way, he has taught all of us how to be a student in this new kind of learning institution. I think that’s why the applause was so strong.”

“He has modeled it well, I agree, and he has become a model teacher as well.”

“Is he working on a *penkuyeri*; a Master’s?” He whispered the English word as well.

Chris nodded. “Twelve more courses in science as it relates to geology, but two of those courses will be his thesis. He’s planning a 100-200 page book on the geology of the Arjakwés area. But after that, I don’t think he should pursue a doctorate. That requires a specialized knowledge we really don’t need here, yet. In ten years he and a dozen other professors at the génadémas will have acquired the experience and publications to be considered doctors, and at that point I think we should award some honorary doctorates and start a formal doctoral program.”

Werétrakester considered that, then nodded. “I agree, it will be a while before we can raise our standards more; the needs are too great. Almost all the *uniyeris* will be teaching in village schools and won’t even get a *dwoyeri* for some time. Dr. Lua tells me that medical doctors will eventually require a *penkuyeri* and that on Gedhéma the process takes ten years instead.”

“And the big problem is anatomy; they aren’t allowed to cut up cadavers.”

“I have spoken to Lord Kandékwes about that and I think we can make a quiet arrangement to solve that problem. You and Lua need to go talk to him, and do the anatomy here in Mélwika where people are less likely to complain.”

Chris nodded. The Eryan had a strong and understandable revulsion against disrespecting the dead, but it interfered with proper medical training.

Werétrakester leaned over again and whispered “can you bring the piano tomorrow? Even one piece will be a nice addition to our graduation.”

“Sure. We want to show it off because the poor craftsmen in Meddwoglugbas have no orders for more, except our order for another one and an order from the city for one in the high school. They cost a thousand dhanay.”

“A lot, but they’re worth it. This crowd has a lot of wealthy people in it; they might buy one for their homes. All the génademas will want one, too.”

“Liz plans to start teaching piano. She and May are laying plans to start courses in the arts, starting this fall.”

“Good. By the way, I have something I should tell you.” He leaned closer. “Next week, I am going away for at least the entire summer, maybe for a year or more.”

Chris was surprised. “Why?”

“Officially, I am going on a vision quest. And that is true; I plan to go to Isurdhuna to the waterfall where Gawéstu often lives and to frequent the Steja. But first, secretly and unofficially, Prince Méméjékwu and I are going off for two or three months

of intensive private classes in the new knowledge. Probably to Endraidha, but we're still not sure; it has a good library and a génadëma with discrete faculty."

"You're educating him?"

"Re-educating. We'll start with the new writing system and the numbers, teach him math, then review the new science and things like accounting and record keeping. Frankly, I will be a student with him in many of these subjects; I have never been able to keep up because of my duties as teacher. Having someone else with him who is also prominent as an expert but equally in the dark will help him, we think."

Chris frowned. "How was this arranged?"

"The Réje pushed her son, then Gawëstu met with him and persuaded him. Frankly, I think she wishes she could go. If this works, we may set up similar programs in the future. But friend Chris, after that is over—probably the end of summer—I won't be returning here. I am turning the génadëma over to Mitrailuku, probably permanently."

"Why?"

Wérétrakester pondered his answer for a moment. "I have another calling now, Friend Chris. Gawëstu and I have had many long conversations over the last month; we even went up to a cave for three days and nights to pray and fast together. My life has long been a battleground between the philosopher inside me and the widu inside me. Now the widu has won."

Chris looked at his friend. "We need both, but perhaps this world needs more widus."

Werétrakester smiled. “Yes, I think you are right, and Gawéstu is getting old.”

He had to stop talking because the musical piece was over and everyone had started to applaud. Chris returned to the stage to thank everyone, ending the program. Then he returned to his friend, who was talking to Liz, praising the piano music.

“He wants us to take the piano to Méddowakwés,” she said.

“That second piece will work very well right after we inaugurate the new Law School,” exclaimed the widu. “The Réjé will be in attendance, by the way.”

“We’ll arrive two hours early with the piano,” promised Chris.

The next day, the entire Mennea family and génadëma faculty, along with the piano, attended the graduation of one hundred twenty students in Méddoakwés. Then the heads of the génadëmas assembled in a comfortable classroom for their meeting.

“We have some new people to introduce,” noted Chris, as they began. “I think everyone heard Werétrakester’s announcement that Mitruiliku is the new head of the Gésélékwës Maj Génadëma, and we welcome him to this gathering.” Mitruiluku nodded in thanks. He was one of the four sons of the Lord of Ora and was sitting next to his brother Mitrubbaru, head of the Mitrui Génadëma. “We also have a new head of the Bellëdha Génadëma, Ékwëgéndu. We also welcome Dr. Lua Shirazi, head of the Mélwika Medical School, and Amos Keino, head of the Engineering School.”

“Four members of the same family,” teased Stauréstu, acknowledging May Keino, head of the Women’s Géndha, as well. But he was gently voicing a concern he knew others had.

“Don’t worry, we have no plans for additional schools soon,” replied Chris. “In addition, we have three guests, but two would like to be acknowledged as representing génademas. Major Skandu has taken a dozen courses at Mèddoakwés, Èndraida, and Isurdhuna, primarily in Eryan literature, philosophy, and the hymns. He is stationed at Anartu, has full access to the Great Library there, speaks fluent Sumi, and has a letter from Lord Lamuno requesting that we recognize him as representing the two génademas on Sumilara.”

Skandu nodded to the others. Rudhisuru, head of the Èndro Génadema, raised his hand. “The army has no objection to Skandu representing Sumilara.”

“Thank you for letting us know,” said Chris. “We also have Wèranodatu, chief priest here in Melwika, representing the Géndha Sègo Mèndhris, the School of the Custom of the Hymns, which is forming just this week.” Wèranodatu nodded and was greeted with indifferent to chilly expressions from those present. “And of course we have with us Widéstu, who can give us a report of the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Health.

“I propose that we not debate who can be added to the Génadema Council yet. Rather, let us go around the circle and give our reports. That way, everyone will know what everyone else is doing or plans to do. As we know, other than an official report from the head of the Council, the details of our discussion are not to leave this room. After the reports we can discuss membership, and once that is finished we need to turn to leadership, because this year, according to our agreement last year, we will elect a chair,

secretary, and treasurer. Does that plan of action meet everyone's approval?" He paused; no one objected. "Excellent, so let us go around the circle, starting on my right."

Dr. Lua was first. "In the last year, the Melwika Medical School has been formally organized. We've been trying to set up medical schools or departments within the existing *génademas* and that has been helpful in training people with basic skills, but advanced medicine requires a lot of thorough study of many subjects, more subjects than I can easily teach. As a result we have been training people via 'practicums' and in the last year we have been able to organize the practicums more systematically. We've also outlined the twenty-four subjects we want a fully-qualified doctor to master. So far, three doctors in training have taken sixteen of those courses, and those three are all qualified to teach the sixteen subjects as long as the first time they teach them, they do so under my supervision. I believe we will complete the remaining eight courses in the next year and graduate our first doctors. The next step is to expand the program; we have eight students altogether and we'd like to start ten more in the fall. Those ten, however, need to have completed their *dwoyeri*; we want doctors who can read and write, count, know basic science, and other basics like the hymns.

"In addition to doctors, we are training nurses. They require a *uniyeri* plus twelve nursing courses, but we want them to have twice that much education eventually. Right now, doctors in training are serving as nurses as well and we are hiring people like Soru—a lot of you know him, he was a patient who was really good working with patients—to handle basic care under the supervision of the nurses. We hope to finalize plans for a separate nursing program by the fall."

“What plans are you making to take medical training elsewhere?” asked Awskandu, whose Néfa Génadëma was one site of medical training.

“Eventually,” replied Lua. “But a proper medical education is not something that can be done by one person. You need at least four or five. We need to start with one school before we can establish another.”

“I’ve been giving courses in Meddwoglubas,” said Stauréstü. “We hope some of the students will come to Mélwika to complete their education as doctors and nurses. That’s the role Néfa and other medical training centers can play; they can start offering some of the basic courses and gradually increase their offerings.”

Awskandu nodded. “We have a lot of reports, so we need to move along,” noted Chris. “Skandu’s next.”

The twenty-seven year old army major nodded. “It’s so good to see some of you again. I’m very appreciative of the courses you taught me. As most of you know, I am from this illustrious city, of the House of Malaraki, a Sumi family that has lived here for six centuries at least. I speak fluent Sumi. I have also taken an oath of loyalty to our Queen and am a member of the army garrison stationed in Anartu. Over the last two years I have been accompanying Sumi students to Isurdhuna and Néfa for training. As a result I have become fascinated by history. Last year I was granted access to the ‘Great Library’ established by Ninurta the Great, which has crumbling leaf-books and clay tablets stretching back over a thousand years. I have been the army liaison with Sumi schools and a few months ago an agreement was reached between them and the army whereby they will be recognized as génadëmas by the army; I will be full time faculty at

both, teaching Eryan literature and basic science; I will represent them here; and I will remain in the army.

“The two new génademas are the Ninurta Génadema and the Central Génadema. Ninurta is associated with the Great Library and is a very old school that has upgraded to teach the new knowledge. Central, in Anarbala on the central plateau, is new, exclusive—for Sumi aristocracy—more sophisticated, less traditional, and smaller. The core of both are fifty students who have attended Isurdhuna and Néfa over the last two years.

“The goals of the two schools are simple: to bring the new knowledge to Sumilara, so that it doesn’t fall behind the rest of the world, and to bring reading, writing, and numbers to all Sumis. The army now will allow the teaching of geology, meteorology, biology, and medicine on Sumilara; chemistry, physics, and engineering are banned; math is banned but being reconsidered. As for universal education, we have a series of small one-man schools in Anartu educating about 600 students, but of course the city has 8,000 people and therefore has about 2,500 children aged six through sixteen, so we have a long way to go. There are small, private one-teacher schools in ten of the island’s eighteen towns and villages. This sounds impressive, but remember the Ninurta Génadema was the source of teachers for these schools for centuries. We have not tried to reform the Sumi system of spelling and Sumilara was already ten percent literate—that’s four thousand men who could read and write—before the new knowledge arrived. So our challenge is different, that of reforming and expanding an old system. We think the army

will give us permission to buy a printing press and start printing books and a newspaper within the next year or two.”

Skandu finished and turned to Chris, who nodded to Stersejiu. “Isurdhuna has benefitted greatly from ten Sumi students last year, twenty this year, and we’ll have ten next year. Their tuition, and a royal grant, allowed us to cover the costs of twenty of our students. Our four faculty teach basic reading, math, basic science, Eryan literature, and several philosophy courses; we have preserved that as our core strength. We now have ten paid teachers for children and adults in Kērda, six in the city and four in villages, plus we are supporting eight schools in villages and the school in Isurdhuna by rotating our students through them. I’d say we have two hundred children in school and maybe three hundred adults can read. We now have three steam wagons operating in the valley, two operated by Mitru Transportation, so transportation’s better, and some goods are more available such as coal, timber, and flour. We look forward to an electrical connection with the rest of the world.”

Chris finished jotting notes, then nodded to Ékwēgéndu. “As you know, Belledha suffered a terrible catastrophe this winter, and one result was closure of the génadēma. However, thanks to Lord Chris’s encouragement, scholarships from the two génadēmas here in the Arjakwés, and a royal grant, four Belledhans were here for the intensive winter term and ten for the two spring terms. As a result, the génadēma in exile can now return to Belledha stronger than ever. We will host several Menneas much of the summer, so we hope that the northern shore will be in much better educational shape by the fall.”

“How many village schools and literate people, altogether?” asked Chris.

Ékwęgęndu pondered. “We have one village school attended by fifty kids and I doubt there are more than a hundred adults who have partial reading ability.”

Chris nodded. “Stauréstū.”

“Lewéspa has continued to expand its school system over the last year. Our génadëma has focused on three things: medicine, since I am being trained as a doctor; teacher training, to strengthen our local schools; and mechanics, since we are traditionally strong in crafts and manufactures. We have five faculty and have averaged sixty students every term who take two or more courses, plus about two hundred taking one course. We now have schools in all nine villages in our region, though they are still reaching less than half of our school-age children; Mëddwoglubas is doing the best, with 500 of our 700 children in school. Of course, our schools are still not organized as well as they are in Mélwika, but in the fall we’ll be adopting the first grade through tenth grade model and using the Mélwikan course materials. I’d estimate that half the thousand adults in Mëddowglubas can read and write some, and in the area we have another three hundred with some literacy.”

“You remain the bright spot. Awskandu?”

“Néfa has stressed business in the last year,” he began. “With some focus on medicine and agriculture. We’ve had a dozen students and faculty here all winter and spring, so our local course work has been less during that time. Total literacy has not increased very much in the last year—from maybe 300 in the area to 400—but they can read much better than they could a year ago. The businessmen, in particular, are using new business skills, and the cash flow through our bank branch has almost doubled.

We're now thinking of training village healers who will also teach the local school; in our area, at least, the villages are more likely to support a school if they're paying for a healer, and Lord Albanu is not otherwise in favor of village education. We're also interested in spreading telephones to all the villages so that medical emergencies can be handled more quickly, and orders about farming can be gotten out more efficiently."

"That's a good report," said Chris. "I'm glad the situation is better. Mitrubbaru?"

"Ora's been building its science and engineering strength over the last year, and that has meant building up our English," he began. "We now have the best English department on the western shore, with three faculty and about twenty-five students and a large library of English books. Total faculty in the génadema is sixteen. We have one hundred students pursuing a *dwoyerri* and forty of them are more than halfway there. We're designing a *kwéteryeri* right now, to start in the fall. We've been sending business students to Néfa and here; Melwika and Meddoakwés have had fifty Orans this academic year. Literacy in the city has jumped quite a lot, to maybe five hundred people. We have maybe 150 more in the villages. Last year we had five village schools, but this year we have only four; it is not the focus of our resources."

"Mitruiluku."

"It's been quite a year in Meddoakwés," he began. "The Géselékwes Maj Génadema moved into its brand new building during the winter, a building designed to handle up to five hundred students and thirty faculty. The old facility has been converted into the city hospital. Next to our génadema is the new Law School, which we formally inaugurated earlier today; it already has three faculty and will expand eventually to have

ten, all of whom will also serve as royal judges. We have exchanged some specialties with Mélwika, which is just a half hour away by public transportation, so many students go back and forth. We have strengthened our business offerings and our medical courses—since we have a hospital—while cutting back on science and teacher training. English has also expanded. Mélwika has cut back on its Eryan literature so that its students come to us for literary training. A new focus starting this fall is civil service training; raising the quality of bureaucrats will be a major priority. We're also working on a new elementary and middle school for Meddoakwés that will open this fall; it'll accommodate 500 students, but that is still less than a quarter of the city's children aged six through thirteen. We'll send fifty to one hundred high school students to Mélwika next year—a small fraction of children of that age, but many want to work instead—and aim to open a high school in two years, and maybe another elementary and middle school two years after that. In the Arjakwés Valley twenty of our twenty-five villages have some sort of school; the five that don't are in the far west and northwest. I'd say there are five hundred literate adults in the capital and five hundred more in the villages, excluding Mélwika.”

“Weranodatu.”

The priest looked at the hostile crowd. “Before I was a priest, I was a student at Werétrakester's philosophical school, and I remember when Thornton became a student with us and gradually introduced the new knowledge. While the older priests at the temple are still against the new knowledge, they know they can't oppose it successfully, and when I became chief priest I decided I had to change their attitudes. The best way to

do it is create a formal school to teach the hymns, how to understand them, and how to do the basic priestly rituals, but also teach basic science, reading, and math, and send the priestly graduates to teach in the villages. The idea is similar to Néfa's, but rather than arguing a village will pay for a teacher who is also a healer, we're arguing that a village will pay for a teacher who is also able to perform priestly sacrifices."

“What alphabet will they teach?” asked Stauréstu.

“Both, but mostly the new alphabet. The old system should not die out, but we don't need to revive it now.”

“And will you let anyone become a priest, now?” asked Stersajiu.

Wéranodatu shook his head. “No, our school will be open to men with priestly blood. But that's a huge number. We're confident we can attract some of them.”

“Let's move on. Wérdéu.”

“The Tripola Génadema has expanded somewhat over the last year. We now have nine faculty, up from six last year and eight the year before. We have focused more in the last year as well. We're sending mechanical students to Mèddwoglubas, medical students here, and business students to Néfa, and we're focusing on three areas: agriculture, adult education, and teacher training. Tripola has broken ground on a school able to accommodate about a thousand children aged six though sixteen and we're scrambling to find teachers, in some cases hiring teachers from village schools, so next fall the number of village schools in our area may actually drop to about eleven out of twenty villages. The villages are responding to the challenge by paying their teachers more regularly; they're setting aside farmland and farming it jointly to raise crops to pay the teacher. Our

latest estimate is for five hundred literate people in Tripola and eight hundred more in the area. Eight of our villages have electricity and telephone service.”

“Rudhisuru.”

“This last year saw the completion of three buildings for the Endro Génadema in Endraida. We’ve hired twelve faculty and formally organized a curriculum involving one term of intensive courses in reading, writing, math, basic science, and basic military skills for all 250 army recruits and a *dwoyeri* degree for officer training—only twenty men per year—eventually to be raised to a *kwéteryeri*. We’re also planning schools for children in Endraida, which has a hundred kids, and Kostakhéma, where there are 150 army children. The army engineering corps is moving to Endraida as well, and we anticipate adding a dozen of them to the faculty.”

“Albékwu.”

“The Gordha Génadema now has three faculty, teaching adult education and teacher training only. Some of what we are doing really belongs in a high school and we’ll move it there if we ever establish one. We have been able to teach literacy to about two hundred fifty men in Gordha over the last year, plus there are schools for the Dwobergoné, Médheloné, Kwlone, Kaitere, and Krésone that have probably taught a similar number. The work has been slow but steady. It appears we will now benefit with a faculty exchange with Mélwika; their astronomer wants to set up his telescope in our dark skies and will teach science classes for us in return.”

“May.”

“The Women’s College is now full, with twenty students boarding and twenty-five more attending every day. It has proved to be a catalyst for many women, who are now taking adult education classes. It has inspired a dozen to consider careers as teachers, nurses, or doctors. At some point the school will need to expand, but it’ll be a few years, yet.”

“Amos?”

“The Engineering School is a new addition to Melwika, as I’m sure all of you have heard. We don’t have faculty and students as much as study teams that choose a topic, study it together in depth, and bring about a solution. Currently we have twenty-five people qualified to be on a study team.”

“Okay, now it’s my turn,” said Chris. “Melwika Génadëma averaged two hundred twenty full time students since the fall, plus we’ve had five hundred take one or two courses from us. We now have twenty-five faculty, half in adult education, and some of that will move to the high school. I suspect that is true of all our génadëmas. We’re involved in planning the regional high school, which will open with several hundred students this fall, most of whom will live in Melwika; the city has a fair number of teenagers in it, some of whom migrated here on their own and who are willing to take a free course part time. About half the Melwika adults can read and write; that’s 1,000 men and 500 women. There are economic incentives producing the high figures: most businesses in town want literate workers and will pay two thirds of the cost of the classes; there are signs everywhere; there is an entire basic spelling and reading lesson painted to the side of a building on Citadel Square; and now there are sales coupons, which have

cause newspaper sales to shoot up. The women who can read are often interested in getting a job, sometimes in day care. Because the city partially pays the cost of child care, a lot of children are in it. The men who can't read are often new arrivals who are likely to learn to read in the next year or so.

“Our latest plans have been to establish educational agreements with neighboring villages. Béranagrés and Nénaslua have committed to pay for as many of their 14 through 16 year olds to go to our high school as they wish, next year. We estimate about half will go. Yimuaidha wants to do the same but can't afford it, but they are opening a new school for most of their kids aged 6-14. The Dwobergone are establishing schools for their kids and we plan to invite them to send teenagers to the high school. We have strong ties with Morituora and Boléripludha, which together have over 3,000 people, 750 of whom are aged 6-16; we think both will send teenagers to our high school next year. Most of these villages have agreements to cover the costs of emergency care of their sick, with the result that we're getting patients from them and their mortality rates are dropping. All of these villages are also part of the regional fire fighting system.

“So we have made immense progress in the upper Arjakwés Valley in the last year. Widéstu, what comments do you have?”

“I'm very grateful to all of you for inviting me and for your work. The results are impressive. I've been adding up your figures. Excluding Sumilara—for which we had no literacy information last year—literate adults have increased from about 4,000 to about 7,500, almost double. If we can continue schooling 4,000 adults every year, plus educating children, in a decade we'll have very impressive levels of literacy. Sumilara is

ten percent literate, according to Skandu, and that explains its long history of wealth, high quality exports, and expertise. Until a generation ago the army engineering corps was dominated by Sumis. I will be sure that my report to the Queen highlights Skandu's numbers and the goal of universal literacy on Sumilara; that will spur us to more action.

“I count about 7,000 children in school, and note that three large schools for about 1,000 are scheduled to open soon. Child education is increasing fast also, and that bodes well for the future.

“In the last year, Her Majesty’s government spent thirty thousand dhanay on education. At the time it sounded huge, but in retrospect it’s small. As you know, the Consultative Assembly was given 250,000 dhanay to spend this year instead of 100,000, plus the power to tax products of the new knowledge, which we hope will raise 150,000 or more. We’re hoping education will get 100,000 and health, 50,000; the rest goes to roads and some to electrical and telephone lines. We spent our thirty thousand mostly on scholarships to the génademas to spread teachers and healers more widely, so Belledha and Isurdhuna got a lot. The Tutane are doing very well, with startlingly impressive levels of literacy even though they have limited resources and no support from us; I suppose that reflects the collective nature of tribal life.”

“Honoreds, I’d like to know what impact this new tax will have,” said Wérdéu. “We in Tripola are worried about it.”

“No one knows,” replied Chris. “Sales of steam wagons and related products, steel products, phones, glass products, machine-woven cloth, electrical equipment, ice boxes, windmills, bicycles, and such employed about 1,100 people, 700 in Melwika, 200

in Mæddwoglubas, 200 in Ora, and 100 in Tripola. They earned about 1.5 million dhanay.

So the tax will amount to 150,000 dhanay unless it depresses sales, and no one knows how much that will happen."

"It should be said that every year, sales of the products of the new knowledge have increased at least by a third, and sometimes they have doubled," Amos pointed out. "So I doubt sales will be depressed. Instead, they will increase more slowly."

"Why can't we have the entire tax on products of the new knowledge, rather than just the ten percent surcharge?" asked Wérdéu.

Widéstu spread his hands. "I can't answer that question. You will have to ask the Réjé."

"If we are now turning to the question of membership in this council, I can't see any reason we should admit a representative of the Sumi génademas," exclaimed Awskandu, abruptly changing the subject. "The new knowledge must remain the province of the Eryan. Let them continue to live on their island the way they always have."

Chris could now see why the Sumis had stopped sending students to Néfa. He turned to Skandu. "That is not a matter for this council to decide," replied the Major. "Her Majesty's government has agreed to recognize these two schools as génademas. The army has been given the authority to decide what new knowledge to teach on Sumilara, and when to change the rules. Frankly, I think the exclusions will change so that Sumilara gets the new knowledge, but always a few years after everyone else. If the island proves its loyalty to the crown, that may change."

“How can they prove their loyalty?” asked Mitrailuku. “I think the standard of proof expected would be higher than that expected for Médoakwés itself.”

That left the room in silence. Then Rudhisuru said, “The Army agreed to the Sumi génademas being admitted to this council and I have been instructed to vote in favor.”

“So, should we bother to vote at all?” asked Awskandu, irritated.

“No, it is not a *fait accompli*,” replied Chris. “We are a private group; we can decide. But why should we exclude two génademas and such a huge number of educated people? Sumilara’s more educated than any part of this world except Mélwika and Léwéspa.”

“And including them rewards loyalty,” added Skandu. “We are trying to integrate the island with the rest of this world. Failing to integrate them simply encourages rebellion.”

“So if we vote no, we will be responsible for a future revolt?” asked Awskandu.

“Never mind, let’s just vote,” growled Wérdéu.

“Alright?” asked Chris, and most heads nodded. No one objected. “All in favor of admitting Skandu as representative of the Sumi génademas?” All hands went up except Awskandu’s. “The resolution has passed. Now, shall we discuss the request of the new génadema at the Temple to join?”

“I think it’s a terrible idea,” exclaimed Mitrubbaru immediately. “We in Ora have been freeing ourselves of the superstition of sacrifice. Memorizing the hymns: we don’t particularly object to that, they are beautiful and are part of our past. The priests are just

re-inventing themselves so that their old ways can accommodate the new knowledge.

There's no reason to help them."

Stersajiu nodded vigorously; Isurdhuna's school had almost been destroyed by the priests. "Next thing you'll know, they'll want to take over some of our génademas."

"We have no desire to take over anyone's schools," replied Weranodatu. "I admit, our relationship with the new knowledge has been difficult, and it will not become easy overnight. But I am trying to move the priests into the new era so they can contribute to it."

"Old superstitions and new knowledge?" Mitrubbaru shook his head in disgust.

"The problem most philosophers have is with sacrifice, not with the hymns. But in a rural village where sacrifice supports a priest-teacher . . . what's wrong with that? The people are sacrificing, which Widumaj, in the hymns, says they should do. The sacrifice becomes meat that is sold right there in the village to support the local teacher. Is that not a beautiful application of Esto's word?"

Mitrubbaru shook his head and said nothing. Then Widéstu spoke up. "The Ministry of Education has agreed to give the new génadema ten thousand dhanay and Her Majesty has authorized twenty thousand from her purse."

"Here we go again," growled Awskandu.

"I suggest that we admit the temple génadema for a year and review them next year," suggested Chris. "The key question is whether they are teaching the new knowledge or just the old. If they are teaching just the old knowledge, there would be a good reason to ask whether they belong on this council."

“They have to teach both if they want more money from my ministry,” exclaimed Widéstu.

“Then they won’t have a problem next year.”

“The school really doesn’t exist yet,” added Mitruiluku. “The Sumis have had schools for a long time, but this school is still an idea and a promise of money.”

“Alright, we can be reviewed next year,” said Weranodatu, obviously unhappy. “It is true that the school only exists on paper right now.”

“All in favor of one year membership?” asked Chris. Most hands went up. “Opposed?” Three: Mitrubbaru, Awskandu, and Stersajiu. “Very well, Éra now has a Council of Sixteen Génademas and Géndhas.”

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Plans

The Génadema Council met the rest of the afternoon to review Mélwika's new graduation requirements, which raised the quality of education, and to consider how quickly other génademas could follow suit or could provide foundational courses that would then feed more advanced students to Mélwika or to other schools with specialized programs.

Everyone was anxious to develop a specialty of their own; Néfa's Business School, Meddwoglubas's medical school, Tripola's agricultural school, Ora's engineering school. Various members of the Mennea clan promised to travel west to help over the summer.

Then supper came out and they all relaxed and chatted informally. Bidhu, head of the census and government statistics, joined them. "So, Bidhu, are we growing?" asked Mitrubbaru at one point.

"You mean, Éra? Sure, in various ways. Last year tax revenue was up fifteen percent compared to the year before. Some of that was the head tax, but there was real growth in the economy as well." He used the English word 'economy' as the Eryan term was still exotic to most people.

"What about population?"

"We can't tell that from the census, since it's the first one. Anecdotes suggest the population is growing, though; the hospitals certainly are saving a few hundred lives per year. We plan to improve our data sharply in the next year by asking all royal cities to

issue birth, marriage, and death certificates and send copies to us. Eventually every village will have to issue them.”

“Another task for village teachers?” asked Chris.

Bidhu nodded. “But I doubt we can pay them anything.”

“Bidhu, even a small amount would help,” said May. “A few dhanay go a long way in the villages. The teachers are doing all sorts of things; they’re writing and reading letters, serving as postmaster, sometimes they are the village photographer, sometimes they run a little store in the school. . . and as we’ve heard, some are paid in harvest from a village farm. Some will be paid to be healers or perform sacrifices. But what we need is teachers *who teach*. There are teachers who have a big room and are alone with fifty or sixty kids; they’re lucky if they can maintain discipline!”

“We’re just making a beginning,” agreed Widéstu. “But it *is* a beginning. As we’ve heard, people are learning to read, write, and count. Villages are getting newspapers, reading them, and learning about germs. The book of Hymns of Widumaj is selling to villages.”

“A world is opening,” agreed Stauréstu. “But what fraction of all villages have access to a decent road?”

“I think Mitru told me that his steam wagons can now reach about three quarters of the villages,” said Chris. “There are Tutane areas that are not yet served and the area north of Belledha is completely unserved. When the regional Lords all bought one steam wagon, largely for prestige purposes, and made no plans to use them for development, Mitru saw a market and began to provide transportation services. Fortunately, there was

enough of a market to pay for it. He now has an average of three steam wagons in each region just for transportation, and more for powering sawmills and grinding mills.”

“He’s taken over the transportation system in Lewéspa,” agreed Stauréstu. “He ran steam wagons more or less on time, the fare was predictable, personal cargo was allowed, and above all else, when there was breakdown he provided a replacement.”

“Even on Sumilara, he has three,” added Skandu. “The army agreed to it last year on the grounds that if any disappeared, the others would have to be taken off the island. More are on the way to help with agriculture and lumbering and he’ll own them.”

“But transportation is one thing; having something to transport is another,” complained Albékwu. “The steam wagons going through Gordha are largely empty of people; maybe they have a few soldiers or soldiers’ families coming and going from Kostekhéma. And they could carry more cargo, too, especially if the road were improved.”

“Your area still doesn’t have a huge flow of cargo,” agreed Chris. “But potentially you should have a lot; you have so many cattle, sheep, and goats.”

“Albékwu, your people shouldn’t be driving a hundred cattle per month to Meddoakwés,” said Amos. “The cattle arrive thin and the sales price is not as good as it could be. You should at very least drive them to the Dwobérgone territory, or even to Melwika, where they are fattened up, *then* are walked to Meddoakwés. But even better than that: establish a slaughterhouse in Gordha, fatten them there, slaughter them there, and ship the meat on ice. A steam wagon with a lot of ice can follow the sun and get the meat to Ora the same day it left Gordha. You’d have a much bigger market.”

“Gordha would also retain the hides, which means expanding your leather working,” said Chris. “For that matter, you’d have the fat for making tallow candles and the bones and hoofs for making glue. Have you any idea how hard it is to make glue here in Mélwika? We have to send someone to Méddoakwés and buy hoofs from a dozen merchants who buy your cattle and slaughter them.”

Albékwu’s eyes went up. “Very interesting. Can you give me more information?” “Before you leave, we can go talk to Estodatu,” agreed Amos. “He can get information for you. On Gedhéma, when an animal is slaughtered, nothing is wasted. Every part is converted into a product and sold. It is done very scientifically.”

“Well, you’ve solved their problem!” exclaimed Wérdéu. “But Tripola still needs help. We haven’t reaped many benefits from the New Knowledge.”

“That’s because you haven’t found one or two things to do,” replied Chris. “Lord Gugéndu needs to call a conference of local people and brainstorm about what products are already being made that can be improved. You need to start with one or two things, then branch out. The South Shore has a fair amount of industry and most of your villages are on the Dhébakwés or the Glaktakwés, so they have water power. I’d develop grinding mills, saw mills, and other small local industries, and continue stressing village schools. The result will be gradual improvement and development.”

Wérdéu hesitated. “A good suggestion, but the Lord is not in favor of conferences to make decisions.”

Chris shrugged and said nothing. He knew Gugéndu’s attitudes well.

“Lord Chris, will this new camera and film improve the life of our village teachers?” asked Widéstu, who was obviously concerned about the problem.

“We hope so. The old system using metal and glass plates was clumsy, they were very hard to mail back here, and the teachers weren’t in the position to develop the plates themselves. But the film is much easier to use and mail back here for development. It’s also cheaper to make. Teachers should be able to make more money with the new photographic system. We can also take pictures using the glider from the air, so we can make much better maps. I think within a year or so we can even start making moving pictures.”

“Moving pictures?” asked Widéstu, startled.

“Yes; you take a series of pictures, about fifteen or twenty per heartbeat, and show them equally fast, and to the eye the series of pictures look like movement. On Gédhéma moving pictures are a form of art and entertainment.”

Widéstu nodded, but clearly had no idea what Chris was talking about. “So, is everything ready for the All-Génadëma Conference?” asked Stauréstu.

“It should be,” replied Chris. “We are expecting as many as five hundred people this year, too. Some graduates have managed to get their fathers to come, and many village Lords have come to the Grand Court a few days early to see what we are doing. We’ll have the largest crowd ever.”

The All-Génadema Conference began the next morning. The Melwika campus was packed with people interested in attending all the different lectures. All day the various programs were crowded.

When the lectures and workshops ended at four bells, a steam wagon with a passenger wagon pulled up to the northern entrance to the génadema to take anyone interested on a field trip to Bolakra and the Sumi villa called Penkwayukwa that Marku had been excavating for four months. Marku was disappointed that only a dozen climbed on board, but among them were Thornton and Skandu, the Sumi Major, who was anxious to see the find.

They set out eastward along Péskakwés Rodha. Skandu looked at the line of utility poles along it. “You have power and telephone service up here?” he said, surprised.

“This is the road from the Péskakwés Gluba, so power is flowing down the wire, not up it. But we are installing another wire—the lower one—which will carry electricity to houses and grange facilities all the way to Bolakra, where there’s a hamlet. There’s a telephone line on the poles as well because there’s a cluster of houses at the gluba and we need to telephone them and tell them how much water to let out of the dam. That line will go to Bolakra as well.”

Skandu nodded. He looked at the rich fields, now bare of the recently harvested grain. One had a huge heap of grain straw and a trailer was being loaded with it by three men with a pitchfork; a steam wagon idled nearby. Another field was being flooded. Farther north, a wagon was plowing. “You’ve planting another crop?”

“We can get two per year.” Thornton pointed to a big, white heap. “Bird guano; it’s incredibly rich fertilizer. You spread it on the bare field, plow it, soak it with irrigation water, then the farmer walks the field casting the grain seed. The wheat shoots up incredibly fast!”

“I can imagine! But it doesn’t look like you need to irrigate at all.”

“I don’t think the farmers really do; we’ve had good rain this year. But they’re superstitious. They want to get rich.”

“The price of grain has dropped twenty percent on Sumilara.”

“And thirty-three percent here. The farmers are disappointed. The Grange is renewing its calls that farmers plant other things. A few lower fields are being converted to rice and a lot more are being planted in corn. You’ll see a lot of vegetables as well, and a few baby orchards and vineyards.”

Skandu nodded, fascinated. “And this grange; how does it work?”

“Farmers are not required to join it, but almost all have. It owns the steam wagons, plows, threshers, guano spreaders, and grain storage silos. The farmer has to pay ten percent of his harvest to them as a fee or provide the equivalent in labor; most provide the harvest and then work for the grange for a wage instead, which gives them income when there’s no harvest. The grange pays all taxes of grange members and arranges sale of the grain, which gives the farmers a collective voice. The grange also pays your hospital if you’re sick, harvests your crops if you are unable, and will give you a funeral. Every fall the farmers vote to elect three members of the Grange Board; my father

appoints a fourth member and is the fifth member. The Grange members meet every two months to talk about what to do with its labor, resources, and money.”

“Really?”

Thornton nodded. “There’s always been a shortage of equipment, so there have been tough decisions to make; it’s better the farmers understand the problems. With the drop in the price of grain, the Grange won’t have the money to buy all the steam wagons and equipment it needs, so the upcoming meeting has to decide what not to buy.”

“Fascinating. And how old are these farmers?”

Thornton laughed. “The average? I’m twenty-two, and I think most are younger than me! Maybe nineteen.”

Skandu nodded. As they rolled up the road, they passed a house and a small barn. “I see some people are moving out of town, too. Oh, young, brave farmers. That’s a big difference between the eastern shore and everywhere else.”

“Not much longer. We have no plans to move the city walls further. Pretty soon the cost of housing inside the city will start to climb, and people are realizing the Dwobergone aren’t a threat, and there are Tutane buying and selling in the market all the time so people are getting used to them, and people know the army can crush any attack now . . . so people are feeling safe enough to move out of town.”

“It’s much more convenient to be on your land. You can’t feed chickens easily when their food is straw and wild seed on your land around your farm house but the chickens are in town, and you can’t leave them alone overnight . . . you can’t guard your crops from thieves and wild animals if you’re in town.”

“And we have passenger wagons rolling on the main farm roads six times per day, so women can go to town to shop. Kids can get to school.”

They slowed and turned right onto Bolakra Rodha. A hamlet of six houses had sprung up at the corner. Skandu saw a husband and wife picking beans in a field.

In a few minutes they came to Bolakra. Skandu pointed to the water towers. “Is that a fort?”

“Sort of; it’s a cluster of five metal water towers and the space inside them is a garage for steam wagons, but it’s also a safe haven if we have trouble. The grange uses it. Bolakra has room for a hundred houses, but it has only twenty because people want to live in town or on their land, not in a little village, and the safety is not enough of an incentive.”

Skandu pointed. “I see it has a store.”

“Yes; run by a Sumi family, by the way!”

The steam wagon turned right onto Penkwayukwa Rodha before reaching the village. The five arched vaults came up along side the road very quickly and the entire steam wagon of people realized they had arrived. They turned off the road and parked.

Marku led everyone over to the villa, which was now cleared of debris; great piles of building stone stood outside the buildings, revealing the remnants of their walls and their concrete floors, some with impressive mosaics. Marku walked everyone into the house through the main entrance, explaining every room and what they had found, pulling waterproof tarps off walls that had the remnants of paintings on them so they could see the images. He told the story of the dead family in the master bedroom and

walked everyone through the central courtyard, which they had begun to excavate systematically. He summarized the coins, bones, broken pottery, and other debris they had found. The servants' quarters received a quick review as well.

The questions followed. Some were fascinated. Others were puzzled that someone would want to dig up something wrecked a thousand years ago, not rebuild it, and reconstruct it; why? Marku tried to explain the idea that one could learn history from the task, which seemed strange to some.

“Now why do you say this was a Sumi villa, way out here?” asked one man.

“Sumi records indicate that 401 years before Widumaj began his mission, something called the Year without Summer marked the beginning of a great drought that forced the Tutane westward, and they conquered this area.”

The man stared at him without blinking. “Who cares what Sumi records say? Maybe this place had an Eryan Lord and Sumi servants.”

“No, Meddoakwés was Moralana, a Sumi city, until the Tutane conquered it about 397 years before Widumaj.”

“Says the Sumi? I bet they call Meddoakwés ‘Moralana’ now. That doesn’t prove it was theirs. This has always been our land, not theirs.”

Marku was stymied by the man’s attitude and momentarily uncertain what to say. Then Skandu spoke up in a crisp and distinctively Meddoakwés Eryan. “I’m pretty sure the man who owned this villa was named Felanoma. He was the brother of King Moremun the Third of Moralana and was in charge of the eastern defenses. The records

in the Great Library in Anartu speak of him as ‘the Count of the Four Forts’ and say that when the Tutane invasion began suddenly, he was killed almost immediately.”

“That makes sense,” replied Marku. “The ‘Four Forts’ are probably four sets of towers that are in a north-south line about five dékent east of here. The first one is on the mountain just east of the Péskakwés Gluba; the second on a hill rather like Bolakra just east of here; the third on a slight rise this side of the Majakwés; the fourth on a hill about a dozen dékent south of the Majkwés. I suspect this villa suffered a surprise raid; why else would the Lord and his family huddle in the innermost room and be killed there?”

“I agree with your theory,” said Skandu. “Are there any images and names on the coins you found?”

“Yes, images of kings of course, and ‘Moremun’ may have been the name. I don’t remember.”

“Some many have been minted during the reign of his father, Ranoma, as well. We’ll have to take a look.” Skandu pointed to one wall with some fresh mortaring along its base. “Did you do some repairs here?”

“Yes, the wall had fallen over but was otherwise intact, so we stood it back up instead of hauling it away.”

“I thought so. You don’t have the technique right in putting the stones back; Sumi walls tend to have a thick basal stone.” He pointed to the bottoms of other walls. “You see? Clear evidence of Sumi construction.”

Marku nodded, fascinated by Skandu’s remark. The critic remained silent.

Everyone began to wander around the site. Skandu looked at the excavations, Marku following along. “How does this work?” Skandu asked, puzzled.

“Every square that is excavated is two doli—one meter—across, and we dig it with small shovels, even spoons. We have books of blank paper where every page represents what we found in the next third of a doli of depth. We map everything we find as we find it and later we can compare what is one doli underground here from what was one doli underground somewhere else.”

“Oh, I see. This is. . . ‘arkhéologia’?”

“Yes, that’s the English word. I am calling it *wetgénto*.” It meant “the science of antique things.”

“Ah. You should come to Sumilara some time to see what we have. There are buildings in Anartu that were built about the same time as this villa. The mosaics look very familiar. So do the wall paintings. You’ll understand them much better.” He paused, then added in Sumi, “How’s your Sumi?”

“My Sumi?” Marku responded in Eryan. “I don’t speak it.”

“Well, you just understood me.”

“That’s true. My grandmother spoke Sumi to me when I was really little, but I haven’t heard much of it since.”

“We can translate for you anyway. You need to come to Anartu and give a course in *wetgénto* at the Ninurta Génadëma. I’m sure the army won’t mind, as long as you don’t teach any chemistry. Remember, Anartu has never been sacked. It has burned on its own a few times, but the library, fort, and temples inside the walls are intact from two

thousand years ago. Sumilara used to be a sleepy, quiet Sumi island; a backwater. So everything is preserved.”

“Fascinating!”

“You should do it,” agreed Thornton. “It’s the only way to get the background you need to finish this project.”

“How will you finish this site?” asked Skandu.

“We’re not sure, yet. We want to build a *muséum* somewhere. Maybe we’ll build it in town, or maybe we’ll rebuild the villa and make it into the museum.”

“What’s a *muséum*? ”

“A building that displays and explains objects. In one room you might have things from one time and place; another room will have things from another time and place. People walk through, read about the objects, and learn the history of something from them. You can have archaeology museums, art museums. . . there can be many kinds.”

“I see. Very interesting idea. If you want to rebuild the villa as an example for people to walk through, you’d definitely need to come to Anartu. You’d probably need to hire Sumi builders, too; they know the techniques.”

“I think it would be difficult to rebuild it, even then. Too much has been lost. But we will need to preserve the wall paintings and mosaics here or in a museum on campus. We also have the skeletons of the family, who were killed with swords; their bones bear the marks.”

“Could you arrange for Marku to teach at Ninurta?” asked Thornton.

Skandu nodded. "I think so. That would cover his expenses, too. Can he rearrange his schedule so he can go there?"

"That's up to him. The work here has completed one phase; the next phase could await the fall. We have students and farmers who could watch and protect the site."

"I would like to go to Anartu," agreed Marku. "It'd be quite an opportunity."

"The best time is at the end of the Grand Court; that's when I'm going back."

"I could do that."

The three men started to walk toward the passenger wagon, where the others had begun to accumulate. "I'd love to see the volcano some time," said Thornton. "I gather it has been rumbling lately."

"It's been smoking and may erupt. But the army would never allow you to go; you know too much. Sumis will have to come here to learn geology, or can learn it from books."

Thornton nodded. "I understand. I've been to Sumilara, you know."

"I know, I was on the campaign. I saw you. But that was different." Skandu shrugged. "Maybe I am pessimistic. Maybe it'll be possible in five or ten years. But I think Sumilara will be too rebellious for a long time. I love the place and its history, but I've taken an oath to the queen and her army. Sumilara is part of the kingdom and will remain that way."

"How much danger are you in?" asked Thornton.

Skandu didn't answer right away. "I don't know, but there are some who would like to kill me, I am sure. It is hard to be a lover of the Sumis and the Queen at the same time."

Awsé was always happy to see so many daughters and step daughters. That was one of the nice advantages of the Grand Court; it brought people home. That day Beranté, her first born daughter, now in her late thirties, was visiting from Pérkas, where she and her husband, a government bureaucrat who was the second son of a Lord and a distant relative of the royal family, lived. The event brought Bloré and Glosé, both now living in Mélwika, to see their older sister. Lébé came over as well with the baby.

"It was quite a wedding," exclaimed Beranté, describing an event that had occurred just the day before. "Estodhéru spared little expense; he wanted to show off to the great houses. Mitrané was a beautiful bride, invisible under all her veils and lace. Ejnésu was very proud. They looked very happy, too."

"Well, she was careful in accepting his offer," said Lébé. "She was in one of my courses early in the spring and we talked. She was looking for a husband; that's the main reason she came to the génadéma. She wanted to marry a second or third son who would have no inherited responsibilities, so he could move to Meddwoglubas and let her rule when her father dies. And she wanted a man who was learning the new knowledge. She told me she had six or seven proposals, too."

“Sure; they have a lot of money, especially with all the industry the town has,” agreed Béranté.

“It sounds like she found just the right man, then,” said Awsé. “Too bad I didn’t have a spare son; Mélwika and Méddwoglugbas would be a good alliance.”

“Well, we sort of have one now, with Estodhéru being a Baha’i,” replied Lébé.

“Oh, is that why he would propose toasts and raise his wine glass to his lips, but never drank?” asked Béranté. “We were wondering about that, and about why your father in law was invited.”

“Auntie?” exclaimed a man, sticking his head into the room. “I’m sorry, but do you mind if I use the telephone to call Méddoakwés?”

Awsé looked up at Brébu, the first cousin of the husband of Sulé, one of her younger step daughters. She did not like him calling her auntie; she really didn’t like him staying in the house; but he was a guest.

“It’s fine, Brébu. I’m sure John wouldn’t mind.”

“Thank you, auntie. Also, I have some dirty clothes that need washing.”

“Just take them to the cook and she’ll take care of them.”

“Thank you, auntie.” He hurried across the room to John’s office. But the operator apologized to him that the line to Méddoakwés was busy, as it often was in the afternoon, so he walked across the room again, the women watching him silently.

When he was gone, Béranté turned to Glosé. “So, how’s the store doing? I was in it this morning and liked what I saw.”

“Good,” replied Glosé. “We’ve been open only a week and so far business has been very good. Of course, the Grand Court has been a huge boost to our business. I’m glad we decided to open in Mèddoakwés rather than here. There must be one hundred wealthy families in town and they’re all buying things to take home. We can’t manage to keep draperies and bedding in stock, it’s flying out the door so fast.”

“I love the quality of the fabric and the colors; really marvelous.”

“Thank you,” said Glosé, with a smile. “Those power looms in Mèddwoglubas really produce a high quality product; very uniform, and so cheap! But the colors are our decision. We had a team of dyers here in Mèlwika do it. Starting in the fall, Mèddwoglubas will weave exactly what we order from various colored threads, so the quality will be even better, and it’ll be cheaper.”

“The standard sizes; that’s amazing,” said Berantés. “It never occurred to me that if all beds are made in certain standard sizes, then the bedding can be, too!”

“That’s a trick from gèdhéma,” replied Lébé. “Twin, double, queen, king. . .” She rattled off the bedding sizes, which had easily translated into Eryan.

“We’re opening a store here, too,” said Glosé. “It’ll be late summer and it’ll be different. You see, the Mèddoakwés store is designed for the wealthy families in the capital and farther south. They’ve been building new houses lately and they need furnishings. But the Mèlwika store will be oriented around the needs of the people here, which are more modest. The wealthy hire someone to build a house for them, then they furnish it . . . here a young man gets some friends to help him build the outer walls and roof, he moves in, lives in a simple, bare space until he has enough dowry to marry, then

he and his wife gradually plaster and paint, install interior walls, and finish the house. So the store here will sell paint, plaster, standard sized glass windows, doors, wooden flooring, and many things the store in Méddoakwés won't carry."

"Excuse me again," interrupted Brébu, walking through the room to John's office again. They waited; again the operator told him the line wasn't available, so he came out. "Auntie, can I ask the cook for some fruit? Maybe an orange? Or maybe she can fry me some bananas?"

"I'm sorry Brébu, I'm sure she doesn't have time to fry bananas, but she may have some fruit; maybe a peach."

"I'll ask, thank you, auntie." Brébu sauntered out, heading for the kitchen.

Beranté was clearly irritated. "Who is he, again?"

"Sulé's cousin in law."

"Why is he staying here, rather than at her house in Brébestéa?"

"He stays here a lot. He's a merchant and he travels a lot, and a lot of his business is here in Mélwika, so he stays here."

"He's rather pushy," observed Glosé.

"Why is he named 'Brébu'?" asked Beranté. The name meant "Beaver."

"It's his own choice, actually," replied Awsé. "He's busy and industrious."

"Oh, is that what he is," said Glosé.

"Where in the house is he staying?" asked Lébé.

“We kicked two boys out of their room and gave it to him,” replied Awsé. “Right now, with Grand Court, we actually have four house guests; there are a lot of children sleeping in the courtyard at night!”

“They really take advantage of you,” said Glosé. “You should say you have no room.”

“We’re putting up three, too,” added Bloré. “Everyone puts up guests during Grand Court. I bet the génadéma’s rooms are all full.”

“They are,” agreed Lébé. “In fact, half the students are displaced and doubled up in rooms with the other half, so that visitors can stay in the dorms. We have an arrangement with the students that we can do that to them, but only for two weeks.”

“Clever,” said Awsé. She sighed. “What this town needs is a *hotel*. That’s the word, right, Lébé?”

“Yes.” She considered a moment. “*Gozdema*,” a translation that literally meant “hospitality house.”

“That’s what this place feels like,” agreed Awsé. “I think we have at least one guest almost every day.”

“Mother, then you should start a real gozdema,” replied Lébé.

“Me?”

“Why not? You don’t have any children to raise any more, we’re all grown up. You know how to manage something like that. And you won’t need to worry about watching the money much; the accountants will take care of that.”

“True,” she replied, thinking about it.

“She’s right,” added Glosé. “You can buy everything you need from our store, too!”

“But we can’t do it here,” replied Awsé. “This house is too crowded!”

“The idea is to get the guests out, not bring more in,” replied Lébé. “There are businessmen visiting Mélwika all the time and they’re staying in the two inns, crowded into small rooms with strangers, sleeping in the same beds with them, walking to the hospital or town hall to make telephone calls. . . I’m sure they’d pay a lot more for a private room, a desk with a light, and a telephone.”

“Throw in a flush toilet and a bath with hot water nearby, and a lot of wives will be happy, too!” added Bloré.

“What an intriguing idea,” said Béranté. “You know, Mélwika is a better place for a gozdema than most cities because there are laundries, the widows make great food, there are restaurants . . . keep a few teenagers around to serve as runners and you’d have quite a service!”

“I like this idea!” exclaimed Awsé. “I wonder what John would think, though. Well, maybe I should just tell him, rather than asking him. We’ve been putting sons and sons in law in business, and some daughters are involved . . . this household already includes day care, and I’m tired of helping out with that. . . maybe I should just do it!”

“I think so!” agreed Lébé. “You’ll need a building, though, and you’ll need to decide how big it should be.”

“And where it should be,” added Awsé. “That’s important. Most guests are visiting the Foundry, the industrial park, or the businesses near Temple Square. We can’t put this in the new addition, it has to be nearby.”

“There are still some spaces down by the river,” noted Glosé. “Ménu could build something at a reasonable price.”

“I like the idea!” exclaimed Awsé. “Why shouldn’t I do something like this; we’ve got plenty of money, so even if it loses, I’ll have some fun!”

“But you won’t lose money,” replied Lébé. “I’ll ask Chris. He can tell you what hotels do on Gedhéma.”

“He has good, practical ideas, too,” agreed Awsé. “We’ll ask him for advice.”

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