

Later in the upper cave, Rexx explained the various devices to Autok. "Do you think any of these would be helpful in restraining the invaders?"

"Hmm." Autok mused. "I'm not really sure. But, maybe we should keep them handy in case we find a need."

Matu interjected. "We thought we would approach the seers to see if they had an insight that we had overlooked."

Autok nodded. "Perhaps, they might. Go ahead and approach them."

Matu addressed Rexx and Sendi. "Let's go. The way is upward."

They proceeded up a tunnel that was often open to the desert air. Gaps that led to cliff ledges appeared here and there along the way. Sendi remarked as she looked out of one of the ledges. "Wow! This is really high!"

Matu glanced out of the tunnel. "Yes. We are almost to the top of the mountain. The seers like to live where eagles perch." He glanced on ahead. "This is probably a good place to pause. The seers may or may not be aware of our approach. But, they do not like to have strangers interrupting their processes. You will wait here and I will go on ahead and explain our mission." He started forward, paused and looked back. "Enjoy the view. I won't be long."

Sendi and Rexx walked out onto the ledge. "Wow! The desert is certainly huge. Everything just disappears into a gray purple haze." She remarked.

"Yes, it does." Rexx replied glumly as he sat down on a nearby rock ledge.

Sendi looked back at him. "Is something wrong? I mean, other than the obvious 'what kind of a mess are we in?'"

Rexx looked up at her and sighed. "I just wonder if we will ever get back home."

She sat down beside him. "I know. I wonder the same thing." She looked around. "What if we don't?" She paused and sighed. "Well, at least we're together. I don't think I could handle this if I was by myself."

He paused a moment. "Yeah...I'm glad we're together, too." He looked off toward the horizon. "At least we're still on Earth."

Sendi inhaled sharply. "Oh! I hadn't considered that...!"

"What?"

"With time being wild, who's to say where we might be...I mean, we could end up any where...or when...in the universe. Somehow, I get the feeling that we're not going to solve everything by fixing what's going on in this mine." She paused. "I don't even know how we can fix this."

"Nor do I. I hope the seers have some suggestions." Just then an eagle flew past their ledge, turned and climbed toward the top of the mountain. "Did you see that? I guess Matu was right about where the eagles perch."

"Yeah. I've never seen one this close. They sure are beautiful...I wonder what it's like to be a bird." She snickered. "At least you wouldn't be afraid of heights."

Rexx, still distantly. "Yeah."

"Rexx, I meant that as humor."

"I know."

"Look. Who knows what will happen here, or anywhere else in this disrupted time zone. Or, what we can possibly do about it." She went very quiet for a few moments.

"Sendi?" Rexx cautioned.

"Rexx..." She paused again. "If we're stuck together in some weird time zone for the rest of our lives...will you marry me?"

After a moment of total shock, Rexx answered. "Um...yes...of course!"

"Good!" As she stared off into the distant desert.

Unsure how to respond, Rexx just settled back on the rock ledge and also stared off into the distant desert.

A few minutes later, Matu returned. He glanced at them just staring off into the distance. "Why so quiet? Is anything wrong?"

Rexx looked up. "No, everything's fine...we were just...thinking about what we could do here...to help, that is."

"Oh. Well, I have spoken with the seers. Their spy has confirmed that you are not a threat and you are welcome to come and speak with them."

"Spy?" Rexx and Sendi responded simultaneously and then looked at each other.

"Oh, sorry. The eagle that flew past here. They use the eagles as eyes and ears to patrol the vast desert...and, other creatures, as well."

Rexx and Sendi stared at him incredulously.

"Oh. I think I sense a culture shock. Sorry. The seers live in a very different relative time and space compared to, I guess, what we would call 'normal' people. This may take some explaining. We know and accept their way, but do not always understand it. They have abilities that are beyond...sorry, again...'normal' people. They are...I guess you would say, 'gifted' in perceptions that most of the rest of us do not have. Though, we do not dismiss this gift. When it is recognized in a young person, we encourage its development, and if the student is willing, we encourage their desire to join the community of the seers...for it is to all of our advantage to advance their wisdom."

"Is this clairvoyance...ESP, extra sensory perception...or something like that?" Sendi asked.

"Yes, you could probably call it something like that. But, we don't really know all that they can do. We do know that they can see into other creature's thoughts and perceive their surroundings."

"Wow!" Rexx exclaimed. "Then maybe they can contact the Alcaad's minds."

"Yes. I suggested something like that to them, and they agreed to look." Matu motioned for them to follow. "But, now we must go and not keep them waiting too long."

Shortly, they arrived at the entrance to the seers' quarters. Matu announced them and made introductions to the two men and the woman that lived there. He turned to Rexx and Sendi and said. "These are Moicha, Vala, and Reela, our esteemed visionaries."

The three seers bowed in greeting. Moicha spoke. "We welcome you. Matu has described the problem, and we took a brief sojourn to explore. We became aware of these beings in an earlier journey some long time ago, but, as there wasn't a need at that time, we let things be."

"There wasn't any danger, then?" Rexx asked.

"There were some incidents, but we could not determine what effect came from what cause."

"I don't understand."

"It may be difficult to explain." He paused. "We did not always know if the rock that fell was thrown."

"Oh, I think I see."

"Yes, where we look does not always have an answer." He paused. "However, we have lightly probed during Matu's recent absence and have learned some bits of knowledge, at least from the point of view of the thoughts we touched."

Rexx bowed. "Please, let us know what you found."

"This group of beings has been here for a very long time. Much longer, than we humans, we assume, as there is no knowledge of humans in their memory when they first arrived. So, it would be safe to assume that they see us as the intruders. And, as long as we stay toward the surface, away from their colony, they don't concern over our existence. We are as negligible as the desert creatures to them."

"But..." Rexx interjected. "If they have been here that long, why is their colony so small? There can't be more than a couple of hundred of them."

"Ah, that is simple, their life times are much, much longer than ours and so, their reproduction rate is slower. Since they arrived, their colony has only doubled in size."

"What can you tell us about their thoughts?"

"Oh, they are very dark."

"Dark? What do you mean?"

"Dark...like a very dense stone. It contrasts light which is fast, airy, bright. Their thoughts are slower, heavy, almost awkward, as if a stone was slowly sinking in very thick mud. It would take considerable time to reach a settled resting place."

Rexx looked at Matu. "Do you understand what he means?"

Matu paused. "Somewhat...as I said, the visionaries see things in different ways than we do. I understand that what you want to know is the Alcaad's attitude toward humans. But, it seems possible that they are aware of us as intelligent beings. And again, maybe, we are no more than insects to them."

"Odd, that they look like insects to us."

"Yes. And therein may lay the problem."

"What do you mean?"

"In order to find a common ground for dialog, we must each consider the other as an equal."

"Can that happen?"

"I don't know." Matu turned to Moicha. "What do you see?"

"I think we will have to journey again to find that answer." He turned to the others. "Vala, Reela, do you have the energy for this search?"

Vala answered. "Yes, and you, Reela." She nodded. "But, we must have time to prepare."

Moicha faced the three and said. "We will take some time for this probe. Return here in a few hours and we will share what we have found. When we are ready we will send an eagle to Autok's shelf." He stood and indicated the entrance. "Now, please. We must prepare."

Rexx stood. "Thank you very much for sharing your knowledge."

Sendi nodded in agreement. "Yes. Thank you!"

Matu spoke to Moicha as they departed. "Also, thank you. We wish you good journeying."

As they walked down the tunnel, Rexx asked. "You called them 'seers', but addressed them as 'visionaries'. Is there a difference?"

Matu chuckled. "Only a matter of respect. It is their word for themselves. We use it to be polite."

"Oh." Rexx paused. "So, what do we do now...while they are 'journeying'?"

"Well, are you hungry? We could get a bite to eat in the kitchen."

"Yes, that would be nice." Sendi said.

Rexx seconded. "Yeah, I could go for a little more of that good coffee. My brain's a bit tired trying to understand Moicha's visions."

A little later, they entered the kitchen. Doka was cooking and Misha was feeding some porridge to their children. They looked up as the three entered.

Misha spoke. "Good morning! I promised that you would meet our children when they were more awake, and here they are." She addressed the children. "Paimu! Mista! These are some new friends we met last night. This is Rexx, and this is Sendi." The children stood and extended their hands in greeting.

Sendi shook their hands and spoke. "Hello!" She turned to Misha. "Oh, they are adorable! How old are they?" Rexx, in turn, shook the children's hands and greeted them. Matu and he chatted with them about their day and what activities would follow their meal.

"Paimu is four years old, almost five. He is just about to start studying in our cultural school. Mista is only two and is still a bit young for school. She is still learning her words."

"School, already? He must be very smart."

"Well, yes, he is, but culture is much more than reading and writing. It is songs, dances, poems, rituals, drawings, and more, all about our history. It is what is normally handed down from grandparent to child. But, we, as a large extended family want to include everyone's ancestry and have it available to all of our children. It is to safeguard our younger generation against losing their link to the past and who they are as a people."

"That is very wise, though I assume, they don't have to wait for school to learn about the past. Surely, there are bedtime stories and simple rhymes that are taught from their earliest months."

"Of course, the school only broadens the simple stories to include the larger history."

"That's good." Sendi paused a moment watching the children. She sighed.

Misha watched her. "Is something troubling you?"

"I assume you are aware of why we are here and what has to be done."

"Yes, I know. Actually, most of our community knows, though, probably not all of the details. Of course, we have kept our knowledge from the mining community. They do not know of your existence."

"It's just that...we don't really know what it is that we have to do to fix things, here and in the rest of time. All we can do is hope that we are doing the right things. And, if we fail...well, we may never get home." She sighed again. "I want to have a family...some day." A moment. "Your children are so beautiful."

Misha put her arm around Sendi's shoulder. "I understand. Please, believe that all of our community will help you in your task as best we can."

Sendi looked at her. "Thank you...I mean it, thank you."

Misha looked at her and smiled. "But, now I had better get back to feeding my little ones before they start complaining that the porridge is getting cold. We can talk more later."

Sendi watched as she picked up the bowl and returned to feeding the children.

Rexx came over. "Sendi...you OK?"

"Yeah...it's just...you know."

"Yeah...I do."

Matu approached with a couple of mugs. "Here's the coffee you wanted. I'll go get us some snacks." He returned to the cooking fire and began to load a platter.

Rexx turned to Sendi. "We'll talk later...but, for now, know that I care...let's try to keep up a cheerful front. We don't want them to be distracted by our fears. OK?"

"Yeah...OK. And, thanks."

Matu returned with a platter of various spiced meats and bread. "Come, let's go over there." He nodded to a quiet corner where some benches were arranged. "We can talk more privately away from the rest."

They settled on the benches and Matu placed the platter on a small table in front of them. "Please eat." He indicated the food. "Now, we have at least a couple of hours until the seers have finished their quest."

"Can you tell more about this 'journeying' thing?" Rexx asked.

"Well, I don't understand all of the details. In our culture schooling, we are given a sort of 'layman's' definition. They begin by entering a sort of trance state...they don't use any herbs or chanting or anything like that. It's sort of a skill they have of opening their minds to another...um...dimension, I guess is the best word to describe it."

"That's beginning to sound like the Time Police guys. Are they like them?" Sendi asked.

"No. As far as what I know of the Time Police, as you call them, they are not human. Or...if they were once human, they are no longer."

"So..." Rexx continued. "How do they 'journey'? What do they do next?"

"The 'journeying' can take several different directions. In this other dimension, they can just, sort of, 'float' and experience whatever they encounter. They do this as a sort of meditation exercise. They can also mentally 'transform' into another being and experience things from that point of view...say, for instance, they can become an eagle and while flying over the desert, they can see what the eagle sees."

"Are they imagining this? Sounds kind of like day dreaming."

"Well, Rexx, we might think that. But, they actually are temporarily living in the eagle's mind. They can also direct the eagle on a specific path. As my understanding, they obtain the eagle's consent for this intrusion."

"They can talk to the eagles?!" Sendi inquired.

"Yes. In this other dimension, the thoughts of any being are accessible."

"Wow!" She commented.

"And, it is my understanding, in their current quest, they will attempt to enter the minds of the Alcaad to see if there is a chance of dialog. Or, if not, they will try to find how they are vulnerable, or maybe I should phrase it...how they can be convinced to leave." He paused. "If they do not leave, I foresee great difficulties for the humans on this planet."

"Yes." Rexx commented. "I think you are right. From what we saw in the future...they do not seem to be inclined to submit to another culture's point of view."

From across the room, one of the children shouted. Misha responded. "Paimu! What is it? What's the matter?"

"Mama!" He pointed at thin air. "What is that thing?!"

"What? I don't see anything."

Paimu just stood there blinking. "It's gone!"

"What?!" She asked as Rexx, Sendi and Matu put down their food and came over.

"What's the matter?" Matu asked.

Misha looked at him. "I don't know. He said he saw something." She turned back to Paimu. "What did you see?"

He looked at his mother. "I don't know. It was really big and looked like a bug...but, really big!"

Matu looked at Rexx and spoke softly. "It looks like we may have another seer." He turned back to Paimu. "Could you describe what you saw? Maybe it just ran away. If you can tell us what it looked like, we can go look for it."

"OK...uh...it was taller than you...and...shiny and sort of dark gray or black...it sorta looked like the little beetles that hide under the desert rocks."

Sendi sighed. "Alcaad." She turned to Paimu. "Did it do or say anything before it vanished?"

"It kind of just stood there looking at me. I didn't notice it at first...only when I looked up from my porridge. But, I think I heard it make some strange noises." He looked at Matu. "Do big beetles talk? It almost sounded like words, but it was really scratchy sounding."

Sendi asked. "Did the words mean anything to you?"

"I don't know...sort of like 'who are you?' or maybe, 'what are you?', something like that. Then I called out to Mama...and then it was gone. How could it get away so fast?"

Matu answered. "I don't know. But, Paimu, we will go and look for it. You should finish your porridge and we will let you know what we find."

Matu, Rexx and Sendi returned to their bench and gathered up the platter and mugs. As they returned them to the cooking area, Matu spoke softly. "He will definitely become a seer. The Alcaad sensed his presence in its mind. And, that is not a good thing. I wonder what prompted Paimu to sense the Alcaad? Perhaps, the journeying seers opened some sort of portal to a pathway. I wonder what they saw or heard? We should, perhaps, not wait for their signal, but wander back toward their residence."

"I agree." Rexx replied as they left the kitchen. "We don't seem to have a lot of time to figure out what we should be doing."

"I wonder..." Mused Sendi as they walked along the path to the seers caves. "What could sidetrack the Alcaad from the seer to Paimu?"

"I don't know." Matu responded. "But it seems that Paimu's mind may be very powerful. Possibly, when the seers opened the portal to the Alcaad, Paimu's mind was triggered. He was eating, which is a very grounding activity, maybe that pulled the Alcaad down to notice him."

Rexx inquired. "Grounding...?"

"Yes...like lightening...when the disturbance in the air and the quiet of the ground come together."

"So..." Sendi interjected. "That...made the thought communication...leap into Paimu's mind...and he 'saw' the Alcaad that the seers were trying to 'read'...am I making any sense?"

Matu paused. "Yes...yes, I think you are. Well, we will just have to see what the seers have to say." He paused. "And we shall have to start finding out what Paimu's talents are...and how powerful is he? When, there is an opportunity, we shall have to start asking him about his dreams. It could tell us a lot."

A few minutes later, they arrived at the seers caves. An eagle was perched on a rock shelf at the entrance way. Matu cautiously approached it. He spoke softly to the others. "It's sound asleep! I don't understand."

Sendi cautiously approached. "They're not day sleepers...are they?"

"No." Matu very lightly touched the eagle's wing. "It's really out. If it was just sleeping, it would have smelled me and woken up. I think something is very wrong!" He announced himself at the entrance and listened. "No sound. We must enter."

As they entered the cave, they found the three seers asleep on their couches. Matu touched Moicha's shoulder. "Moicha. Moicha!" He looked at Rexx and Sendi. "No

response. He's alive, but, not asleep...something much deeper." He turned toward the entrance. "Stay here...help them, if they awake. I'm going to go get help!" He said as he left.

"Rexx, what can we do?"

"I don't know...wait and see, I guess."

Sendi touched Moicha's forehead. "It's very cool, but not cold...maybe because of the trance?" She placed her hand beneath his nostrils. "He is breathing...but, it's very shallow. Rexx, I'm worried." She turned to him. "Do we...do we have the ability to actually do something here?...I'm very afraid."

Rexx lightly put his hand on her shoulder. "I am too."

They stood in silence watching over the seers for a few minutes. There was no change in their appearance.

Then, hurried footsteps were heard in the outer tunnel. Matu led a handful of others into the cave. "There." He pointed to the seers. Rexx and Sendi moved out of the way as they converged on the sleeping forms. Matu turned to Rexx and Sendi. "These are healers and some teachers, or I should say, guides who understand more of the seers ways than most." They stood quietly and watched as the others worked.

A few minutes later, more footsteps, heavier this time, were heard in the passage way, they turned toward the entrance as Doka appeared carrying an unconscious Paimu in his arms. He was followed by Misha carrying Mista. Matu approached and taking Paimu out of Doka's arms, he laid him on a couch. He turned to Doka and Misha. "What happened?!"

"He shouted that he saw something again, and then fainted. Is he having visions?" Misha asked.

Matu sighed. "I'm afraid so."

"What does it mean?" Doka asked.

"I don't know. But, the seers are also in a deep trance. We fear that they may have crossed minds with Paimu while on their quest."

"We knew there was something wrong, when you called for healers, so we followed you here." Misha added. "What can we do?"

"I don't know...I will ask." Matu approached the healers and motioned toward Paimu's sleeping form. One of the healers came over and began examining him.

After a few minutes, the healer stood and addressed them. "I am Martov, I bid you greetings. He nodded to each. "They all seem to be in the same type of very deep trance. Since Moicha is the first visionary, we are trying to revive him, so we can determine how to revive the others."

"'First visionary'?" Sendi questioned.

Matu explained. "He is the most accomplished in the seeing arts."

"Oh." Sendi answered. "How will you try to revive him?"

Martov explained. "We will begin with simple grounding devises...such as, a cold water compress on the forehead, steam vapors from a hot herbal infusion, artificial muscle activity...movement of limbs to simulate actual walking or lifting, things like that. We will also try elevating his upper torso to change the circulation to the brain."

"And, if that doesn't..."

"We hope it will...if not, there are other methods...we won't discuss them at this point."

"I see." Sendi lowered her eyes in silence...then. "What about the eagle?"

"Eagle? What eagle?"

"Just outside the entrance, there's an eagle that's also sound asleep."

"Show me."

Sendi led him to the entrance, then stopped, staring. "It's gone!"

Matu followed. "It can't be gone! I touched it and there was no response. How could it have recovered so quickly?"

Sendi turned and dashed back into the cave where Doka was standing with Misha and Mista. "Doka! When you brought Paimu into the cave, was there a sleeping eagle on the rock ledge?"

"What?" He asked. "What are you talking about?"

"An eagle...when we arrived here, there was an eagle sound asleep on the rock ledge outside of the entrance. And, now it's gone."

"No...I don't remember seeing anything like that." He turned to Misha. "Did you?"

"No." She responded. "I think I would have noticed something that unusual."

"So...when Paimu fainted and fell into a deep sleep...the eagle woke up...and left? What do you think, Matu?"

"You raise an interesting similarity. You think their minds were somehow linked?"

"Well, we know the seers can link their minds to animals..." Rexx added. "...and they said they would send an eagle to let us know that they were ready to meet with us."

More hurried footsteps were heard approaching, and Matu went to the entrance.

"What now?" A man carrying a large basket entered the cave. "Fera!" Matu greeted him.

Doka approached as Fera set down the basket. Doka turned to Rexx and Sendi. "Fera is one of the cooking staff." Then back to Fera. "What is it? Why have you come here?"

"This." Fera indicated the basket.

Doka lifted the lid of the basket and seeing the contents, he questioned Fera.

"What is the meaning of this? We do not hunt eagles."

"Eagles?!" Rexx exclaimed. He and Sendi hurried to the basket. "It's dead!"

Doka continued. "Fera, please explain."

"We were cleaning dishes and tending the fire." Fera began. "Pasha went to the cliff edge to bring in more firewood. He came running back, saying that an eagle had just landed on the ledge. We thought that it might be bringing a message for one of you."

"Yes." Matu said. "That would have been for me saying the seers were ready to meet with us. Then, what?"

Fera continued. "I went to the ledge. The eagle was just standing there, preening a feather. Then, suddenly, it stared at me, blinked a couple of times, and fell over...dead. At first, I didn't know what to make of it. Then, I remember Paimu's shout about the big bug. I...I thought you should know, so I brought it here."

Matu went to the basket and looked closely at the dead bird. He touched the same wing he had touched when the bird slept on the rock ledge. He looked up at the others. "It's the same eagle that was on the rock ledge outside of this entrance. I recognize some odd coloration in the flight feathers that I noticed before."

"Matu..." Sendi began. "...what do you think this means?" She continued. "The Alcaad found Paimu's mind and questioned who or what he was. The eagle...did they find it, too? And...the seers, all in a trance."

Fera asked. "What is the Alcaad?"

Matu sighed. "Soon, everyone will know...the Alcaad are an alien race living in the deep tunnels...they are the big bugs that Paimu saw...they are the ones attacking our people."

"What?!" Fera exclaimed.

Matu continued. "Rexx and Sendi encountered one of their specie in...in another time and place."

"What are we going to do?!" Fera demanded.

"That..." Rexx added. "...is what we are trying to figure out. Please, calm yourself. Panic is what we really don't need at this time."

"Yes." Matu added. "We need to revive the seers and find out what they have seen."

Martov intervened. "Fera, will you prepare this potion?" He handed him a paper with the names of several herbs written on it. "Please, make it very hot to get the most out of the herbs, but let it cool to a drinkable temperature before you bring it. We will try to moisten Moicha's mouth with it and hopefully, he will swallow some of it. Oh, and make enough for all four of our patients."

Fera took the paper, looked it over and agreed. "I will return with some soon." And, he hurried off toward the kitchen.

Martov turned to the others. "We don't really need the potion, but using it may help and will certainly do no harm. I ordered it to give Fera something to do to take his mind off of the situation." To Matu. "Now, perhaps you will tell me all you know of these circumstances. It may give us some insight as to how to proceed with reviving these people."

"Yes, certainly." And Matu proceeded to recount their experiences.

"I see." Martov commented, after Matu finished retelling all that they had observed. "So, your suppositions about these aliens having made a mind connection with the seers and Paimu may very well be correct. One moment." The healer left them and approached one of the guides. He spoke with her a moment and the two of them returned to the group. "This is Mana, she is one of the teachers, or guides, that instruct children, and sometimes, adults, that have just begun to be aware of their talents. She, and the others, try to help the learning process with their understanding of the many pathways that have just been opened in the young mind. Our guides are not strictly seers, but they have some of their talents and understand much of what the seers have to go through to completely realize their strengths. I have briefly mentioned the situation, but I think it would be good for you to explain all of what has occurred. Please, talk with her. I am going to return to our patients." He left the group.

Matu spoke, introducing Rexx and Sendi and explaining some of the reasons for their being present here among the tribe. "And, so you see. We need to know what has transpired between our seers, Paimu, and these aliens. Oh, and also this poor eagle."

Mana sat on a nearby couch, sighed, and looked up at them. "That is a lot of knowledge to absorb. Come, sit, and let's talk about some of the thoughts that you may have about these aliens and what has happened here. I would like to know more about how you, Rexx and Sendi, know so much about these intruders."

"Yes." Rexx agreed. "We will tell you all we know. But, when we first spoke with Moicha, he did a brief quest and said that the aliens were here before the humans arrived, and that they may see us as the intruders."

Mana stared at him briefly. She sighed. "Well, that is an interesting insight. Let's talk. And, please give me your impressions, as well. Even the supposedly untalented mind has a powerful connection with the unseen universe. When you have a sudden thought come to mind about a subject, it is well to keep it there in a simple form and see how it connects. If you start to analyze the thought, you will become involved in the analysis and start to stray from the first impression."

"Wow! That is an interesting viewpoint." Sendi exclaimed. "How did you learn all of this?"

Mana smiled. "We guides also have a school, and knowledge of the unseeing arts are passed down from generation to generation." She paused. "But, for now, did Moicha say anything else about these aliens?"

Rexx volunteered. "He said that they seem to not concern about us as long as we stay away from their colony. At that point, we are insignificant and they pay no attention to humans: ants in the garden, as opposed to ants in the pantry. I am guessing that when the miners starting digging deeper, though they didn't dig in the tunnels that connected to the colony, they made enough of a disturbance, maybe echoes through the rock walls type of thing, that the colony was alerted to a possible intrusion. Then, they advanced up the tunnels and attacked anyone that they found. Again, destroy the scout ants before they can notify the invading colony."

"Could you tell me why you relate this as a comparison to insects?" Mana asked.

Rexx sighed. "This is involved...where and when we are from in the future, we were informed, or perhaps, taught, that this alien race had a hive mentality: a supreme ruler, that was also the genetic pattern for the colony, classes of warriors and potential mates, housekeepers, and workers or slaves. But, our interference with the unfolding of time as it was supposed to, according to our history, has altered reality." Rexx paused. "And since reality has been altered...we have no idea if the description we were given is still true." He shrugged his shoulders. "So, we are flying blind, here."

Mana interjected. "Rexx, slow down a bit. I understand your frustration. Take a moment and catch your breath." Rexx nodded in agreement. Mana continued. "Whether or not reality has been changed as you said...we don't know, and for that matter, can't know. Pause a moment and ask somewhere deep inside of you, do you feel that the situation is the same as your teaching, or is it somehow different, and if so, how is it different. Don't speak right away, rest a moment and see what comes to you." Rexx nodded.

Sendi watched this conversation with intense interest and then said. "I am really interested in the processes that you are describing. I have often had thoughts that came out of nowhere, but led me to conclusions or decisions that were in the correct direction. If I thought about them too much, I would often make a bad decision. Is this how it works?"

"It is not an exact science. And, often, we make mistakes based on mis-information that may be recent or something that has festered in our minds for a long time. It may even be hear-say that was believed. We don't know anything for sure...all is in transit."

"You sound like the Time Police."

Mana laughed. "Well, reality is quite a concept!"

"Yes...yes, it is." Sendi chuckled.

Doka interjected. "Earlier, Sendi mentioned the possibility of our seers' quest into the alien's mind somehow triggered an intervention by the alien into Paimu's mind. He apparently saw the alien and it spoke to him. We are assuming that our son is showing signs of becoming a seer." He paused. "But, how this deep trance came about...we have no idea. Nor, the eagle's death."

Mana considered. "If this is so, the eagle may have died because the intervention may have just been too strong and over stressed its system...which, may also be the case with our patients. The shock may have just been a trigger to retreat into the safety of unconsciousness. In that case, we have to find out how to release the stress so that they can recover." She turned to Rexx. "Do you have anything to add?"

Rexx slowly composed his thoughts. "I have been thinking and listening, as well. As to the aliens, I think that the basic knowledge from the future about their culture is fairly

accurate. But, I think this colony may have evolved, due to their separation from their home world and, perhaps, the long journey from there to here. I feel that they are a bit more relaxed in their rules, and being a small group the structural order may be less distinct. What I mean, is that the duties are shared between classes."

"That is interesting...so, you mean a slave, or worker, could also be a housekeeper, or even, a warrior?"

"Yes. Or even, could become the ruler, if needed. Say, if an illness or something similar occurred, any member of the colony could take on another's duties."

"Do you think that the particular alien that touched Paimu's mind had a specific duty or was able to take on different tasks?"

Sendi interjected. "Paimu said the alien, or as he called it, a really big bug, asked him who or what he was...just a straight identification question...which doesn't really identify him, the alien, I mean, as any particular class...more a response to surprise." She paused. "Though, I wonder how the seers found the particular alien to question...I would guess he had some seer abilities to be able to tap back across the minds...responding to the initial...um...touch?"

Mana nodded. "Yes, that makes sense. One seer would likely contact another over a mind less open."

"Do we know anyone whose mind is open enough to try again? Anyone still awake, that is?"

Mana looked at her. "Do you want to give it a try?"

"Me?!"

"Yes, why not? You will either connect or not...worth a try."

"But, how?!"

"I will help you...do you want to try?"

"Um...yeah...I guess...will it hurt?"

"Maybe...maybe not."

Sendi sighed. "Well, I guess, that's what we are here for...sure, what do I do?"

"First, relax. You need to be calm. We will take this very slowly, and please, ask any questions you want as we go. There is no forcing the issue. Also, if at any point you want to stop, just say so, and you will return to this level of consciousness."

Rexx interjected. "Can I try, too? We've become kind of a team and we..." He glanced at Sendi. "...well, we feel safer if we travel together."

Mana smiled. "Of course. As friends, your minds will likely seek each other and together lead the way. We have observed that group consciousness increases ability. That is to say, the more minds seeking adds strength to the quest. The results are often much more productive than with just one person seeking." She paused. "Now, understand that what you individually perceive may differ in content. But, if looked at in the concept of, say an emotional aspect, may be the same thing. You are individual people with distinct backgrounds, so your perceptions will be different." She sighed. "This is why our seers work together as a team, to relate their experiences to each other to try to understand the grand concept. And, in this case, suffer the same fate."

Rexx glanced to where the healers were caring for their patients. "I hope we don't."

Mana studied his worried expression. "I don't think you would. In this case, you two are very different from these others."

"What do you mean?"

"You come from a different time and place, have different experiences, and have had previous, well, future, connection with these aliens. Our patients have a common background and have had no previous contact. Something in your connection, even if it's

in a future beyond your current knowledge, might bind your minds to the alien's in a way to provide communication without causing an overload...or shock. We can hope."

Sendi sighed. "Well, I guess we should get started. What do we do?"

Mana thought a moment. "Do you have any special activity, thought, mantra, something like that, that you use to induce a sense of ultimate calm, relaxation...something that would be similar to the process of falling asleep?" She paused. "You want your body to be relaxed as possible. But, you don't want to actually induce sleep to your mind."

"Wow, that's a challenge...fall asleep, but don't fall asleep."

"Well, even if your body is asleep...your mind isn't."

"You mean like dreaming?"

"Exactly...your mind is always wide awake, inventing all kinds of experiences for you to dream about. But, here, it is beneficial, actually necessary, to remain in a conscious state so that you can direct your thoughts along your quest."

"That sounds hard."

"It's not, really, but it does take practice. And the more you do it, the easier it gets."

"Wow." Rexx remarked. "So, how do we begin?"

"Look around here...you will notice that there is an abundant number of comfortable couches. Many seers are trained here and there needs to be the right environment for that. See if you can find a place to recline that suits your...fancy. And it would be best for you to be physically near each other. Once you have selected a place, I will sit between you and help you to cross into a light trance state."

Rexx and Sendi looked around the spacious cavern. Sendi pointed to the far end. "How about over there? It's near that opening with light and fresh air, which should help keep us focused, and it's further away from the healers, so their voices shouldn't distract us."

"Very good, Sendi." Mana added. "Are you sure you haven't done anything like this before?"

"Well..." She admitted. "...I did study some yoga when I was in school...and that is a sort of physical meditation, which works best in a quiet atmosphere. So, in a way...yes." She turned to Rexx. "What about you. Have you done any meditating, or anything like that?"

"Well, looking at it that way...I guess so. I did some martial arts when I was in the military, and that required both calmness and concentration."

"Good!" Mana commented. "You both have some skills that should help you on your quest. So, let's go over and get settled and prepare for whatever we can find."

As they walked over to the couches, Rexx nudged Sendi. "You nervous?"

She met his eyes. "Uh, yeah!"

As they settled on the couches, Sendi asked. "Could you sort of walk us through this experience in advance of actually doing it, so we have an idea of what we are doing?"

"Certainly." Mana said. "The first thing you will be doing is to totally relax, well, as much as possible. I understand that a new and unfamiliar experience can be intimidating, but, try to think of it as taking a much needed nap. Once you have felt that you are comfortably relaxed, then you can begin your quest. Do not think ahead...trying to see the end...but, rather, seeing what appears in your thoughts. Since you have both actually seen the aliens...as most of us have not, try to picture one in your mind. Then, slowly, explore the image, taking note of the physical features...size, color, texture...is there a facial expression...is there an odor or extreme temperature sensation...do you hear anything...questions like that, and add any other sensations that you can think of. Try to not force any conclusions, just let your mind lead you and follow where it goes, continuing to observe any details. When you become weary, it will be time to stop. Slowly back away

from the images. Shift your mind to this physical reality. Feel your body against the couch. Hear the sounds within this room and smell the fresh air, noting the fragrant nuances of the flowers blooming in the rock ledges outside of this window...things like that. Now, begin to move your hands...stretch your fingers, your arms, your feet, your legs...then, open your eyes and look around...and you will be back to normal. How does that sound? Do you think you can handle it OK?"

"Yeah, I think so...you, Rexx?"

He nodded. "So you don't want us to actually try to communicate with the alien?"

"No, not at this time. But, if you do communicate with it, please do as you feel comfortable with...and back away if it gets too stressful. This is your first run and we don't want to overdo anything. Are you ready to begin?"

"I guess we are still a little intimidated." Sendi volunteered. "Rexx?"

"No, I think I'm ready. It sounds like it's not too dangerous, if we're not actually confronting the Alcaad. More, like we're just observing it from a distance."

"Yes, keep that thought." Mana agreed. "It will make you feel safer. And, don't forget, you can wake up at any point, if you feel intimidated. Just return your thoughts to this room, to the couch, and feel your physical body. Then you will be fine. OK?"

Sendi sighed. "Yeah, I guess I'm ready, too. How do we begin?"

"Just lie back on the couch...feel the softness of the material...close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply for a few breaths, then softly, let your body rest...enjoy the comfort. Then, when you are ready, begin to visualize the alien, and let your mind lead you. If, at any point, you need to speak out or ask any question, I am here to assist. You are not separated from your body. Only your attention is focused in a different direction. If you don't have any more questions, then proceed." Mana stood. "Now, while you get comfortable, I will briefly check in with the healers and inform them of your attempt. I will be back momentarily and I will wait here while you journey. As this is your first time, if I feel that you have been gone too long, I will softly talk you back."

After several minutes, Mana held her hand over their faces to check their breathing. As all was well, she settled back on her couch to wait. A few minutes later, Sendi began to stir. She stretched her hands and slowly opened her eyes. Mana spoke quietly. "Rest for a while and feel your physical reality. Rexx is still journeying."

Sendi inhaled deeply and murmured. "OK."

After a few more minutes, Rexx began to stir. Mana addressed him quietly. "Rexx, you are coming back. Slowly feel the world around you. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes."

Rexx opened his eyes. "Wow. That was intense."

Mana addressed Sendi. "Sendi, how do you feel?"

"Um, wonderful, I think. That was like a really restful nap. How long were we gone?"

"About a half an hour. But, that was plenty for a first time. A normal journey can be almost an hour...any longer would be too much."

"What would happen then?"

"Oh, it wouldn't be harmful. It would just take a lot more grounding to feel like you were back to normal." Mana addressed Rexx. "Rexx, how do you feel?"

"OK...good, I think...I just feel a little groggy."

"Well, both of you just rest a few minutes, and then we will talk about your experiences." She stood up. "I'm going to check in with the healers and let them know that you are back." She crossed to the other group.

"Rexx, you OK?" Sendi asked.

"Yeah, I guess I was really out."

"Well, if nothing else, we both seem to have had a really good rest."

"Yeah. I'll have to remember this technique, the next time I can't sleep."

Mana returned and she was carrying a basket. "Fera returned with the potion and brought food for everyone." She opened the basket and handed out a jug, mugs and a plate of sausages, bread and cheese to a small table between them. "A little to eat will help you feel more awake and grounded. And this herbal tea will cleanse the sleep from your mouths."

Sendi and Rexx accepted the mugs and drank. "Oh, that is good." Sendi commented, while Rexx drank deeply.

"Yes, he agreed." Setting down the mug. "It's kind of like lemonade, but not as sweet, and very refreshing."

"Please help yourself." Mana indicated the plate. "And, while we eat, we can begin to discuss your experiences. Do you have anything to say?"

Rexx thought for a moment. "I'm not really sure. I feel like I was really out. But, I also feel like something really heavy happened...maybe, intense is a better word...though I can't really remember what it was."

Mana smiled. "That is not an uncommon reaction. As we talk, something said might prompt a memory, and please speak out if it does. One word will build on another and soon the picture may be revealed." She turned to Sendi. "And, what about you?"

"Wow, I don't know...but, I feel I have had the same sort of experience as Rexx...heavy, intense...but what it was...I'm blank."

Just then, several people entered the room. Rexx and Sendi turned to look and saw Autok with some other men.

Matu joined them and pointed to where Rexx and Sendi were sitting and they hurried over to them.

Autok greeted them. "I'm glad I found you...they said you were attempting a journey. I hope it transpired well." He indicated the others. "We have just returned from the dome. We, cautiously, and quietly as we could, uncovered several square meters of built up dirt. The dome beneath is clear, but slightly clouded. We don't know if that is from age, or if it is intentional...perhaps to dim the sunlight, but we could see light emanating through the substance. Apparently, there is a light source in the colony's cavern."

"Yes." Rexx agreed. "When we first found the cavern, it was very well lit." He thought for a minute. "Though, I didn't see the source of the light. I didn't think too much about it at the time, as I was preoccupied with finding the colony."

"I understand. We hope that we were quiet enough, so as to not alert them to our presence. Though, desert storms would likely cause more noise and disturbance than our digging. Have you discovered anything more during your journeying?"

Mana interjected. "They have recently returned and we are now just beginning to discuss the experience. Please, join us, and perhaps some of your experience will prompt memories of theirs." Autok and his men pulled some couches into the circle. She turned back to Rexx and Sendi. "Has anything he said prompted anything?"

Rexx thought, then said. "Yes, I think so. I remember the bright light of the cavern when I looked through the opening in the wall and saw the colony...I think I saw that same brightness during my journey...but it was a little brighter in one spot...maybe where you were digging?"

Sendi added. "Yes...I think I saw it, too. But, I never looked through that opening when we were in that tunnel...I was too overwhelmed by what Rexx said...did we just have the same experience?"

Mana interjected. "Slow down. Don't try to come to a conclusion. You may have had some small similar experiences, but I am sure, you each had a larger and more unique vision. Let's continue talking and see where it leads."

"Autok, did you see any indication that the colony noticed your presence?" Rexx asked.

"Well, we really couldn't see through the clouded dome, so we don't know."

"They didn't all hop in the spaceship, open the dome and fly off?"

"Uh...no." Autok laughed. "Nothing like that."

"Hmmp...I wish I could remember what during my journey felt heavy, or intense."

"Me, too. There was something definitely there, but, I can't remember, either."

Sendi added. "This is so frustrating."

Mana interjected. "Slow down. I know it's frustrating, but that just pushes the memory away. You need to relax and let it come to you."

"Aaagh, how?" Sendi moaned.

Mana smiled. "We'll work on that...remember, you're not used to journeying, so it will be a bit more difficult to remember the details." She turned to Autok. "Perhaps, you or your men could add a little more of your experience as it seems to be, at least, a little bit connected to Rexx and Sendi's."

"Well, we found the place where Matu and Rexx had started digging and continued from there. We decided to dig latterly and a few meters on we found what looked like a sealed metal connection to another section of the dome. The bracket extended vertically toward the top of the dome and we uncovered a section of it to confirm its direction."

"That would be just inside the cavern from where we originally looked through the opening." Matu added, then turned to Rexx. "You couldn't have seen the bright spot from that angle, could you?"

"No." Rexx replied. "So, during my journey...and Sendi's...we must have been in a different part of the cavern...and, actually in the cavern, not just overlooking it." He turned to Sendi. "Does that prompt anything from you?"

"Yeah, I think it does. I kind of remember looking up and wondering about the bright spot...I felt a kind of concern...like someone should...look...see if anything was wrong...something like that."

"Yeah, I think I felt something like that...the feeling like an annoying drip from the ceiling during a rainstorm."

"Rexx, Sendi...I want to ask you how you felt about that feeling, but I don't want to lead you away from your perceptions, so I want to word this very carefully." Mana said. "Do you feel that this was your observation...wondering about the brightness, or perhaps, maybe, you might have been listening to someone else describing what they felt?" She paused. "Think about it a few moments, before you answer. I want you to question your experience and answer from that."

"Wow." Sendi whispered.

Autok looked intently at Mana, then carefully at Rexx and Sendi. "Yes, think very carefully. This is important."

"I think I need to ask some questions before looking deeply at my experience." Sendi interjected.

"Please, do." Mana answered. "What are your questions?"

"Well, this is more in general about journeying...are we seeing and experiencing things from a distance, kind of like watching a recording, or looking through a distance viewing device...or are we actually in the place that we are viewing?"

Mana smiled. "This answer is not going to be of much help, but it's the way it is...it could be any of those. In any case, your attention is there, so what is there is what you are perceiving, which is why I asked you to analyze how you feel about it."

"I think I understand." Sendi thought a moment. "What I think I felt...was kind of like watching a theatrical performance or reading a novel and getting caught up in the emotions of the heroine reacting to the drama. It wasn't me feeling the drama, but it was me resonating with the heroine, and because of that, I was feeling her emotions."

"Very good, Sendi. That helps. Now, how about you, Rexx?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah...me. Um, I'm not sure, yet."

"Take your time. You don't want to rush to a conclusion that may be someone else's concept. And remember, you and Sendi are different people and your experiences may or may not be similar. Another thing to consider is how the flavor of the experience feels in your mouth...does it taste right, does it feel like you. I hope you understand what I'm trying to describe."

"Yeah, I think so. But, I need a few more minutes to think it through. OK?"

"All the time you need. And, both of you, help yourself to more food and drink. It will help you to feel more yourself."

"Thanks." Rexx reached for the mug. "This herbal tea really is refreshing." As he drank, he noticed Sendi staring off into space. "Sendi...what are you thinking?"

She blinked and thought a moment. "I don't really know how to describe this...but, the 'intensity' or 'heaviness' of my experience...is...is, not necessarily about the experience...but, somehow connected to the actuality of the viewing...I'm not making sense." She looked helplessly at Mana. "How do I explain this?"

"Try making a similarity...doing this feels like doing something else." Mana suggested.

Sendi thought a moment. "It's like I feel like there's heaviness around me...actual physical heaviness, not just mental stress."

Mana turned to Rexx. "You mentioned 'intensity' and 'heaviness', do you have an opinion on this?"

Rexx thought a moment. "Yes, I think I agree with Sendi on the physical heaviness...not sure why, though. But, I would also say there was a mental stress factor. It's like being given a lot to think about and not enough time to process it...something like that."

Sendi added. "I feel like I'm in a very dense surrounding...no, that's not right...more like I'm part of it. It's much bigger and denser than my body and I feel its heaviness as altering how I think...not, sure exactly how, though...but, definitely different."

"I'm going to ask you both, now, to explore that heaviness." Mana said. "Think about it, feel it, see it, smell it, taste it, hear it...anything else that might help describe it to you. Please, take your time and consider these aspects."

They both fell quiet as the others waited. At last, Sendi spoke. "This is weird, but I feel like I'm inside of a stone...it's all dark inside...but, I can see outside...the light of the cavern and the bright spot...and there are some kind of hazy shadows moving out there...people, maybe? But, inside...it's dark...and slow. My thoughts are like thick honey...very slow moving. I'm anxious to make them move quicker. I mean, by my thoughts, not sure if it's really my thoughts or the stone's, I mean, the thoughts of whatever I'm feeling. Those feel like they are moving normally for it, whatever it is. But, me...I want to hurry things along and get to the answers." She looked at Mana. "Make any sense?"

"Wow." Rexx added. "That's...um...how do I say, really interesting. Do you feel connected to the stone, or just observing."

"Sorta connected...like what I'm observing is what it's observing...I think." She paused. "I think my head hurts."

Mana interjected. "Slow down...rest a bit. Rexx, do you have anything to add?"

Rexx thought. "I feel the heaviness as something other than me, but it's covering me...it's like I'm wearing a very heavy coat and it's dragging me down to the ground. It's hard to move, but, I can't take it off...it's like it's stuck to me. I feel like my thoughts are my own. Though, I occasionally feel a thought that seems to come from somewhere else...and, it's something that I don't really understand...could be in some other language...no, that's not right...more like a different way of thinking...maybe, it's a cultural perception...I don't know." He laughed. "I think my head hurts, too."

Mana laughed. "You, two, rest a bit." To Autok. "Does any of this prompt any thoughts from you or your men? I know Rexx and Sendi have much more knowledge of these aliens than we do. But, did you notice any other details when you were at the dome?"

He considered. "When we were looking at the seal, we noticed that it was intricately interlocked. We assumed that was to keep out dirt and other debris that might keep it from operating properly. But, thinking about the layer of dirt on top of the dome, we weren't sure how it could open without dumping all of that dirt into the cavern. It seems like it should have been engineered better to keep the cavern below clean...especially if there is a spacecraft below it. We also assumed that the layer of dirt was there to camouflage the dome."

Matu interjected. "Moicha said that the aliens had been here long before we humans arrived. If that were the case, with no one here to notice, why would they need to camouflage the dome. It seems that they would keep it clean so that they could come and go in their ship as needed."

"That is a good point. So, maybe, the dirt was just accumulated over time and they didn't need to clear it as their colony seemed to be permanent." Autok turned to Rexx and Sendi. "Did either of you see or hear anything about the dirt covering the dome?"

"The only thing I got was that someone should check out the bright spot in case anything was wrong." Sendi said. "The feeling was like it was normal for the dome to be covered and that the light overhead should be uniform. So, the concern was like the dirt covering had been disturbed by, perhaps, some storm not felt in the cavern and that the dome should be checked for possible damage."

"In that case..." Autok responded. "...the dome probably has not been opened for a very long time."

Matu added. "Moicha said the aliens were very long lived and the colony was small because of that. But, if the current generation expected the dirt covering, then it must have been a very long time even by their standards."

"I wonder how long." Autok mused. "And, I wonder how much of their history they remember and how much their culture has evolved."

"If it is as assumed, that they are only defending their colony by eliminating human interference and that their existence is very old and the dome has been covered for also a long time, it seems that they rarely, if ever, go outside." Rexx stated. "I wonder what they eat?"

"Mold." Sendi murmured.

"What?" Rexx pounced.

"Huh?" Sendi responded, waking out of a daze.

"You said, 'mold'. You said they ate mold."

"I did? When?"

"Just now, when I said I wondered what they ate, since they don't seem to ever leave the cavern."

"Huh. Fancy that...I have no idea why I said that."

Mana interjected. "Sendi, think about your experience...what do you think prompted you to answer that question?"

She thought a moment. "The stone I was in ate some mold...a kind of a mushroom or fungus thing that was growing on the wall...the wall was slightly damp right where it was...and, I saw a kind of arm reach out and break off a small piece and bring it toward me...I remember the smell and taste as it ate the piece." She blinked. "Was I just in a trance?"

"Quite possibly." Mana responded. "The thing about journeying is that you are never really in one place. Where your attention wanders, you follow. You, apparently, were back in your experience reliving some of the details. Don't worry, all is well. You are still not back to the normal you were in before we began this experiment."

"Will I get back to normal?"

"Probably not."

"What?!"

"You see, you've grown. You've learned new skills and had new experiences." Mana smiled. "Don't be afraid...it's normal...it's all a part of life. You'll get used to learning."

"Just, great." Sendi sulked.

"Don't worry, Sendi..." Matu sympathized. "...you've had a very deep and at the same time expanding experience. It's natural to feel somewhat disoriented...but, that will soon pass and you will wonder how you ever lived without it."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

Mana added. "Journeying has brought your attention to a skill that you had, but never realized you had. You probably dismissed it as dreaming, because we expect dreams to be unusual as compared to everyday waking reality. But, they have their own reality and often tell us important things...though, most often they can be very hard to understand. One significant aspect about dreaming or journeying is that most often thoughts are conveyed through images, be they visual, or otherwise sensory, than through words...you saw the rock's arm bringing something toward you...you experienced the smell and taste of eating the mushroom, but you did not say that you thought the concept of desire, hunger or satisfaction. Did you have these thoughts?"

"I see. And, no, I don't think I did."

"Even in the waking world, we experience images and our minds draw conclusions from prior experiences. We see a rabbit run away, we conclude something probably frightened it. We do not conclude that it was running toward something, because something desirable, like food or a potential mate, would probably be close to the immediate perceptible surroundings, and it would approach at a more exploratory pace. Do you see?"

"Yes...yes, I do."

"This is very interesting." Rexx added. "So, we should look at the sensory images much closer, before drawing conclusions?"

"Correct! See what the image tells you and then see how you react to that image. Don't dismiss alternate realities without questioning more."

"Shouldn't you have told us this before our experience?"

"Not necessarily...you needed to have conflicting, or confusing images, in order for your minds to have the necessity to sort it all out. Practice, in the art of understanding, in other words."

"Trial by fire?"

"Something like that...but, consider, isn't this how a child learns? There is no instruction book for a new born infant. He, or she, has to learn through experience."

"As we are doing."

"Again, correct! But, as you are learning by experience, you are gaining a much better way of understanding, than if you were studying a text book and committing the facts to memory. The experiences are becoming more firmly ingrained in your memories enabling you to more efficiently and accurately reach conclusions."

"I see." Rexx concluded.

Mana looked around at the group. "Does anyone else have any thoughts?"

Matu spoke up. "So, if these aliens have a self contained colony and have little need of outside interaction...they seem to have an adequate power and food supply...what are they doing here?"

"Good question." Rexx remarked. "I wish I knew. I also wish I knew why they seem to be the same aliens that we encountered in the future...well, our past...at that time, since they apparently came from a far distant galaxy. Why would they already be here in the past?" He paused and laughed. "I never thought that time travel would be so complicated."

"Me, neither." Sendi added. "So, why are they here? Most explorations are for advancement of some kind...new resources...maybe, overpopulation of the home world, or scientific research...any other ideas?"

Matu added. "This seems kind of an out of the way place to start a colony...though, it is remote from human population, considering how long they've been here. I would suggest the mineral deposits, but the discovery of those is recent history."

"But..." Rexx replied. "...we don't have any idea of what kind of technology they possess in detecting mineral deposits, or even what might be useful to them. Their interests could be in something entirely different."

Mana intervened. "Before we come to too many unfounded conclusions...we are now just at suppositions, I think Rexx and Sendi should take another rest and reflect back on their experiences." She addressed them. "You both have questions to ponder on the colony's purpose of being here. Think back on what you have felt. Did anything happen that might suggest what their interest is? Sendi experienced the rock eating the mold. Was there anything in the thoughts you felt that seemed to be directed in any particular direction...that kind of thing...it's not a directive, only a suggestion...feel what was happening and see if it led anywhere. OK?"

Rexx answered. "Yes, that sounds like a good idea. But, I think I'm getting hungry."

"Yeah, me too." Sendi agreed.

Mana agreed. "Then, you should eat. Please, help yourselves. And since there are more of us, I will go get us some more food." She stood. "I will ask Fera to bring some more from the kitchen." She crossed to the rest of the group and spoke to Fera. He nodded and left the room.

She paused to talk with the healers before returning to the group. "The healers say that their patients are resting comfortably in a more natural sleep like pattern...they are closer to awakening from their more unconscious state. So, perhaps soon, we may be able to talk with them about their experiences." She addressed Rexx and Sendi. "I hope you are willing to share your thoughts with them, as well. You needn't be shy because

they have more experience journeying than you. But, you also have more experience with these aliens than they do. Paimu's experiences may be the hardest to unravel, but I'm sure his parents will help to interpret."

"Of course, we'll share. Right, Sendi?"

"Yes, definitely!" She nodded. "Anything we can do to help get to an answer that will solve the problems."

"So, now that you have eaten and rested a bit, do you think you are ready to review your experiences with the thought of pursuing the reasons behind this colony's purpose for being here?"

"Yes, I think so...I've been kind of turning it over in my mind...trying to see if there was any sort of connection." Rexx commented.

"I'll have to poke a little deeper." Sendi added. "My rock was more interested in eating, I think."

"Take your time." Mana suggested and turned to the others. "Any further thoughts from anyone else?"

Matu spoke up. "I'm still wondering why a space faring civilization would want to land here. There doesn't seem to be anything of much value for them here to expend that much energy to get here." He paused a long moment. "Unless...unless, they were running away...from..." He shrugged. "...from...well, I don't know."

Mana turned to Rexx and Sendi. "Does that idea suggest anything?"

"Hmmm...wow. Have to consider that. Is there any fear...is that why the dome is covered?"

Sendi added. "My rock was concerned about damage...or, maybe it was concerned about the lack of dirt cover revealing the colony's existence. Hmm, have to review what it was thinking, again." She thought for a moment. "After my rock ate the fungus, it turned its attention back to the bright spot. I became aware of another being approaching. It said something to the rock...some sort of question, and the rock answered...but, what was said, I couldn't understand...the thoughts were in a strange order and I couldn't put them together. Then the rock pointed to the bright spot and the other being looked up at it. That one suddenly seemed very concerned and hurried off."

"Could you see what the other being looked like?" Rexx asked.

"Hmm, I hadn't really thought about that. I just assumed that since we were apparently in the cavern, that it was one of the Alcaad...let me think...OK, I'm getting some sort of image...I think it was one of the Alcaad...but, there was something different about it. It was larger, somehow...maybe wearing something...maybe, more...or heavier armor?"

"That would make it a warrior, wouldn't it?" Matu asked, then turned to Rexx. "You mentioned wearing something heavy. Did you interact with her rock?"

"Um...I remember having strange thoughts...maybe."

Autok suddenly stood. "I am having a feeling that we had better keep an eye on the dome. If they decide to come out and investigate, we must make sure our tribe is safe. We will go and post a guard." He and his men started to leave the room, just as Fera was returning with some helpers and more food. After a brief interchange, Fera handed a few baskets of food over to Autok's men.

"Mana, does journeying happen in real time?" Sendi asked. "I mean when we experience these things, do we do it now?"

Mana sighed. "Unfortunately, it could be now...or in the past...or in the future. It's very hard to tell unless you experience an event that can be chronicled...or otherwise recorded by some method. Do you have a feeling about the whenness of your experience?"

"I just assumed that it was now, since it sort of timed with Autok's team uncovering part of the dome."

Rexx added. "That would mean that my guy in the armor was probably headed out to inspect the potential damage." He looked toward the door. "Should we go warn them?"

"No." Mana said. "They will have weapons and know how to be cautious." She looked toward the window. "The day is getting on and the light is fading. I suggest we join the healers and see how our seers are doing. We can continue the exploration of this conversation when they have recovered."

In the gathering dusk, Autok and his men cautiously approached the dome. They spread out to various vantage points at some distance from the dome's perimeter and set up a watch. Small fires were set where they could be concealed and food was shared among the men while they waited in the gathering darkness. In the distance they could see the glow from the cavern illuminate the exposed part of the dome.

Autok sat quietly near one of the fires. Soft footsteps alerted him to an approaching guard. He looked up and greeted him with a nod. The man bent and whispered. "We have seen some movement near the edge of the dome that was still covered with dirt."

Autok nodded and gestured to the man to lead the way. The two of them softly crossed to the sentry's location, which was several meters from where the dome had been cleared. A few meters from the edge of the dome, a metal hatch had been lifted from the desert floor. The debris covering it had been dumped toward the hinge edge, leaving a mound of dirt and brush. The sentry pointed toward where the dome had been cleared. They quietly approached keeping to the desert brush. Two very large beings that appeared to be heavily armored stood investigating the cleared dome. One held a shovel that had been discarded near the dome. They appeared to be deep in conversation.

Autok motioned for silence as they crept quietly toward the aliens. They paused a few meters away hidden by the brush. Clicking sounds could be heard from the alien's conversation, but none of it was understandable. The one holding the shovel pointed to it and then to the dome. It shook the shovel angrily and began to converse louder. The other looked long at the dome and nodded, as if in agreement. The one with the shovel began to heave dirt and debris back onto the exposed dome, attempting to cover as much as possible with at least a little shelter. The other alien joined in tossing debris onto the dome. After a short while, they had succeeded in dimming the light emitting from the dome. Seemingly satisfied, they wandered back to the hatch, entered and closed it. Autok and his men remained hidden, watching. A short while later, the light from the dome dimmed until it was barely noticeable. Autok motioned to summon his men. They began to extinguish their small fires and gathered at a point closest to the mountain. He spoke quietly to the men. "Apparently, they need this concealment, but, aren't doing anything more at the moment. I would like a few of you to remain on guard and notify us if anything further happens. The rest of us will return to the mountain and see if anything else has been learned."

Rexx and Sendi sat quietly to one side while Mana assisted the healers. Moicha was beginning to stir in his sleep.

Rexx turned to Sendi and whispered. "So, what do you think of all of this?"

She just stared at him and softly laughed. "I've had time to think? Surely, you're joking. But, looking back, I'm glad we chose the natives over the miners, they seem very wise. But...boy, it's sure been quite a ride."

Rexx nodded. "You're right about that. Who knew we would become amateur seers?"

"I sure didn't. I wonder what's going to happen next...I'm sure I don't have a clue."

"Neither do I. But, I sure hope the seers have some good information when they wake up."

She glanced towards the healers and sighed. "I hope they are OK. They've been out an awfully long time."

Rexx turned his gaze toward the healers. "Yeah, me too." He paused, and looked back at Sendi. "If not, it's back to us to figure this out."

"Yeah..." She looked at him. "...do you remember anything more?"

"I donno...but, I think Matu might be right about the colony running away from something...donno why, but it feels right."

"Yeah...I think you're right." She paused. "I'm gonna think about my rock for a bit. He seems like an average guy, not super intelligent or involved in a lot of stuff. Maybe he remembers how things came to be....you know, stories his parents told him...something like that."

"Sounds good...I'll poke at my warrior and see what he thinks."

They both went silent for several minutes. After a bit, Sendi spoke. "I'm getting a weird feeling like that they are rebels. When he was looking at the bright spot, he was remembering stories about his grand parents being freedom fighters."

"I think you're right...my warrior literally freaked out when he saw the bright spot."

"So, that might explain the need for cover. To not be found. But, why, after so long, would anyone come looking for them? Wouldn't it be more like, 'good riddance'?"

Rexx shook his head. "I don't know. It does seem like it's way too long...but, then, if they are very long lived, maybe it's not really been that long. Remember, in the future, the war lasted a really long time, for us, that is. Maybe for them, it was just the same guys fighting the same war."

"Yeah...I wonder what they did that was so bad, they had to flee?"

"I don't know. But, if their society was a very strict order, like a totalitarian governing system, maybe even a slight discretion would seem major."

"Yeah, like rock's grand parents being freedom fighters...they must have been really bucking the system." She paused. "I just remembered, in Earth's history, major powers would send dissidents off to remote penal colonies, where they could do no harm..." She went quietly thoughtful. "...and later those remote colonies became major powers that caused quite a bit of harm."

"You know, that just triggered something. My warrior's parents...just a sec, I'm thinking..." He paused. "His parents...took command and broke their ship away...from...someone taking them...somewhere...somewhere to a prison planet."

"Then, naturally, they would have been pursued as traitors...and their descendants would be a potential threat. The home planet wouldn't want to risk the descendants returning and overthrowing the government."

"Yes! Correct. So, these guys here must be really paranoid about being found."

Just then, Autok and several of his men burst into the room. Out of breath, he stated. "The aliens definitely need their dome to be covered!" As he proceeded to relate the events at the dome to the healers, Rexx and Sendi moved closer to the group and listened. When he finished, Autok looked around at the group. "Has anything changed here?"

Mana spoke up. "Moicha is now just beginning to awake. He is not quite where we can prompt him, but soon."

Rexx spoke up. "Sendi and I have been reassessing our experiences and we think we have come up with some new information." He elaborated on their theories of the colony escaping a prison planet sentence.

Autok listened intently and nodded. "Yes, I think that is a good possibility, considering what we observed at the dome." He paused in thought. "But, how can that information be of use to us?"

Rexx replied. "Maybe we could scare them away...?"

"Hmm, maybe..." Autok replied. "...but, I don't like that approach. I would prefer diplomatic dialog."

"But, we don't even know their language." Sendi quipped.

"True...but we do have seers." He nodded toward the group. "Maybe, soon we shall hear what they have to say about their experiences."

A grunt was heard. Martov called out. "Moicha! Moicha, can you hear me?"

Moicha opened his eyes and groggily looked around. "What? Where?" He blinked his eyes a couple of times. "Oh...yes." He slowly sat up. "The others...are they awake?"

"Go easy, Moicha, you've been gone a long time. Don't try to stand. The others are beginning to approach awakeness, but they still drowse."

"Yes...yes." He nodded. "This has been a difficult journey. We must have some time to process what has occurred." He looked up at Martov. "May I have some water?"

"Yes, of course." He grabbed a jug, poured a mug and handed it to Moicha.

"Please, take all the time you need. We are glad you have returned. We have had some unfortunate occurrences here."

"Yes. I felt that others might have been affected by our journeying. I hope that everyone is alright."

"Paimu experienced a vision of the alien and then fell into a deep sleep."

"He is well?"

"We believe so. But, he is still deeply asleep." Martov sighed. "An eagle died."

"That is a pity."

"Rexx and Sendi experienced their first journey today and have brought back information. They will relate their experiences when all are recovered."

"That is good."

After several minutes, the others had revived, except for Paimu, but he was now sleeping peacefully. His mother felt it was because of his young age, the powerfulness of the experience, and the lateness of the hour. He would probably awake at his normal morning hour feeling very hungry. Mista had been fed and laid on the couch next to Paimu. She was also sleeping peacefully.

After eating and refreshing themselves, the seers chose to retire separately from the group to converse about their journeys, as was natural for them being advanced in their experience of such. Rexx, Sendi, Mana, and the rest gathered to partake of food, conversation, and relaxation after their long ordeal of tending the patients.

Later, the seers rejoined the rest. Moicha said. "I think now we can begin to address what has transpired. But, where to begin?"

Matu spoke. "Since I have been witness to most of the happenings, I will try to relate the physical chain of events." He continued to lay out the progression of happenings to the entire group, some of which, because of their need to attend to other duties, were not knowledgeable of the events.

After a long pause, Moicha said. "I see. There is a lot to discuss here. We must begin...and proceed slowly, allowing any suggestion to inspire a reexamination of any of our journeying experiences."

Rexx began. "Since, we have, presumably, only lightly touched on the minds of the aliens, and having no previous experience in journeying, I think it best to begin with you, Vala, and Reela. What did you see? And, what are your thoughts?"

"Hmmm...yes." Moicha paused.

"You seem to say that a lot." Rexx remarked.

Moicha chuckled. "Yes, I guess I do. But, thank you for lightening the mood, as there are some serious things to consider." He paused. "When I first reached out in this last journey, I touched a mind that was different than in the brief prior episode. This one was very bright, almost luminescent...not dark like the previous one. It held a sense of authority and at the same time, a need to protect. Soon, Vala and Reela, found my thread and joined me. At that point, the mind seemed to have noticed our presence and reacted defensively. We, three, backed off so as to not alarm him further. We held our presence at a small distance and maintained a quite attitude. He, and yes, we got the image of a powerful male...he began to probe toward us...demanding answers as to who we were and why we were approaching him. We gave off soft thoughts of being passersby, not intending to intrude, but this was not satisfactory to him. We retreated even further, recognizing that this was indeed a very powerful mind."

"Could that have been when Paimu had the vision of the alien...the very large bug?" Sendi asked.

"Quite possibly. We did not see the mind as from an external view, only as he saw himself."

"Paimu said that the big bug said something to him. He said it was hard to understand but it sounded like it was asking who or what he was." Rexx added.

"Hmmm..." Moicha paused. "That is not good. That indicates that the alien assumed he was part of our mind group."

"Does that explain the eagle's death?" Sendi asked.

"I'm afraid it does. I had alerted the eagle that we would need its services when we returned. So, obviously, it was tuned to our minds. The alien must have touched it as well...and equally harshly...and being a more open and susceptible mind, the touch must have been too hard for its system to handle." He paused. "I am sorry we could not have protected it. Well, this indicates that we must proceed with great caution lest the alien touches other less prepared minds. It must associate members of our tribe by our similar thought processes."

"What about us?" Rexx asked. "We did not get questioned. It didn't seem like they knew we were there."

Moicha explained. "There could be several reasons for that. You said it was your first time journeying and that you touched lightly. You, also, apparently just slipped in as a very quiet observer and did not call any attention to your presence or attempt to communicate. Again, also, you are of a different culture than us, so you might not have been considered as part of our group. And, it does not seem that you contacted the same individual that we did...there could be many other reasons as well. But, the fact that you contacted two different individuals of very different personalities and mental abilities indicates that there is quite a variety of personal types in this colony. That is, perhaps, good. It may indicate that we have a chance of possible dialog with some members of this colony...some less hostile individuals. And, if we succeed, we have a chance of calming any other hostilities."

Autok interjected. "You spoke of possible dialog...I, too, would prefer that approach. Though, I'm not sure how we could find the correct individual for such a dialog."

"Yes, it does seem difficult." He addressed Rexx and Sendi. "Do you think that either of the individuals that you observed might be open to dialog?"

Sendi spoke up. "Well, the guy I was watching didn't seem to be much aware of anything outside of his immediate actions. He may have a deeper side, but, he seemed like just an average guy getting on with this life."

"My guy..." Rexx added. "...seemed more aware of the colony's welfare. He immediately ran off to deal with the dome issue. Frankly, that's when I lost contact with him. He may have been one of the ones that Autok saw by the dome, or he may have just gone off to alert someone else. I don't know."

"Though..." Sendi continued. "...neither of us actually interacted with the individuals we were observing, so, we don't know what their thoughts...opinions...whatever, would be about dialog with what, to them, would be aliens."

"True." Rexx added. "But, Moicha, what happened to all of you after the alien approached so aggressively?"

"That..." He paused. "...will be very hard to describe." He sighed. "There is a place in the mind, in everyone's mind, that is the ultimate retreat...where no other thought can penetrate. I'm afraid that is where we went...in fear of our lives. There all thought is quieted with an energy field that is of our own making, it shields so as to not alert an outsider. We waited a long time, drifting in nothingness, until we could cautiously reach out to see if a threat still existed. Only after time and no further aggression, did we creep forward and begin our journey back to this world. Things may have happened in that place of nothingness that would further our knowledge, but, they will be slow in emerging. We hope that something from that darkness may be triggered by someone else's insight."

"As we found out, looking back, reliving the experience and discussing it between us prompted new ideas."

"Precisely!"

Rexx looked over to where Paimu slumbered. "It's too bad we can't access Paimu's thoughts. Maybe, his dreams could give us a new point of view."

"Moicha, is that possible?" Sendi asked.

Moicha thought long and hard before answering. "It is...but, one would have to approach extremely lightly. One so young should not be put in any possible danger." He turned to Doka and Misha. "Do you have feelings about this? I share and completely respect your desire for his protection."

Doka looked at Misha, who nodded. He then turned back to Moicha. "I think we understand the need for this...but, we also understand the dangers. How do you propose to do this?"

"I must think about the best approach and would like to confer with the others on this. Will you excuse us for a while?"

"Certainly, you are our best authority." Rexx responded.

As the seers retired to a far corner, the rest resumed conversation. Rexx turned to Doka and Misha. "Are you sure you want to go down this route?"

"Yes?" Sendi chimed in. "He's so young and vulnerable."

"At the moment, our choices seem limited as the seers gave us little to build on. Unless, of course, they can remember more of their experience." Doka said.

Misha shook her head. "I wish there was another way."

Doka put his arm around her. "I know. I wish so, too."