



# PANDEAE II

2045++

The youth of the Pandeae

Narration and report by  
Michael Nitsche

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## PROLOG

On an island in the Atlantic Ocean, something existed that was created before the apocalypse and was supposed to allow high technology to survive.  
It survived without the people, even though it was made for them.  
After it had a thousand years to find a way, it began to pursue its own goals.  
In memory of humanity, her creator, she built a temple with special human clones.

This narrative is the sequel to "Wild Card"; [www.nanina-roman.de](http://www.nanina-roman.de)  
Proofreading is still pending.

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## 1 The year 2045

Seth looked out over the city from the eighteenth floor of his hotel. The setting sun was trying with its last ounce of strength to turn the smog over the city a plutonic red. Isolated clouds of smoke could be seen to the west of the city, sometimes lit from below by flickering firelight. Sirens of police cars and ambulances blared through the canyons of buildings.

His duffel bag was already in the hallway outside the door. He had been told that it was unusual to travel with suitcases on a sailing ship if you were part of the crew.

An hour before midnight they would leave port. For moments, Seth not only felt like he was on the run, he was in reality. The mission, which he called "mission impossible" for himself, had to be carried out undetected by the public.

Political unrest had increased dramatically in large parts of Europe.

He had been in the city for five days. On the day of his arrival, the police had fatally injured a 15-year-old in a fight with youthful looters, as a result of which the mob raged for days through the district.

What business was it of his? He wasn't married, had no children, just a few friends for occasional sporting activities. Skiing in winter, surfing, sailing and diving whenever he wanted.

Seth knew the world, twice, a year each time, he had taken time off from his company and had been a globetrotter. That was enough to know where he might like it in this world.

In quiet hours of his penthouse apartment, over a glass of red wine, the thought sometimes occurred to him, "Was that all there was to life? What challenges are left for me?"

When six months ago the director of their research center, bypassing his department head, came directly to him and recruited him for this extraordinary mission, it didn't take much persuasion. He agreed. Financially, too, he couldn't say no. He knew the advantages of having enough money, especially when he was abroad.



The mission was top secret. High-tech had to be secured because of anticipated political uncertainties. Some international think tanks had been predicting political instability for some time. He had had to take an oath and had only been told a small part of the overall project, which was called THGP.

He had done some research on the Internet, but at some point he gave up in frustration. Either certain information was blocked or hacked. In addition, there had recently been an increase in hacker attacks by extremists, who were now able to paralyze entire surfers. His company had its own, totally isolated network in association with other companies. But even that was no longer secure; bribed moles and agents of rival companies were apparently making a lot of money from technological espionage. And not only them, some peace activists had also managed to find out what developments they were still working on, besides the public announcements. Large-scale high-tech projects were no longer democratically enforceable.

Seth was a physicist, not just a theorist. He was so far into Project THGP that he couldn't resist the mix of adventure, risk, and challenge. An explosion could be heard through the now closed windows. In about an hour he would be picked up. He checked all the rooms. Had he packed everything? Then, once again, the thought popped into his head: where was the money for this mission coming from? A group of billionaires? After all, they sometimes had strange projects in their sights. Seth knew he only knew the tip of an iceberg. A gene pool for plants had already been created catastrophe-proof underground for a long time. This should now also happen with high-tech and he would also support it, that was important to him.

Suddenly there was a loud, heavy knock on the door.

"Yes I'm coming," Seth called out.

"We have to hurry, there's trouble," he heard from behind the door.

Seth opened, two men, dressed in black, entered. "The luggage?" "Here!"

One grabbed the duffel bag, the other pulled Seth by the arm. The rush was contagious. They almost ran for the elevator.

At the front desk they slowed their steps, Seth checked out, despite his nervousness the scanner had recognized his face. The hotel was too insignificant, a simple face scanner was enough, otherwise he would probably have gotten in trouble and they would have analyzed escape thoughts in him. Outside the hotel, they were already falling back into a light trot. In a dark place, between two street lights, there was a black van with a gas engine running quietly.

They sped through the city towards the port. They drove around districts where the traces of the last riots could still be seen and smelled.

Few ships had moored in this part of the harbour. The water gave the impression of black lubricating oil in the low lighting.

Somehow the windjammer looked ghostly. He knew the Neptune also on blue sea, before blue sky and with set sails.

Two technicians from his institute had finished assembling his "Meteor-I" a month ago. Four days ago he had familiarized himself with her in this unusual place. He knew where she was concealed on the stern. He could make out the large upturned lifeboat, a dummy, in the darkness under which his Meteor was hidden.

They hurried up the gangplank. Another black van sped up. Two-meter-long wooden crates were towed onto the ship and immediately stowed in a hatch on the foredeck.

Two hours earlier than planned, the three-master Neptune slowly left the harbour with quietly whirring turbines.

Seth climbed on deck under a sparse emergency light. At the stern, the captain stood with his first mate next to the helmsman.

"Hi, what's going on here? I knew you didn't want the public to know we were leaving. But why the rush?"

Seth waited for an answer. The first officer waved him off and told him to keep his mouth shut. They concentrated fully on the port environment and the course, which seemed to be a stealth course.

After what seemed to Seth an unbearably long silence, the captain replied in a restrained voice, "Any activists or pacifists got wind of our mission. The police have been to the port captain, and we have a message from one of his staff." The captain paused and continued to look strained at the Neptune's course. "Besides, there will probably be a change of government in today's election for the city-state senate. We don't want to wait for the result either. The transfer of power is already prepared. Much of the executive branch has already been infiltrated anyway."

"Yeah, so?"

Dryly, with no inflection in his voice, the captain still replied in a whisper, "They can stop us."

And after a pause he ordered in a sharp tone: "Get your Meteor ready for action immediately - that's an order."

Seth put in his earpiece and while he was still on his way to the meteor, he clearly heard the captain's excited voice, "Ship ready for battle!" "Ready for battle," the first officer repeated in a hushed voice.

No alarm bells rang. The first officer disappeared below deck. From there hurried footsteps were soon heard in all directions.

Seth suddenly felt a shiver run down his spine. He felt as if he were on the Sea Eagle, the legendary ship that broke through the British naval blockade in the Second World War, disguised as a sailing ship.

He had never been in the military and as a pacifist he had rejected war games. As a passionate computer gamer, he had immediately understood that a war game, when it becomes serious, is deadly.

When he later got a job developing targeting devices for tanks, he had been hesitant at first but finally the annual salary and the annual raise had convinced him. Over the years he had become the Meteor's specialist. It had originally been planned to shoot down small meteors and space debris. But it could just as easily break tanks into thousands of fragments with one shot.

Seth knew that the mission HTGP was very important and he could also understand that this project had to be defended in case of attacks. And after all, no one knew the Meteor as well as he did.

The two technicians of her workshop were already at the engine when he arrived below deck in the bow.

He looked again in the gunner's station manual. Battle-ready meant only that the stabilization, which eliminated the ship's lurching, had to be put into operation and the gas

pressure brought up to 10 percent. The next stage was then to take aim! Then the dummy boat was moved away and the Meteor was hoisted over the canopy.

The large capacitors were charged. Slowly they reached their full charge. Seth activated the targeting device and waited. He knew he didn't have to think, just function.

They were already two miles from port when Seth heard the captain's voice in his headset: full speed ahead.

They had to leave the 20-mile zone behind to reach international waters.

No, their cargo wasn't quite legal, the papers were fake and the port captain had been bribed, that much he'd picked up.

Time ran like viscous syrup through an hourglass. He would not be able to maintain battle readiness for long. He got permission from the captain to return electric charge and gas pressure. Then came the relieving news: we were past the twelve-mile zone. The technicians looked up in relief. Seth knew that he had to defend the ship and the Meteor to the utmost at all costs; he also knew that the license for the Meteor was covered from the very top.

The relaxation was almost complete when suddenly the alarm siren blared loudly.

"Full combat readiness! Meteor ready for target acquisition!" the captain's voice boomed in the headset. Now, Seth guessed, it was going to get serious. Seth powered up the Meteor, which took minutes. The dummy boat was moved to the side and out of the hatch slowly emerged the Meteor at the stern.

On the foredeck a light twin gun had also emerged from the sinking and was brought into position. Only the tarpaulin served as camouflage.

The captain had received a radio call to stop immediately. They continued at full speed. Seconds stretched into minutes. Then a fountain of water, the "shot across the bow" hit next to the ship.

"Engine half power, hard to starboard!" The Neptune came about and showed the fast coastal cruiser her broadside.

"Meteor target lock and destroy!", Seth heard in his ear.

He became nervous and began to tremble slightly. The coastal cruiser appeared in the crosshairs. The pale light of the crescent moon clearly showed its outline.

Seth pulled the trigger. With relentless precision, the Meteor whirled, calculating distance and target size. The turbines were running at full power. The display approached mark 12 and began to flash.

Five seconds had passed when the projectile left the meteor at 12 kilometers per second in a glistening tunnel of heated air and headed for the coastal cruiser. A deafening bang pierced even through the earmuffs. Where the coastal cruiser had still been, a huge fireball indicated the destruction of the target.

The Neptune resumed her usual course at full speed. After an hour the sails were set and the alert lifted. The Meteor sank again for the most part below deck.

The first officer appeared at Seth. "Awesome, what is that infernal machine?" Now the tension was gone for Seth as well. A smile spread across his face. This was no comparison to the underground tunnel that had served for testing so far. Seth was proud. The surface of extremely heat-resistant ceramic had held up to the finish, even under the conditions of sea air.

"Seth, I want the three of you at the captain's office in half an hour for a report."

The first officer had taken command, and the captain awaited them with a whisky, "To our successful naval battle!"

The heavy lead crystal glasses felt good in Seth's hand now.

"What would have actually happened if the military had sent Eurofighters?", Seth now wanted to know after all.

"The military? No! The Air Force and Navy hasn't been infiltrated that much yet, we could be sure of that, absolutely sure." The captain grinned, "they probably even monitored it with a drone. - Well, another one?"

"It was like a computer game," Ralf, the younger technician, interjected, "just awesome."

"The poor bastards on the cruiser!" the older of the two, Mario, pointed out. The captain emptied his glass in one go and set it down rudely on the table. "Times are changing, no one knows where, but that they are changing, almost everyone gets it. And I even think our best days are behind us."

"And what else is in store for us, do we need to take action again?", Seth wanted to know for good measure.

"Most likely nothing, but of course there's no way to know." The captain was obviously very sure of that. Seth was not at all satisfied with the answer.

"They're going to investigate where their cruiser is and what happened to the Neptune. They saw us lying in the harbor. And in the harbor master's office ..."

"Yes, there's some work to be done ashore, but that's not our problem," the captain interrupted him, "we're sailing to the Islands of Bliss."

Seth didn't dream well that night and was already awake again when the sun just appeared over the sea as a large orange. The sky showed shades from brick red to turquoise blue.

Surreal had been his dream. A ship, divided into several tiles, he was supposed to reassemble into a whole so that he could get away from the place. He didn't succeed, as the scene kept changing and finally he woke up with the inexplicable feeling of not having made it.

The Neptune was no cruise ship, she lurched, pitched, her sails were mostly reefed and the turbines were running at full power. Seth feared getting seasick. He took a pill for it and went to the forecabin. Three crewmen, not sailors, stood at the bow watching their ship go up and down. Gout sometimes splashed up. The three were obviously members of the military crew.

He let her admiration of the Meteor wash over him. High tech was high tech, it either works perfectly or the software still has bugs.

They explained to him that they would not have stood a chance against the cruiser with their small cannon.

"Is that a laser gun?" one wanted to know.

"No, it was something like a meteor, only high-tech," pride still resonated in his voice. "And I suppose you're the official escort?" "Yeah, I guess you could call it that," one said, "but now we should get to breakfast!"

After a few days, Seth felt that crossing the Atlantic on this sailing ship was almost like a vacation, especially since they were heading steadily south and the climate was getting warmer.



At first he had wondered why they had come up with him. The more pieces of the puzzle he got together for their "Mission Impossible", as he still called the enterprise, the more he was convinced that he was a perfect fit. Not married, having been an only child, and his sexual proclivities ... Seth had to smile involuntarily. They'd get it all out, and surely they knew he'd tried both women and men.

After five days without further incidents, they reached the island in the evening and anchored in a bay. Seth and his technicians had been disassembling the Meteor and packing it into boxes for three days.

That night, the Neptune began to unload. Seth felt like he was on a military landing operation. Rubber dinghies and plastic rafts brought the crates ashore. With lifts, platforms made of boards and inclined planes, the crates were pulled onto the cliffs with the help of winches.

The island appealed to Seth. Cliffs, wooded slopes, extinct volcanic cones rising to 2,000 meters and, in addition, the mild climate, reminiscent of an eternal spring, was to his liking. Where there was water, practically every plant you could imagine grew: bananas, avocados, oranges...

Seth had seen many parts of the world and was now 43 years old. In the two years he had been living here, he had always feared that he would eventually get island fever. To his surprise he found out that he was still far away from it. Slowly he got a concept of what the Greeks had meant by the term Silver Age: a life of eternal youth and eternal spring. Did he miss the snows of winter and the dull, damp cold days that ate at the mind for half a year? No, he didn't have to eat a high-fat diet to provide the body with "fuel." The light diet with lots of vegetables and fruits, plus the daily sunshine made him younger and younger. In addition, a lot of exercise by the sea, in the mountains and the light conversations with colleagues on the terrace of the cafeteria.

To an astronomer, its dome, erected on a small hill above the hotel complex, must have seemed suspicious. An astronomical observatory erected 400 meters above sea level was an absurdity. The dome with its annex contained everything that kept the Meteor autonomous and ready for action at a moment's notice. Its job was to protect the hotel complex, which hadn't been a hotel for some time. Externally, almost everything seemed to have remained the same, but the core of the building complex had been completely rebuilt. Laboratories and workshops housed the lower floors, while the upper ones still looked like the apartments of the former hotel.

What does money mean to me? he sometimes asked himself now. His salary had doubled and was increasing every year by a considerable percentage above the rate of inflation. He would last a few more years here and then ... he would hardly go back to his old company, he would start something completely new and what that would be, he wanted to find out.

His techs fared differently, getting island fever one after the other, even though they shared three on standby around the Meteor. They missed the women, the parties and discos of a big city. Seth couldn't help them. Obviously they were still too young for the islands of bliss and had to struggle in a world of greed, competition, fear, laziness, and little love. Seth shuddered at the thought. Was he so old, then, that he could realize the value of this island?

He didn't lack women or men, his ideas of worship were geared to an angelic ideal and that was very difficult, if not impossible, to realize.

Seth had just started looking for artistic subjects on the island, ordering the best photographic equipment he could get, when his company approached him with a whole new development job. He was to redesign the Meteor, without the high-tech materials and with even half the power. A member of the board of directors for research and development had come especially with his secretary.

"Why don't you guys do it yourselves, it's bullshit." Seth suspected they were trying to give him occupational therapy to keep him in line.

"After all, it's only for preliminary considerations and thoughts and possibly for some preliminary experiments. You'll get two extra technicians and a small workshop later," he was told placatingly.

All objections on his part were shot down with the bogus argument, "If we don't try, we won't find out if it's possible."

A new "Mission Impossible," Seth still thought.

On the last day of the visit, the director took him aside once again: "You don't know what's going on in Europe! The official information is becoming more and more embellished, is only the half-truth or a bold-faced lie, political correctness that is."

Seth had suppressed what was happening in his native Europe. Bread and games, that was nothing new for a long time, but other things seemed to become more threatening.

"It's been around for a while, you just have to make do or go private."

As long as Seth could remember, green ideologists determined what was morally good or bad. Sustainability in the economy, protection of nature, preservation of creation, he knew since kindergarten and school days. Somehow this had become internalized in him and he also felt somehow off when he noticed his passion for the subject of physics in himself at school. Why did he have so little interest in ecology or social sciences like most of his class. Studying physics or any technical subject was almost immoral. He was an oddball even then and at some point he stood by his role in life.

The old man grabbed him by the shoulder and leaned towards Seth's ear, "And what's worse, archaic religions are spreading rapidly. The no return point has been reached." The Research Director paused meaningfully, now looking past Seth into an indeterminate distance. "And another thing, the already almost secularized religions are digging up atavistic claims and practices ..."

Seth interrupted him, "Religious nuts have always been around."

"Yes maybe, but the increase is frightening. They're already enforcing the governments. Be prepared for anything, long our company will not exist."

The Director paused for a long moment, then spoke as if to himself, "Baldwineffekt - make it good here." The Director squeezed Seth's hand wistfully, "Your mission is becoming more important!"

Seth could still remember: There had been a public debate about whether intelligence is not only inherited through genes, but also genetically anchored in an appropriate environment in an evolutionarily permanent way through natural selection over generations. This intellectual debate was not, of course, about intelligence spreading, but about the fact that particularly educationally deprived sections of the population were dragging the whole of society into an age of darkness through their unusually strong reproduction.

Sailing, surfing, scuba diving, his leisure activities with fellow members of the "hotel," as they ironically called their THGP complex, could go on forever. And yet Seth knew it was all a facade. The work everyone did here was top secret, no one was allowed to talk to friends about their line of work. Those who did were soon to be heard from no more. They could no longer be reached by any means of communication. Their "hotel", completely autonomous in its energy supply, was located in a remote area, surrounded by banana plantations, at the end of a well-maintained road. The complex had been chronically under-occupied even in the days of high tourism. Who wanted to vacation here, in this remote area, either? Although the cliffs were not high, a bathing beach, as holidaymakers love it, was completely missing.

Seth had so far blocked out or suppressed news from Europe and the rest of the world. That changed slowly since the visit. He began to take an interest in it again.

International tensions increased, but not because of the distribution of raw materials and energy, as had previously been assumed, but because more and more faiths succeeded in imposing their archaic social concepts on the rest of the population. The theory of evolution disappeared from school curricula and then from many universities. Medieval rites of child mutilation and penal laws were first tolerated and then creepily introduced under pressure from religious communities. This all took place against the background of a migrant movement that had become uncontrollable. The offence "disparagement of a religious community" was internationally enforced and increasingly prosecuted with drastic penalties.

In the cafeteria, he tried to get into a conversation about it with other employees.

No one had much interest in talking about it. "That's why we're all here" was the consistent tenor of all these conversations. It was just as always about diving grounds and wind conditions.

Even when the international financial system crashed and almost all currencies depreciated sharply against gold, the consternation here was limited.

What could possibly shake them on the Island of the Blissful. There was no need for action.

Seth threw himself into the work, pondering how to square the circle of designing a Meteor II without high tech. He had to develop a method of compressing hydrogen almost by itself to pressures barely imaginable.

Concentration was a skill he was a master of, so it took him a few days to notice the angelic creature in the cafeteria. She was certainly only in her late twenties. Blonde hair, a little touched up, at over-shoulder length. The muscle tone of her lightly tanned skin made fantasies of deserted sandy beaches come to mind. Seth could hardly remember the last time he'd seen such a creature so close. He began his auto-check. The enamel of youth was decades ago, and age-related decay was still in a future that didn't seem threatening.

While he was still strategizing how to get into a conversation with her, she approached him with a smile.

"I hear you're a good sailor - I could use a few more hours of practice and I'm looking for a coach."

Seth was lost for words, feeling as embarrassed as he did on his first date. When he regained his composure, he politely invited her in, "Have a seat, you haven't been here long, have you?" With that, Seth began the best days of his life. He felt like a supersonic airplane that had been mothballed in a hangar for quite some time and was now reactivated to conquer light, air and earth anew.

They found quiet coves for sunsets over the sea. The stars shone above them as they lay together.

He felt younger than he had felt in a long time. An angel named Dana had come to him, here on the Isles of Bliss.

Very slowly, a steadily growing desire matured in Seth that this time might never end. The days of his off-duty time were one big dream.

As they daydreamed once again, nestled together over a glass of wine and the sunset, he told Dana, completely out of the blue: "I want to be with you always." She smiled at him. And I want to have children with you, too, he continued to think, but said instead, "I love you like I've never loved anyone before."

Dana's sensual lips opened slightly and she snuggled against him. After what seemed to Seth a very long and uncertain pause, she said, "I'll ask THGP."

"Ask THGP? - For you, I'd leave here tomorrow and start a whole new life somewhere.

Dana put her right arm around his shoulder, pulled his head toward her, and whispered in his ear, "Me too."

For the next few days, Seth was back on duty and his thoughts were all about Dana and how they could get away from THGP. He couldn't see her during that time and cell phone contact between the staff was forbidden.

After all, I haven't even asked her what she's doing here, Seth summed up, where she's from and if she has any family.

Having a crush like this is a wonderful thing. He hadn't thought it would happen to him at his age. Hadn't he had enough adventures already? Or was it something like a midlife crisis combined with a gateway panic?

Seth smiled, tomorrow he would see Dana again, he had two days off.

Sitting in front of his "observatory" he watched the setting sun. Before it could reach the sea, it disappeared in a distant layer of clouds. The air was still unusually mild for January, so close to the Tropic of Cancer. He was still waiting for the full moon to come up over the mountains from the east.

Seth felt like he was on a distant moon of the solar system and there over the crest of the mountains his planet was rising. Probes had crisscrossed the solar system and now NASA had large parts of its research program on hold due to lack of funds. Evangelicals in the Senate and Congress had no interest in NASA's ventures, their interest was in making more and more God-fearing people so that when they died they could reach the kingdom of heaven without rockets.

What did one want to do with space missions? Intelligent life outside the earth had not been found and the probability of finding any was steadily decreasing. What made others of his profession resign and become sad, had never touched him very much. But he had to admit that something had changed in him since he had met Dana. Seth got his sports suit as it got cooler, he didn't feel like going to sleep yet, nor did he drink red wine alone since he was with Dana. No he wanted to create a new future and he wanted to do it with her.

Wind had risen during the night, the sea showed white crests of foam. He had just gotten up when the changing of the guard, the technician Ralf, was at the door. Full of anticipation, slightly elated, Seth walked down the small hill and straight to the cafeteria for breakfast with Dana. Today they would go sailing in the catamaran. The wind was such that



he could safely award Dana the imaginary captain's license to sail afterwards. Afterwards they would celebrate together and plan their future together.

Seth waited. Dana didn't come, nor did she for the next few hours. No one could give him any information. There had obviously been many staff replacements in his absence. Seth could no longer detect any women.

He got angry, ran into the administration office and yelled, "I want to see the boss!" Seth immediately got an appointment. The director told him that they were now starting the second phase of HTGP. Seth wanted to know where Dana had gone.

"You know the oath, I can't tell you that now. But I promise you that I will take care of it immediately. You just have to be patient, in the next service meeting we will have a solution."

Seth was red inside with anger at the whole HTGP. He didn't believe in any solution, his anger didn't allow for any belief against it, he instead assumed they were just stalling.

The next few days were terrible for Seth, several times he came close to leaving the island in a sailboat on the spot. He began to gather provisions and pack them waterproof. A map of the islands could show him the way to the neighboring island. Now he just had to wait for the right weather. The risk of crossing the ocean between the islands in such a small catamaran, which was only suitable for good weather and the coast, Seth estimated to be very high.

He also wondered what was going on in the other islands. There were hardly any tourists left on their island and the banana plantations around their hotel had been bought up by THGP. Potatoes, vegetables and even grains were now being grown. Various small plantations with a wide variety of fruit trees were to supply the hotel in the future.

Almost only old islanders lived on their island as self-supporters. The young had left the island, there was no more work here.

In the next few days, the weather was supposed to become favorable. But when the technician went to relieve him, the boss stood next to him, "I can bring you some happy news. We've found a way for you to meet with Dana."

"Where is she?" Seth couldn't believe the news.

"She's on the island at THGP I, we're THGP II. We have a finca set up for you in about the middle of the island. You can spend an extended vacation there - just you guys. As soon as a third technician arrives here for the Meteor, the vacation is approved. And that can't be long now, he's already on his way, albeit by ship."

Seth could hardly believe his luck. The blood, enriched with serotonin, rushed through his body. He would see Dana again soon. He felt as if the sun had risen after a stormy, dark night in the deep blue sky above the sea.

Seth had plans for their future together, not on the island, here all singles and families were not wanted.

In the few hours when the Internet was not disturbed, he received no pleasant news from Europe. The continent resembled an old, large building, from whose various parts fires kept coming. This would turn the birthplace of a humanistically enlightened civilization, fought for in long wars, into a ruin in time.

His company was no longer accessible. Many large cities in Europe, especially the cities were dominated by migrants and their own archaic religion and social structure. Many governments had become blackmailable. Alliances of convenience with Christian churches were successful in abolishing freedom of speech. Criticism of a religious community had

become punishable by law. As demographic change progressed, these alliances also became obsolete.

The more information Seth got about Europe, the more the decision matured in him not to return there with Dana.

It had obviously been the fate of all the more advanced societies in the history of mankind that in the end they had nothing to offer the barbarians on the fringes of their empire. Too decadent, only bread and games, that was the end. And, alas, the high moral standard of tolerance and cultural relativism, nothing was better suited on the path of abolishing one's own civilization.

Wasn't the renaissance of patriarchal religious social structures also a confirmation of the Baldwin effect?

So this was the solution to the Fermi paradox. A hundred years after the first atomic bomb was used, every higher civilization destroyed itself. If it didn't, the universe would be full of highly evolved beings.

No, the solution looked like this: Civilization does not destroy itself, Seth now believed, it falls back into archaic religious social structures and loses interest in higher development.

Seth doubted her project could change that. Her THGP was nothing more than a straw of desperation.

How would Dana feel about her future?

The new technician, an engineer, was there.

Seth still had to train him. He would be his replacement. That could be done in three days at the most, then he would finally see Dana again.

He knew their holiday home, a former tourist complex in a nature reserve, bought by THGB years ago. There he could forget the world for a few weeks.

During the briefing on the Meteor's aiming device, he also pointed the sight at the pool of their hotel complex. He could not believe his eyes. Small, naked children were romping around in the restored wading pool.

Have they now become a Noah's Ark for high technology, nanotechnology and genetic engineering with artificial wombs?

What was he really protecting?

In two days, he would talk to Dana about it, too.

What he could still see were the slowly emerging masts of a ship on the horizon. As was his duty, he reported the ship, giving her position, speed and present course. From the central air and sea surveillance he got the answer that it was a light cruiser for reconnaissance purposes and that he had been observed for a few hours.

The duty officer still said that he was coming from the direction of Africa and that we could surely expect an alarm soon.

"That's what's missing," Seth replied. His replacement, also looking through the visor, said, "I know the type, I was in the Navy for three years as a radio operator. Usually these destroyers are always in formation, though."

Seth had a bad feeling.

"Can you tell the nationality?" wanted Seth to know.

"No, we still have to wait, the destroyer is approaching."

A few minutes later, combat readiness was triggered.

"Shit," his successor groaned, "I see a green flag with Arabic writing!"

And after a pause, he added, "That's the flag of jihad, it's on a warpath. They fight against all non-believers."

Seth knew the problem. Decades ago, the oil-rich Muslim states had already bought what they could get from the best arms manufacturers in the world, bypassing restrictions if necessary. His company had made good money from these arms deals.

The destroyer was approaching. A helicopter was readied for takeoff and at the same moment the order was given: Battle alert!

Seth launched the Meteor. It took her almost ten minutes to fire a shot.

Behind artificial walls and facades, defensive cannons were brought into position. They could act like a shield and destroy even approaching shells in the air before they hit their target.

The helicopter, a reconnaissance plane, was approaching their "hotel."

Seth was ordered to destroy the tail with the helicopters.

A rapid-fire cannon sent a carpet of projectiles into the air from several pipes. No bird would have made it through the hail.

Shortly before the first helicopter reached the beach, a fireball in the air showed the successful launch. The debris flew partly into the sea and some also onto the cliffs.

The cruiser's on-board guns began firing.

The Meteor took another minute.

The cruiser had turned and fired from all pipes. Most of the shells could still be destroyed in the air.

The meteor was ready. Like lightning, a tunnel of glowing hot gases indicated the projectile's flight.

The superstructure and helicopters of the tail flew into the sea as burning debris.

Seth's been given a new order: Destroy the midship from the waterline!

The Meteor was powered up again. The destroyer had resumed firing after the shock of the detonation on the stern.

The Meteor's position now came under fire as well. Obviously, almost the entire remaining firepower was directed at it. But since it was far behind the hotel complex, the shells could be intercepted.

Seth took aim at the midship. The moment of firing was almost reached when he saw several missiles ignite on the cruiser. Seth fired immediately without having reached full power. A second meteor hit the cruiser exactly at the waterline, it began to sink faster and faster.

Seth couldn't watch this anymore.

A missile had penetrated the defenses. Seth saw a bright flash, then a long tunnel opened up, with a never-before-seen bright light waiting for him at the end.

He felt happy.

## *ATLANTIS - 3045*



*An age lasting a thousand years is coming to an end. It will later be called the Dark Age or the Leaden Age. In secret, in the underground, in the caves and catacombs, something has developed that feels the power to beauty, harmony and eternal youth. Perhaps it will evolve into an Atlantean, a Golden Age.*

*The doubts are great and very justified.*

*Do we still speak of man, or even of humanity? No! It has reached the end of its evolution. Greed, laziness and fear, these driving forces of human civilization have reached the end point. Led out of the animal kingdom, they have made man more animal than the animals.*

*Stupidly naive moral concepts of a human herd and extremely decadent lifestyles of an elite left only one outcome open: suicide - apocalypse.*

*The brutal competition of male aggression for offspring, which originated in the animal kingdom, and female greed for the greatest male aggression for their own offspring, could not be changed; ideologies and religions were insurmountable obstacles to this.*

*Parts of humanity survived through artificial wombs and virgin birth. The male part no longer existed. A mostly peaceful world in harmony with nature emerged, a decaying world in which what was once technology became increasingly rare.*

*Just as in the heyday of human civilization the breeding of animals did without the male portion, so the new humanity was to continue to exist without men. Were not the male specimens, the small bulls, bucks, cocks, the male animal children eaten as delicacies, as veal, lamb, kid, chicken meat?*

*Male human children no longer existed or were almost non-existent. A small pool of male children was raised for safety in a secluded reservation kept strictly secret from the rest of the population. With the onset of puberty, these specimens were transformed into girls.*



*But the male element was not yet completely defeated, then it happened that something succeeded, which no one had thought more possible. An ancient dream of mankind was about to become reality. The dream of eternal youth. In a research institute that was working on the adaptation and optimization of virginity production, there existed a small research group that was allowed genetic experiments on the remaining male gene pool. There they succeeded in designing a male specimen of a new human, with the potential of eternal life. But these specimens of a new man would allow very little differentiation, they were like identical twins and loved each other as such.*

*Would it become a blessing or a curse to mankind? It was decided to destroy this small male gene pool immediately. But time had its own plans.*

*On an island in the Atlantic, something existed that was created before the apocalypse and was supposed to allow high technology to survive. It survived without humans, though it was made for them. After it had a thousand years to find a way, it began to stir.*

*The world was changing and had its own goals, beyond man.*

## 2 Beo and Alan

Beo could only weakly control his inner excitement when Alan arrived at their bungalow from his nanocenter. Strange, Beo thought, that the planned adventure also excites me sexually.

Beo was still in the shower when Alan joined him as well.

"Hey, what's wrong with you?" asked Alan in surprise as he greeted him with a hug, "I want to at least take a shower."

He soaped Alan up and Alan played along. Their bodies were still sliding against each other when the shower gave only cold water. Naked together they lay on their bed for a while later, happy and exhausted.

"Alan, I have a hunting trip planned for us," Beo gave Alan a gentle kiss.

"Yeah right, we want to go hunting tomorrow and what exactly do you have planned?"

Beo stroked Alan tenderly.

We could be on the road for two or three days, take food with us, a blanket for the night and in the evening we would grill our hunting prey on the fire.

Alan remained silent for a while.

Beo had resolved to go close to the strictly forbidden north on their next hunting trip. Pandeae allowed them only the southwest of the island. He didn't know himself why that excited him so strangely. Perhaps, the thought fleetingly occurred to Beo: because they had lived on the island for thirty years now? On the map, he had chosen a path that he thought



Alan would not notice that they were approaching a forbidden area.

"Come on," Beo pulled Alan to him tenderly and then more forcefully, waiting excitedly.

Alan turned to Beo and smiled. "Why not, if you ask me so sweetly, I can't resist.

At dawn they set out. Food and a blanket along with a light pad for the night Beo carried on his back, the heavy crossbow Alan had hanging over his shoulder.

Alan had brought a crossbow with him one day. He had built it according to an old construction manual in a workshop of the nano center. He said that it could have been used to hunt wild boars and deer and that it was oversized for rabbits. But it had the advantage that a shy rabbit could still be hit safely even at long distances.

Beo and Alan had recently developed a passion for hunting. The only game they hunted were rabbits and a few birds, after the wild goats had disappeared centuries ago during the cold season due to too much hunting.

Beo determined the direction. They climbed and ran to the northeast, there he hoped to find a ravine that would take them downhill even further north to the border of the forbidden zone.



Rabbit holes they did not find in their climbing over stones and in the forest floor slippery with long pine needles. Again and again they slipped in their simple sports shoes. After two hours they reached the fog zone. Individual wispy clouds moved through the forest.

They had their first rest. Through the occasional clouds they could see far to the north and in the distance below them the blue sea shone up. They had seen a few edible mushrooms and only small birds.

"If we go north a bit more here, we should hit a valley that takes us in a wide arc first west and then south again," Beo lied, hoping Alan wouldn't notice the little lie.

"Go on, then." Alan was not a friend of long deliberation, but of quick action. A decision once made was seldom again doubted by him.

They found the valley and began the not easy descent. Again and again they slid a bit and then the small valley became a gorge with steep walls. It would be difficult to find a suitable ascent again.

It was late afternoon and Alan had the impression that the sun should be on their left, although he had assumed it to be on their right.

"You're not mistaken either, Beo? It looks like the valley leads slightly to the north."

Beo allayed Alan's concerns. "It may be that it makes a bend."

Alan was satisfied with the answer, while Beo's heart was up to his neck with excitement. He was afraid, but at the moment curiosity and adventure outweighed it. He felt safe at the side of his beloved friend. His insincerity, to Alan, grieved him a little, and he had been thinking for some time when he should confess his lie to him. He waited for a favourable opportunity.

Dusk was falling and they found a suitable spot to camp for the night.

"I guess grilling rabbits over a fire isn't going to happen today." Alan looked at Beo and twisted his mouth into a grin. For that composure and poise, Beo loved him and would have loved to engage him in lovemaking - his talent and strength, but instead he said, "Either we live on love or we eat pita bread and cheese."

"Better bread and cheese, I'm too done for love - maybe in the morning," Alan put off.

They spent the night nestled close together as best they could on the imperfectly leveled piece of ground.

Beo couldn't help but think of the first time he had felt something for Alan. He didn't remember exactly how old they were then, he only remembered how it had happened.

On her lesson plan were "Techniques to love another person". It was a lesson right at the beginning. They splashed around in a pool of warm water. Their task was to walk up to another boy and kiss him. To do this, they dipped their heads underwater beforehand and then kissed. When it was Beo's turn and he arrived at Alan, not only their water wet and soft lips found each other, but also their tongues.

Beo found that arousing even now, thinking about it before falling asleep.

When Beo woke up, there was no sign of Alan. Where is he again, Beo asked himself not for the first time, you have to learn to endure his spontaneous ideas.

Beo shook his head and went in search of dead, dry plant parts and bushes. Here in the ravine it was still cool, a small fire would also signal Alan that he was waiting for him.

He had just about enough combustibles together when Alan showed up, "I was going to find us some opuntias for breakfast and you know what I found?"

"Of course - opuntias, I see."

Alan had impaled six opuntias on a stick. He made Beo wait.



"You'll never guess," Alan grinned.

"Come on, spit it out!" Beo was getting impatient.

"Further down, the gorge widens and one side is a slope that can also be climbed. On this slope are also ..."

"Rabbit holes?"

"Yes!" confirmed Alan, "and on the opposite steep wall is a cave where water trickles drop by drop into a small stone basin."

"Great, you've found a treasure," laughed Beo, "then let's go there!"

After breakfast they packed up their few things and climbed down further. They agreed that Alan should watch the rabbit hole. Perhaps with the slow warming the rabbits would come out into the open and for the evening they would have roast rabbit over the fire. Beo wanted to go further down the gully to find a way back above the cliffs. The slope with the rabbit holes opened only one way to the forbidden north.

Beo climbed down until he got hungry and started the way back. When he arrived back at the rabbit hole, he could not discover Alan.

He called out, "Alan, where are you, I'm hungry for rabbit." No answer.

Slowly Beo became impatient, he had no understanding for Alan's game of hide and seek and thought about where he could have laid in wait. He searched all possible hiding places and then he made a terrible discovery: a small scrap of their blanket was hanging in a thorn bush. The ground nearby was churned up and a few smaller stones had left their place they had claimed for decades.

Beo got scared and panicked at the same time. For a while he stood there paralyzed, blood rushing through his brain. A concept ripened in Beo and began to develop into a demon: FIGHT. There had been a fight here.

Alan had lain under a shrub in a spot favorable for shooting. He had a good view of two holes from that spot. They would come out eventually, they always did. He had discovered fresh tracks, so the burrows had to be inhabited as well.

The crossbow was cocked and he would only need one shot.

The sun slowly came over the mountains and began to light and warm the canyon. The rabbit hole would soon be in full sunlight. Individual taller bushes were already being hit by the first rays of the sun.

Alan saw a shadow flit quickly over the bushes. A hawk, he asked himself, do they hunt rabbits? He thought he knew that hawks at least did not hunt adult rabbits.

A larger shadow obscured Alan for a fraction of a second, then his head was forced to the ground. A bony hand held his head with his mouth and nose pressed into the sand.

"One sound and..." Alan already couldn't scream in shock, he was so paralyzed. Two knees on his back kept Alan immobilized on the ground. He could barely breathe. Despite the sand in his eyes, he could see the back of a hand that looked strange to him. The hand held a knife flashing in the sun. Nor had fear completely frozen him.

As Alan slowly came out of his shock stupor again, he tried to fight back with his legs. But his hands were already tied behind his back with strips of cloth from her blanket. Now he was getting another gag through his mouth. Even if Alan had wanted to scream in mortal danger, he couldn't now.

His feet were bound together so that he could walk with small steps.

"Get up!" commanded the deep yet quiet voice, "your friend will find us, I'll leave some tracks."

Alan heard another suppressed laugh, then he was pushed forward. A person from a bygone age, it flashed through Alan's mind, then he was pushed up the slope.

The path, which was very difficult to see, led further north through scrub to another valley. Once there, it went towards the sea and over a cliff ledge in serpentine down towards the bottom of the cliff. A barely visible, very narrow path, led to a cave in the steep cliffs. At the entrance, a few stones separated a fireplace. Stale smoky air hit Alan further inside. A campsite of stones and wooden sticks, padded with dry plant parts and a few half-tattered blankets were located on the farthest cliff face.

Alan had to sit on it. The human was only clothed with two blankets roughly held together at the back and front.

He tied Alan's feet tightly together now. The hands were additionally tied to a stone pillar with an old rope.

Alan had the impression that this cave had functioned as a dwelling many centuries ago.

"So now I'm going to take care of your friend, hopefully he won't want to abandon you." The strange figure grinned at Alan and disappeared from the cave with a few ropes and the knife in his hand.

A paralyzing fear spread through Alan again and hindered his thinking, which seemed to run only in slow motion.

Who had caught him? This question ran tenaciously through his head. Only slowly could he grasp the full extent of his plight. The sand rubbed in his eyes, his hand and ankles ached. The gag barely let air through to breathe. His shorts were soaked at the bottom from pissing in fear and dirty from the dirt. His crossbow lay, still cocked and bolted, in a dark corner.

Beo had never been so abysmally afraid in his life, he had to find Alan. Somewhere he guessed that it would be a matter of life and death.

Following the trail was easy. Again and again he saw drag marks on the ground that followed a path.

I'll be careful, Alan must not have noticed anything when he was mugged. But who or what was he attacked and taken by? Was it Pandae? He hadn't noticed that they were being watched or followed. Beo also felt paralyzed with fear and he had to overcome himself to follow the path only after hesitating for a while.

His heart hammered the blood into his head in a strong rhythm.

He began to reproach himself. Why had he only planned this adventure.

Why did he have to approach the forbidden zone? Constantly securing himself on all sides, he followed the tracks that led him to a cliff. Should he climb down the serpentines?

Beo's knees began to tremble, he had to concentrate fully on the path to the depths.

After the second bend, he heard debris sliding down the slope behind him. Before he had turned around, his arms were pulled back.

"Keep going!" commanded a deep and powerful voice. Beo's hands and arms were held on his back as if in a vice. He got to his knees and slid down a bit.

"Let's go," thundered behind him again. Sliding more than running, Beo arrived at the cave. He had tried to scream but received a strong push from behind that immediately stifled his scream.

As Beo adjusted to the darkness of the cave, he saw Alan lying bound on the primitive camp, his crossbow and quiver of bolts leaning against the rough stone wall beside him.

Beo was bound and gagged just as Alan was. Any attempt to speak was immediately ended with a shove in the back. He was now sitting next to his friend and was able to look at this monster for the first time. Hands, arms, legs and face were thick with a few grey hairs in some places. Only where Beo and Alan had hair, the human was bald.

A person from the old days, Beo immediately thought, this had to be a man.



*A small community has left mainland Europe to build a new society undisturbed on a small island, close to the uninhabited British Isles.*

### **3 Nanina leaves Gertrud and the island**

Nanina stood on the cliffs looking out over the blue sea. The wind made her smock brush pleasantly around her torso and legs.

She took it off and threw it down. It flew about five yards and then caught on a shrub that had found a livelihood on a ledge the width of her hand on the cliff face. The sandals flew, flung farther out, to the cyclopean stones at the foot of the cliff, and there remained in a crevice, slowly drenched by the splashes of the spray. Perhaps the tide would reach them and drag them out to sea.

The mild afternoon breeze caressed her body. Nanina felt lonely, infinitely lonely, as if she had lived through all the times of the world and was now facing the ultimate last adventure of her life.

Thirty years she had now lived in this world. Like a cat of prey, she had roamed the island, from east to west, from north to south. She had hunted birds, hares, foxes and wild

goats. Beside her, leaning against a stone, still lay the hunting bow with quiver for the arrows. She took the bow in her hand and looked at it one last time before it would follow the sandals into the depths. Then she would leap, arms outstretched like a bird. Perhaps she was that child of Father Sky and Mother Earth after all, and could simply fly over the sea. She would return to the place where she had been before she was born.

Perhaps she would reach the sea before then, swimming and diving so often in the summer, always guarded and cared for by Gertrud's priestesses and temple servants. She was, after all, the divine child, brought to her destiny by the High Priestess.

Small communities had sprung up all over the island. Flocks of children swarmed across the meadows, the fields, and into the dense forests. They were her children, children who resembled her in many ways.

Nanina felt that this time and this life, especially this, her life, were over. She was the untouchable, the deified. She also felt that she had become a burden to Gertrud's religious community. If she was to represent anything divine, it was something terrible. If Gertrud had not always been so reassuring and had not constantly appealed to her mission, Nanina would have burst out laughing at the religious rites she had to undergo at Gertrud's instructions.

In the beginning she had liked this "being milked" and had really imagined that she was creating a new species of human being, but now she had the impression that she was being milked like a goat to satisfy the needs of others with her milk. No one had asked about her real needs and she had told them to no one.

What else was she to do here. Although Gertrud had learned very well to shield her thoughts from Nanina, she succeeded more and more in absorbing Gertrud's questioning uncertainty about their future together.

Nanina stood at the very front of the cliff. A small impulse and then two seconds floating through the air, being fanned more and more by the balmy evening air and then...

Nanina wanted to jump off with momentum that she didn't get caught somewhere in the rocks like her smock.

What would Gertrud do when she found her shattered body? That had been St. Nanina then, now floating as a corpse in the water.

A gust of wind caressed Nanina's naked body and for a brief moment her thoughts flew to a lake and the wind became Silki's hand, touching Nanina curiously, carefully and delicately.

No, Nanina said to herself, I have to get out of here! She had been dreaming about her time in the blockhouse more often lately, usually it was a nightmare with policewomen who always wanted to tie her up and throw her into a bottomless pit. She also always had the impression that Rona and Sika were already in the pit.

No, I have to get out of here, Nanina thought, without anyone noticing, without Gertrud noticing. Her throat choked at the thought of Gertrud and her eyes began to swim.



Then she became firmer and determined: "Let them think that I am in heaven with my father or in earth with my mother.

Nanina stepped back from the cliff. She was free and she looked down her body again. Like a current of energy, it pierced through her. The depressed mood vanished like a fog suddenly dispelled by a blowing storm. Yes, she would leave the island and seek Silki and Rona and little Sika. The images of childhood appeared in her mind's eye.



Nanina grabbed her bag, quiver and bow. She was suddenly free and ran off into another life. Where to, she did not know, she only knew that she ran through a gate and could no longer return.

It wasn't until she was almost out of breath that she realized the strangeness of her situation. With only the bow in her hand and the quiver on her bare skin, she ran through the hard grass of late summer. Somehow it was exciting too, animalistically exciting. She had never felt such a sense of almost limitless freedom. She felt like a predatory cat set free.

The long white robes with the golden borders that she usually wore for religious rituals and celebrations had always evoked different feelings, feelings that contained little that was alive, but conveyed much eternity and harmony. Only on her hunting trips, which she had been doing alone for the past year, did she wear a sturdier linen smock that reached just above her knees. In a heated argument with Gertrud she was able to enforce this. Before that, two hunting women had always had to accompany her.

Nanina was sure they wouldn't look for her until tomorrow night. It was not the first time she had stayed away overnight. Gertrude was having a hard time getting used to it.

Perhaps they would find her smock first and then stop looking for her. In the coming night she would have to take clothes from somewhere unnoticed. Her small provisions of bread, dried fruit, and jerky had been left in her smock, she realized now at the first appearance of hunger pangs. Besides, it would be better if she did not seek out the nearest settlement. There they would know she was hunting near them, and all the inhabitants were forbidden to make contact with Nanina. That was an order from the High Priestess Gertrude.

For a while she ran parallel to the cliffs and then turned behind a grove into the interior of the island. Nanina ran until she was out of breath. Only now did she notice the thorn in the sole of her left foot. She pulled it out and hobbled over the stony ground for the next while until she could run over grassland again. The hunger had finished its first attack and was somewhat stunned for the time being.

The sun was only about an hour above the horizon when she saw the settlement from a distance by a few rising plumes of smoke. No one would suspect her here. This village belonged to the District of Spring and was under the authority of the Priestess of June, who was closely watched by Gertrude during religious rituals, as she always nearly fainted when Nanina, the Untouchable, was present at the ceremony.

Crawling through the tall hard autumn grass, Nanina climbed a small hill and observed the settlement she had not yet been to.

A few small children played hide and seek around the larger wooden house. In the village center the ritual festivals were held and during the rest of the time it served as a pantry and workroom. However, it was also here that decisions were made, under the direction of the priestess, concerning matters of concern to their small community. An attempt was always made to reach a consensus for all members. The older children were also present during such decision-making processes.

Gertrud was very pleased with her new society. Only once in recent years had there been a new election of the Priestess of November.

A small annex, directly at the meeting and work house served the priestess and her children for living. In addition to her religious duties, it was also her responsibility to teach the village children.

The smaller huts of the settlement, many with a fenced garden, scattered relatively disorderly around the center. All the dwellings had walls, made of clay-thrown wickerwork. The overhanging roof was made of wooden shingles or had a thatch covering.

The pens and well fenced shelters for the goats and sheep were located just outside the village and were constantly guarded, alternately by a woman or two older children, at night with herding dogs.

Only Nanina, Gertrud and three other women had been living for about five years in a complex of buildings consisting of four flat stone houses arranged to form an atrium in the centre. Gertrud thought it was modeled on a Roman villa from a bygone era.

The sun touched the forest behind the settlement. Nanina was now beginning to feel cold as well after lying uncomfortably on the uneven ground strewn with small stones. Tense, she tried to listen in the direction of the village and pick up on a mood that might concern her. The distance was too great and she couldn't detect anything noticeable.

Nanina looked around, perhaps there was a more convenient spot in the terrain from which she could sneak closer to the village. A little further away there was a small ditch or stream that had dug into the terrain a bit, and it ran directly towards the houses. She crept closer. It was a small stream that apparently supplied the village with needed domestic water. Unfortunately, it wasn't very deep, so she could only get closer to the houses by crawling on her stomach and sometimes half in the water to boot. Nanina had become so cold by now that she slowly began to consider sneaking into the priestess's house. There were warm blankets there, and a bed, too.

Then the door of the meeting room opened and a few women and larger children came out in small groups. The sun had set by now and the twilight offered Nanina enough protection not to be seen. She had already come so far to the village that she could hear individual voices and loud laughter.

Suddenly Nanina was startled. Something had touched her left leg. She flinched and turned around in a flash. A dog was looking at her, obviously as frightened as she was and not knowing whether to wag its tail in curiosity or growl aggressively.

Take it easy and go away, thought Nanina. The herding dog looked at her for a small moment, almost amazed, and didn't even move his tail, then turned his head a little sideways. Go, you're a good dog, Nanina reinforced her thoughts. The dog jumped away.

Nanina still hadn't discovered a way to get clothes and some food. She imagined herself sneaking into one of the huts and just as she had a bundle of clothes under her arm, being betrayed by a child who instantly began to scream.

No, this couldn't happen. Somehow she could not do that to Gertrude. Then she remembered again what Gertrude had said when she informed her that some of the priestesses, including June's, had expressed thoughts that amounted to wanting Nanina in their bed. The desire had diminished after the first children were born, but it had never completely gone away. "It destroys faith and must not happen under any circumstances," Gertrude had said more than once, and everyone had complied.

But if she simply climbed into bed with the priestess that night? Then perhaps she would fulfill her most ardent wish. Nanina imagined this image, how she climbed into the warm bed with the priestess, freezing like this. The child of heaven and earth, cold, naked, and dirty, dressed only with bow, quiver, and arrows-no she would do that to no one. That would indeed destroy all faith, Nanina supposed. She had to smile a little, despite shivering from the cold, and could tell that there was some blood from inside her body heading towards her penis after all. She quickly suppressed these figurative ideas.

In the meantime it had become so dark that Nanina could approach the village without having to look for much cover. In a large circle she circled it like a fox scouting for prey. On a line between two trees she spotted some smocks for children and a woman's smock that would



fit her. Quickly she untied it from the line and immediately put on the still wet smock. She still didn't get much warmer in the damp fabric.

She untied the whole line and pulled it with the clothes towards the forest. Then she left everything halfway there. Let them interpret it as they wished. It would at least look a little like it might have been an animal at first glance.

Nanina waited until about midnight, then cautiously approached the meeting house. There was always a chamber there for guests with a bed. Perhaps she could find some other useful items.

She succeeded without difficulty. The door was not locked. There were no thieves on the island.

She tied everything up in a bundle with a blanket, arranged everything as best she could in the darkness and moved the whole thing to a large solitary tree a bit away from the village, then she ran back to the first houses of the settlement.

All was quiet, no dog barking. Goats lay tied up in front of a few huts and slept. Somewhere in the village had to be the bakehouse and the smokehouse.

The smock was almost dry now and slowly holding back the heat, Nanina felt significantly better. The half moon had risen over the forest in the east and only disappeared behind a cloud now and then. So she had enough light and could also find the bakehouse and the smokehouse.

There was no bread to be found, but on one of the shelves there were a few pieces of smoked goat meat. She bit off a piece greedily from hunger and chewed the meat soft. The provisions had to be enough until she reached the small harbour in the northeast. There were a few small fishing boats there, suitable for navigating the arm of water that reached far into the interior of the island.

She wanted to use it to reach the mainland via the narrow channel and hoped that the sea was calm. On the mainland, she knew from Gertrud, there was a tube that led under the sea to the continent. Nanina had even dreamed of standing in front of it and wanting to go through but not being able to move.

In the first attempt to repopulate the island, they had cleared it and tried to get regular transport going. To supply an island only with small boats, no woman wanted to get involved in that

The project had failed and the first settlers returned. Why, Gertrud did not know exactly, she assumed that it must have been scary for the women to walk through the spooky dark tube and the horses would surely have shied away too.

Nanina still lacked a way to make a fire. She found that a good distance away from the settlement. She walked all night. She still had plenty of water to drink in the stream; that alone would have to last until morning if need be. With all the wild goats and sheep, there were no large, contiguous patches of forest, so she made good time. It was windy and she couldn't get used to walking barefoot. The soles of her feet were beginning to send out a burning pain.

She had to take a northeasterly direction and in doing so she could not get too close to the center of the island, Gertrud called it her capital.

It was already getting light in the eastern sky when Nanina found a sheep pen in a small valley sloping down to the south, and in it a primitive shelter covered with branches. Far and wide neither sheep nor goats were to be seen or heard. In one corner a wooden frame was piled with straw. She wrapped herself in a blanket, lay down on it, and immediately fell asleep.

She dreamed again of a cave into which she wanted to go. But a warm damp wind came out of it and really blocked her way. Then there was a loud noise and the cave seemed to collapse. Nanina again had the feeling that she must stand rooted to the spot.

She woke up, there was a sheepdog in front of her and out of the dream this loud sound of the cave collapsing turns into dogs barking. Probably the dog had sniffed at her before. With wagging tail he now stood in front of her and a child's voice called, "Bero, over here!"

Nanina was startled; the sun was already high in the sky. Outside the pen stood a child of about nine with a small flock of sheep.

Curiosity and some fear of the unexpected Nanina could sense in the child's thoughts. "What's your name?"

"I am Berna," she heard the answer in a bright voice, and at the same time she heard the unspoken question: and who are you? Nanina erected a barrier of thought, allowing only a deliberately controlled bridge to the outside. Could these children read minds, she didn't know for sure.

Nanina had had practically no contact with children. Except for Gertrud and a few servant temple women, she had formed no connection with anyone. Even Gertrud's adopted daughters, Corina and Balda, had come to live in a settlement soon after their arrival on the small island with the other children born soon after. Now Corina and Balda had children of their own. Gertrud had been fully occupied building up and managing her settlement.

And who are you? What thoughts should she let out over the bridge?

Berna, fortunately, did not recognize who she really was. Maybe he'd seen her before, when his age group had classes at the Children's Temple in their island center. But in that plain woman's gown, he had to assume she was a Slayer. She certainly wouldn't assume the "Child of Heaven and Earth" in her, she could tell by her thoughts already.

Nanina broke off the bridge and replied, "I'm a temple servant and I'm from the center. I got lost while hunting, and to avoid trying to find my way back in the dark, I slept here for a bit."

Berna came closer, her thoughts now pouring doubt. How can she believe me in this simple smock, Nanina thought from behind her thought barrier, and took out her bow and quiver of arrows from behind the straw bed. "I was tracking a big deer, but unfortunately lost its trail, and so I just spent the night here-would you like to shoot with my bow?"

Berna seemed to be calmed down and was only curious about the big hunting bow. The one they had as children were only simple bows and only suitable for birds.

"Are you here all alone with your sheep?" still Nanina wanted to know as she handed him the bow and an arrow to forestall further questions.

"Yeah, Mara sprained her ankle yesterday and couldn't go today."

Nanina looked at Berna: Ash blond hair fell to her shoulders, finely drawn eyebrows covered bright blue eyes. The grey, short summer smock revealed slender brown arms and legs. Nanina suddenly felt the need to play with Berna. They could do archery together, play tag on the lawn, spin the wheel through the grass, or throw a flying disc at each other, and if a small lake or the sea were not far away, they could go swimming.

Painfully her decision to leave here came back to her now. She was the special child who was no longer needed and would become more and more annoying to Gertrud.

After letting Berna shoot at a tree three times and making them look for the arrow twice, she said, "Berna, I'm afraid I must be going on. I wish you all the best - maybe we'll see each other again sometime."

Nanina picked up her bow and quiver, tied up her bundle and ran towards the centre of the island. After a little distance she turned once more and waved to Berna with his shepherd dog, who waved back joyfully. Out of sight of the girl, she quickly changed direction, taking in the old target, the small fishing boat harbor, a little faster now. As she ran, she brushed off grass seeds and chewed on them, then gulped down the porridge for breakfast. She desperately needed a vessel for drinking water.

Around noon, she finally found a small rivulet to drink. Taking a little break, she ate some of the jerky. Late in the afternoon she reached the arm of water that led to the sea channel between the small and large island.

The sailing yacht, with which they had all come to the island in several trips, lay somewhat run down at a larger jetty. It looked as if they wanted to overhaul the yacht, which had become unseaworthy in the meantime. But what was lacking, besides paint, were tools and the construction of a contraption to get the boat out of the water. That would probably be left to a future generation.

A small fishing boat headed for a jetty and moored there. It had a small sail. Nanina could see two women on the boat. She waited until dark. She had been on a boat before and she also had an idea of how the sail could be used. Since none of the fishwives ever expected thieves, it was easy to steal the boat. The moon was rising when Nanina was already quite a distance from the shore. With the sail I might be able to get ashore a little farther south if...she did not think strongly of pursuing, however. About midnight the wind came up, and from the northwest it drove their boat farther out into the channel. The boat was not suited to cross against the wind. She soon gave up trying to get the boat closer to shore by rowing. Maybe I can get straight to the mainland this way, she thought, it can't be that very far after all. The waves were getting stronger and Nanina had to keep steadily on course, which was now almost in a south-easterly direction. In the dawn Nanina could see no shore, the visibility was very hazy. She hoped the wind would keep its direction. Later she could see the sun behind clouds and was relieved, the direction was still right. The waves were getting bigger and the boat was getting more and more difficult to steer. Nausea made itself felt in her, but she was able to successfully adjust her body to the new situation. She sailed downwind all day and by evening she could see the shore of the mainland. The moon also helped her that night. She

reached the shore without much difficulty. She pushed the boat back into the water, her landing she wanted to disguise but she was also sure that no one had watched her until now.

I will, she thought, have to find a dwelling, a village. She had devised a plan to reach Bordo. Bordo knew her; nearby, Nanina had been enthroned the Child of Heaven and Earth in a cave. She had to slay a wild animal to give a gift with to the women if she met any. She climbed a small rise. The weather had changed. She could see the sun rising in the east. And if she wasn't mistaken, there had to be light smoke from a settlement further south as well.



## 4 Beo and Alan caught

Have you ever been really afraid, maybe even scared to death? I am Kerim and your still living predecessor." After a brief pause, he continued, "Before I take your gag, you listen to me. All right?!" Beo and Alan shivered. Kerim sat down on a stone covered with an old blanket, propped his head in both hands and looked at the sandy and dirty floor of his cave. "So now it's sealed, the imminent end," he spoke softly to himself, then suddenly rumbled off that made them both wince "you don't think you're here by chance and she didn't watch you when you crossed the border." Lowering his voice again, "I was able to stay hidden for a long time, at least that's what I thought - or did she know about me for a while and sent you to me?"

Alan wanted to protest but only an inarticulate stammer came through his gag.

"Even if you think it was your choice..." Kerim looked directly at the two of them now and asked, "Why are you here, are you bored in paradise, surely you've been here for over thirty years and look like you're only twelve. Did Pandae make it, what hasn't worked for me yet? Are you the perfect clones, the superhumans? That would be the last thing I'd be interested in before my end."

A grin spread across his wrinkled face. "There, that's enough. I had to have the fun of taking you out of the paradise of eternal love for a bit." Kerim stood up somewhat laboriously, with a look of derision on his old face. He released the two of them from their gags and shackles. "You are free, you may leave or stay here, you may ask me what you will or leave it alone, as you wish. I await your decision."

Alan looked at Beo questioningly. "Did you have this planned?" Beo looked down at the ground, "Not like that, an adventure is, finding a way to the border, yes, maybe I did but that's all I wanted. It was supposed to be a surprise gift to you."

"And you have crossed that imaginary line," Kerim interjected.

"And why is there a border here," Alan wanted to know. "

It's still a law from a time when Pandeae had to protect itself, and it's coming to an end now. The border doesn't make sense anymore. There are no more secret production labs, Pandeae has abandoned them, she has something else in mind but don't ask me what. Maybe you can tell me."

They both shook their heads.

"Alright - what do you guys do in your temple, play, play in cyberspace? They both nodded and Alan explained : "I build spaceships and try them out when landing on different planets. There are always surprises and battles along the way." Beo was silent about his cyber adventures.

"I thought so," Kerim looked up, "how many hours a day do you put into it?" "Three hours, five days a week."

Kerim swayed his head back and forth thoughtfully. "Then you should teach Pandeae sometime that the border no longer makes sense. Take this message from me. My lifetime is over, it has lasted nearly 200 years, now are my last days and I am glad of it. But you," he was silent for a while, then continued firmly, "and tomorrow you go back. Tonight you are my guests. There will be opuntia and fish. Will you eat it?"

Alan looked at Beo, it wasn't exactly his favorite.

"Oh, if you ever need to and want to wash your peed in clothes, there's a little trail that leads to the Atlantic Ocean."

Both were glad to be able to leave this gloomy cave for the time being. On the little stony beach Beo looked at Alan. "I didn't read anything about that in Robinson. How's that going to work?"

Alan laughed, "That's just our adventure!"

Kerim, meanwhile, had made fire from a remnant of embers and slaughtered three fish from a container on the shore, gutted them and placed them on the rusty black sticks over the embers.

Beo now found the cave almost quaintly cozy, sleeping was less so. Kerim apologized for the breakfast of opuntia. He first had to fish again and he had not been prepared for guests. Besides, he said, they still had some of their provisions and he had not eaten much of the delicious goat cheese.



Kerim wished them good luck and happiness in their long lives as they parted. "If you could swim around the cliff, it would be a short cut, but this way you will have to go back the same way."

They waved to Kerim one last time, then climbed up the gorge.

Suddenly Beo stopped. "If we climb up this path here and down the other side, we can get back to the bungalow faster." Alan agreed.

Zigzagging, they climbed up the ridge between the ravines, holding on to the sparse shrubs. The descent on the other side was more difficult than suspected.

"We'll be fine." Alan began to climb down. "We need a rope!" interjected Beo. "We can do without," Alan was confident. Beo resolved never again to plan such an adventure excursion without asking permission at headquarters. Maybe it would go more smoothly now, Kerim thought.



They came to a rocky outcrop and Beo wanted to go back but Alan said, "We're so far now, we can still descend." Almost imperceptibly it had become steeper. Alan started to slide on the scree, he could no longer find a foothold and then fell over a previously unseen steep face into the depths.

"Alan!" shouted Beo down into the ground, "Alan!" He received no reply. Beo felt like he was paralyzed. His mind was circling around a black hole, unable to truly comprehend the situation. He felt like he was in cyberspace, only there was no restart here. After the initial shock, he searched for another way down - in vain. Could this be what death looked like? Beo tried to comprehend, calling out again and again. He could get no answer.

I have to get back to Kerim it occurred to him, maybe he has a rope. He needed help, any help, now. He hurried back and almost fell himself.

Could death look like that. They had loved each other, they were like identical twins and knew what the other knew and liked.

He stood in front of Kerim and he immediately understood what had happened. In a corner they found an old rope. They reached the crash site. Beo abseiled down. At the bottom of the ravine, Beo found a shoe and traces of blood. Alan's body was nowhere to be found. Beo was desperate, screaming and crying. He didn't want to go back. Part of him was dead, Alan was dead. Where was his body? He was also denied one last kiss. He remained sitting on a stone, an eternity. Then Kerim's shouts came to him. Mechanically he let himself climb up the rope, as if absent-minded. Kerim took him in his arms. He knew Beo had suffered the same fate as he himself had nearly a hundred years ago. The lover, the companion, the brother was dead.





## 5 Nanina on the road on the continent

By noon she was on the lookout for a rabbit hole. She was practiced and the first arrow was deadly after she stood motionless in front of the burrow for a while, lying in wait behind a bush. The rabbit was sufficiently large and with it she would surely find a good shot. For good measure, she shot a second one. Nanina's destination was Bordo, she still knew that and from there she would find her way north by rail, she would see the market, Silki, Rona and Sika again.

Nanina remembered that back when she was in Bordo with Gertrude, there were two types of women, the longhaired and the shorthaired, who usually appeared in those two forms as a pair. She would be a short-haired, she would squat behind a bush to pee, and she would have to avoid any kind of nudity. She would probably manage to mentally convince one or two women that she was a young woman as well but in a group? She wouldn't risk that.

She approached the village and from a distance two little girls came running. "A strange slayer" she could tell from their thoughts. Nanina had to be careful, slayers weren't very common. For a while they were even not tolerated, it was only in recent years that there was more acceptance. Supply in the rural areas was becoming increasingly difficult due to the high population of game that had discovered the fields of the village communities as a welcome source of food.

The girls greeted Nanina exuberantly and without fear. Strange girls or women were not a threat but only objects of curiosity.

"My name is Nanina and I'm from the north. I have been lost for three days," Nanina tried to satisfy the astonished girls. But soon the chatterboxes were sputtering away again.

There were policewomen in the village, she said, and they were putting together a transport, to Bordo for childbearing and duty.

"What kind of service?" wanted Nanina to know, but the girls evidently did not know more exactly. Nanina could not remember any service that existed for women in Bordo, not for women from the province.

The village was small, but had a supervised guest room with separate sleeping quarters. Nanina claimed to be from the north and named a place the girls suspected. The innkeeper was suspicious and hinted that she would have to report any strangers to the policewomen.

"Can you buy the rabbits from me?" asked Nanina, "I must be able to eat something else again. I have no money." The landlady agreed and brought some cheese, bread, and a large cup of a dark brown drink made from roasted cereal grains.

Dusk was setting in and the guest room was filling up. Word had already spread that a strange stranger had appeared. Nanina felt like a being from another world. Straining, she tried to pick up snatches of the women's thoughts. They didn't believe her and suspected she was a spy from the northern kingdom of Dagan. She had never heard that name before. Without waiting for a direct question, she tried to clarify, "I am not from Dagan!" The women suddenly fell silent. Had she mispronounced the name, misemphasized it? Nanina knew what a kingdom had been from her history lessons with Gertrude, but that there had ever been one when she was still growing up in the north in the forest was not in her memory.

The landlady had given her a small sum of money and had made a rabbit into a stew for the evening and offered it. Three policewomen turned up. They had already been informed about Nanina.

"Who makes hunting bows like that," the leader wanted to know. "We in the north, when the wild boars..." "You don't hunt boars with those!" Nanina had made a mistake, the policewoman interrupted her. "Yes, but I've already shot a deer," she tried to justify herself. "You like to hunt, and you hit, too-how old are you? You look pretty young."

Nanina could not make another mistake now. She knew that she was hardly different in appearance from 12-year-old girls, although she was a tiny bit taller. Her true age, which was now 32, she couldn't tell. She decided on 13. "Alright, two years of training and you can start with us. That'll give you something stronger to shoot." the policewomen grinned. "We really need young girls who can stand blood and want to hunt wild boar." The policewomen laughed and infected the rest of the women with it.

It got louder in the dining room. The landlady was pouring out cider. Three young people sat down at Nanina's table, to whom she told hunting stories and who listened in disbelief and amazement. Toward midnight the innkeeper's room emptied. The policewomen staggered off to their bedchambers. The girls at Nanina's table also took their leave. They would go to Bordo to have children or go on duty. That would only be finally decided there.



The innkeeper showed Nanina a place to sleep and sat on the edge of the sleeping cot. "You look pretty, won't you stay with me, I could use a slayer and helper at the inn. I'm sure there'd be plenty of women stopping by for you, and we'd make some money." The innkeeper started daydreaming and Nanina immediately realized what else she was daydreaming about. "Surely you are not from Eran, as you claimed." Then she suddenly fell silent, looking Nanina up and down. "Is someone expecting you back where you came from?" The landlady's thoughts now turned only to the question, How can I keep Nanina with me? "No, no one is expecting me; I have run away and am going to Bordo." "To Bordo?" the landlady looked startled and looked Nanina straight in the face, "you must be crazy, didn't you realize those three were trying to get you into service? There's a rumor going around that there's war far to the east with animalistic people. That's a war service!" The innkeeper considered, then continued more quietly, "You should spend this night in the forest, run away and hide. I can take you to a safe hiding place. The policewomen are leaving tomorrow, they've put together a transport of girls. You stay with me."

Nanina still stopped, realizing how strong the landlady's desire for her was. The landlady had already observed that she didn't act like a girl her age and that only increased her desire. She was in her early 30s and had taken over the inn from her late mother. Finding partners was not easy in her small village.

Nanina agreed. Delighted, the landlady jumped up. "I am Erna, you will like it with me." She embraced Nanina stormily and kissed her madly. Nanina was not uncomfortable with this. "Go pack your things, I have to be back at the inn before sunrise."

Nanina would need money to get to Bordo. The danger of being discovered was less important. Nanina hoped to keep a woman like Erna at a safe distance, and if not...something else would turn up.

The fetched another lantern, then they crept to the door. "Stop!" it cried behind them, "it won't do." As if moved by the blow, they both stopped. Nanina failed to gain control of the two policewomen. "You're not going anywhere, Nanina is under arrest, she's being taken to Bordo. She is under suspicion of espionage and subversive activities."

It's no use trying to escape, Nanina thought. She knew what the gun would do behind here. From outside the door now came the third policewoman. "We heard what you were up to."

Nanina was tied up and the landlady was given a severe warning. She had to spend the night on a rug in the policewomen's bedroom, covered only with a horse blanket.



## 6 Kerim's cave

Once back in his cave, Kerim tried to comfort Beo, who just sat there apathetically and howled. He had realized that Pandae knew everything about him, and he also knew that this would bring his death sentence. Several times he had stood at the edge of the cliff to end his life and each time he decided to resume the game of hide and seek after all. If he was to die at the hands of Pandae, he at least wanted to learn, even if it was the last thing he would know, how she would let him die. Was he to experience a fate similar to Alan's, to be picked up and destroyed after death?

But there was Beo now, what was she going to do with him? Would they both...Kerim was now not so clear about what she would do with Beo. What should he advise Beo to do? To stay with him? That would surely be the death of them both. He would advise him to flee, though that too promised little hope.

Beo suddenly asked him out of his tear-stained face in a weak voice, "Can I stay with you? I can't go back to the others."

"You really can't," Kerim encouraged him, "you can't go back, but you can't stay here either. That would be our imminent death, believe me. What she intends to do with you I can only guess, she has already tried with our generation. She wants to create the perfect human, a human who loves only his own kind, who shows no aggression, no cruelty, no competition. That is why she has created you practically as if from an egg, she has taught you physical love at an early age and made you dependent on each other. You started kissing and arousing each other at a very young age, after all." Beo nodded. But what I don't know," Kerim continued, "is whether you can live without that physical dependence. The specially engineered spermidine that binds you to each other like a drug, do you really need it? I could live only by splitting myself into two existences. I learned to love myself. Maybe that's why she kept me alive so long."

Kerim fell silent. Outside it was by now very dark. The faint crescent moon had set like a barge in the sea. Kerim added some wood. Smoke filled the cave where they sat, only slowly receding.

Kerim looked at Beo. "I could love you guys too, I was amazed to find that about myself when I saw you. When I captured you, it was also for my protection that I was a bit creepy to you. Images of my childhood friend immediately came to my eyes, and I almost believed he had miraculously appeared."

Beo looked to the ground, his pain too great, none of Kerim's conversation penetrating his insides.

"There are no miracles, and I chose hostile arrest. If I had let myself fall into the delusion of youthful love, you would have been just as frightened. An old man like me must think of dying."

Beo had only been half listening, still apathetic and sobbing from time to time.

"Beo, hey Beo! If I was as young as you and had that crossbow..." Beo was howling again, it had been Alan's idea with the crossbow. He was the hunter.

"I would try to leave these islands. It is not as you have been led to believe that there are no people left." Beo looked up. "I saw a sailboat myself, though it ended in a massive fireball. Pandae..." Kerim fell silent. He remembered the incident that had brought him hope then but also new despair.

"Beo, you should try to reach the big neighboring island, I'm sure there are people living there, maybe even on the east side of this island. Pandae wasn't always as powerful as it is now. Even if there are no more people there, maybe you can find a boat to make seaworthy again. I never tried, I was just afraid of starving. Here I could exist with difficulty but there...you have the crossbow, that should be enough."

For a while they both looked at each other silently without really seeing. Kerim wanted to make one last attempt to reach Beo.

"Beo, you are all educated, you know the laws of nature, you have experienced the history of mankind and read its literature. Be like Robinson, go to the east side and try to leave the island, or settle there like Robinson. You have all the time in the world. Accept the challenge of fate. Every crisis is an opportunity to start something different, something new. Alan, I can assure you, Alan wants you to go on living. He will always be with you in your thoughts... and now we sleep."

They both tried to get to sleep. Beo fell into a black abyss.

"Wake up! You've got to get out of here fast! I saw her!" Kerim shook Beo awake.

"Pandae?" asked Beo, still drowsy. Hastily, Kerim loaded Beo up with his things and pushed him out to the cave. "There, you'll have to go up that path. Try to avoid the mountains to the north, hurry."

Beo took off running, turned once more, and could see Kerim grab his neck and plunge down the slope with a scream. "Run!" he shouted while still falling.

Beo ran up the path until he was out of breath. He didn't dare look back.

## 7 Nanina as a prisoner on her way to Bordo

Nanina promised the policewomen that she would not attempt to escape and they believed her. She also told them that she would like to go on duty and that was why she had run away from her village and that she would be glad to get to Bordo so soon. She said goodbye to the landlady, who was sad and gave her some more sandals. Nanina also indicated to the innkeeper that she would take any opportunity to come back to her. She also left the bow and arrows behind. Later, Erna was convinced that Nanina had said this to her literally and claimed it in the village as well.

The squad started to move. The three policewomen on horseback, the girls on foot behind, their luggage stowed in backpacks.

The walk to the nearest train station felt to Nanina like she was swimming in a wave of affection. Each girl tried to make herself interesting in front of the stranger. A policewoman gave Nanina a horse blanket when she saw that she was freezing by the fire in the evening. Except for the coarse linen dress, she had nothing on her body either.

Nanina had to force herself to laugh when the girls burst into laughter over some



inanity.

During a pee break in the middle of the forest, a girl named Erfa squatted down next to her and said, "I think they're all stupid, too, with their silly giggling." "Oh, you know, Erfa," Nanina replied, "I grew up quite lonely away from the village with my mother." Erfa looked at her in amazement and disbelief. "Why is that? But you went to school, didn't you?" "No, my mother's friend died when I was young. We moved away to a desert because my mother blamed the village for her friend's death. My mother taught me." A series of inner images

passed Erfa by, abandoned villages, strange women and all accompanied with a creepy feeling.

"And you left your mother, ran away?" Erfa held Nanina back by the arm. "I left because they wanted to force my mother to live back in the village and she got weird about it. Some said she even went mad."

Erfa looked sadly at Nanina. "Then I can understand why you can't really laugh.

It did not take a day and the whole trek knew of Nanina's fate. Now she was swimming in a wave of affection and compassion. Everyone made an effort for her and tried to win her affection. Even the policewomen did not remain as cool as they seemed at first.

It would take them three days to reach the railway station, the policewomen had said. They did not take into account that they would be travelling on foot with a troop of young girls and that not all of them were on horseback.

The fourth day dawned and a light rain came to meet them. By noon the rain was so heavy that the trees no longer provided shelter. They built a makeshift shelter in the dense bushes from the policewomen's canvas tents. They snuggled close under it. Nanina had no rain gear, she had gotten soaked to the skin and was now steaming under the horse blanket. Erfa had managed to squat down next to Nanina, who found it quite comfortable. Involuntarily, she couldn't help but think of Silki and their naked togetherness by the lake. Just not that, Nanina thought, if they notice I...she wasn't here on the island with Gertrude, she wasn't the child of heaven and earth. Here she would be considered a relic from humanity's animalistic past. Here she was a monster, what used to be called a man, aggressive and violent. No, she had to go north, she had to see Rona and Sika again, Silki too. Nanina needed other thoughts now to calm her hard penis ready to burst.

"Your breasts are probably still a bit very small?", Erfa whispered in her ear. Nanina had thought about it before but hadn't found anything suitable for faking breasts. Just not to be discovered, she hoped. Nanina mentally focused on Erfa and whispered back, "It's because of the old dress and it only seems that way to you. Feel it!" Erfa felt Nanina's chest and sure enough, she had been wrong. That strange dress had made it look as if.... Erfa snuggled even closer to Nanina.

"Do you have a girlfriend?", Erfa now wanted to know. Without thinking twice, Nanina answered, "Silki," and she immediately remembered the pictures of the swimming lake and the discovery of their physical differences and reactions. Nanina told how she had met Silki and then unfortunately she couldn't see Silki again because her mother had forbidden her to make contact with the village girls. Here Nanina had to be careful that her little tall tale didn't get out.

Erfa stayed close to Nanina. "I have girlfriends but I don't have a real girlfriend," Erfa sighed.

I am no longer a holy angel, as Gertrude had liked it, it came over Nanina and spontaneously she kissed Erfa with passion, then looked around to see if no one had been watching them either. Although Nanina saw no one, she could still mentally notice that they had been watched.



Erfa was in seventh heaven, she could hardly sleep that night. Nanina was so different. She would do anything to make Nanina her friend. Erfa didn't leave Nanina's side and was terribly envied by the other girls.

Erfa chatted with Nanina and Nanina also chatted, made up stories. So they reached the train station. The journey to Bordo took six hours. To everyone Erfa and Nanina were a couple, only a policewoman, the group leader, did not think so. Secretly she had been watching Nanina and her opinion was hardening. She would have to act. That chatterbox Erfa, she thought, Nanina is for me, I want her with me, I must have her. She's a slayer and maybe much more. She knows other than this girl stuff. She's driving me crazy and yet she only falls for this silly girl talk as a cover. She'd go to heaven and hell with me. Nanina wants to go into the service, she brags, I'll find out what she really wants. Military service in the southeast of the Republic is murderous, that should soon be known in the most distant village.

They reached Bordo and went to a hastily set up camp. They were told that they would first be examined and then it would be decided who would have children and who would go into service.

"Nanina, you stay with us, you're still under suspicion of espionage!" The policewomen held Nanina back. Erfa wanted to stay with Nanina, a beautiful future world was collapsing for her. Nanina called out to her, "I'll join you as soon as the police are done with me!" The promise reassured her to some extent.

The policewomen took Nanina away.

## 8 Beo in the Holy Grotto

Beo kept running as soon as he got some air. His side stung. He followed a path to the north that must have been a road a thousand years ago. That night, Beo looked for a place to sleep a little ways off. He ate dried fish from Kerim and tried to dig up fern roots by hand, which he soon gave up.

After two more days he reached the northern tip of the island. Bridges had collapsed, tunnels were buried. He found water only once, and it dripped slowly from a ledge. After two more days, Beo reached the northeast of the island, completely exhausted. It was greener here and there were often cloud jams in the mountains. He found a cave that offered shelter from the night and he immediately fell into a sound and deep sleep. He thought he could still hear a humming, which accompanied him into his dreams.

When Beo woke up, he had a strange feeling. He was shivering and it was cold and damp. The cave seemed bigger than in the evening. He lay wrapped in a blanket, but it was not enough against the cold.

Am I still dreaming?, were his first thoughts but then he convinced himself of the reality of his surroundings. He had been sleeping on a wooden table that stood slightly elevated at the far end of the cave. Towards the exit he could now perceive wooden benches. To the left and right of the table were two wooden chairs and next to each was an oil lamp burning. Beo could not interpret this. Several times he made sure he was no longer asleep.

What is this, he kept asking himself, where am I? He knew from history class that the three figures now approaching him were women in long white robes. They stopped in front of him and bowed.

"We welcome your return, Son of Heaven and Earth!".

Beo was speechless, as if hypnotized, he remained standing in front of the table. He could not utter a word.

"You're not safe here, we need to get you out of here. Don't ask now, we'll explain later."

Beo got a long coat with a hood, which he pulled tightly over his face. The women now wore the same hooded coats. Beo tried to ask several times, but was sternly ordered to keep quiet.

The cave was outside the city and they walked two hours until they reached a house in one of the outskirts. Beo only knew cities from history class. This one was kind of strange.

Suddenly it flashed through his mind: Kerim was right, they still existed, the humans! Why had Pandae kept that from them? It was impossible that he had gone back in time. Time travel only existed in fantastic literature. But if he was actually supposed to be in the time of the Women's Republic, he had to pretend to be a woman, or he was lost. Again, fear surfaced in Beo. After Pandae, there were no more humans, no more Women's Republic.

They took him through a larger room with tables and chairs, pushed aside a wall of books and asked him to sit on a couch. They pulled up a small table and from outside a woman brought a cup with a warm drink. Only now did Beo feel that he was close to starving and dying of thirst. Comforting warmth spread through his body as he drank the meat broth.

"We found you outside the cave in this blanket that was somehow stuck together. We examined you and immediately it was clear to us that you had returned in human form," one of the women began to explain, "I am the head priestess of our new order and I greet you with reverence and gratitude." The women fell to their knees and muttered something that sounded to Beo like a prayer to heaven and earth.

It was working at full speed in Beo. Had he been transported here to an archaic time that adhered to archaic religions? Religions? Those had always been instruments of caste power, after all. He would probably play this game, he had no other choice. If he remembered correctly, some religions were oriented towards a Second Coming after an apocalypse, but such a Second Coming had never happened, which was understandable to Beo. Pandae had taught them the laws of nature and there had been no room for a god.

The head priestess rose first and asked Beo to be allowed to ritually wash and dress her. Some of the women had already prepared everything while the others guarded Beo's sleep in the cave. What should he do? He decided to play along with this game.

Two women brought a large bowl and a jug of warm water, two women undressed Beo, then washed him with a sponge. What Beo noticed only now, it was urgently necessary that he was washed, obviously he had spent longer time in this blanket, which stank now terribly. A shower would surely be more appropriate, Beo thought, wondering about these medieval conditions he only knew from literature. The women had to change the water twice. Then he was anointed and dressed in women's clothes. He felt as if he had been reborn and the scent of the ointment flowing around him was pleasant.



Beo got another snack of scrambled eggs and a white bread, plus another meat broth. He suddenly felt very comfortable and also somehow secure, the inner fear had to a large extent gone from him. His need to sleep grew greater and greater. The head priestess sent the other

women away and told Beo that he could rest now. He should not leave the room, however, for his own safety. If he ever needed to, there was a chamber pot under the cot and on the small dresser was a bowl, a pitcher of water and a towel. Beo immediately fell into a deep sleep.

In the common room, in front of the secret chamber, the head priestess had to reassure the women again and again. Many still could not believe that this miracle had happened, that they had been praying for it for so long. Two of the younger women had even been very close to fainting when Beo was undressed.

The High Priestess, who called herself Norin, assigned two women to keep watch in the common room during the night and to look after Beo's needs. Which consisted of emptying the chamber pot and bringing fresh water. Beo slept until the next evening. Norin entered the secret chamber alone. She sat down beside him on the bed and began without mincing words, "You are a human being, a young man," she began, "I overheard Nanina, the child of heaven and earth, appear in the cave when I was a young girl, as the priestess said then that one day a child of heaven and earth would appear again. The next day the whole order disappeared. For 12 years we of the newly formed Order have been waiting for this moment and yesterday it came true, you came to us." She paused. Beo had doubts that it was a surviving remnant of the Women's Republic that he was dropped off in. This was medieval times, this was a jump in time, a time tunnel, and how had he gotten into it? Was he supposed to enlighten Norin's beliefs? His trained mind played through several variations and concluded that he couldn't possibly play the prodigy, whoever this Nanina might have been. What her religion expected of him, he would certainly not be able to serve. He had to choose another variant.

Slowly, he turned to Norin. "I'm a..." he faltered. Could he say he was a clone, a trans, a superhuman, a construct of an artificial superintelligence? No, she wouldn't understand, that would just create another expectation in divine miracles.

Beo began again, "I come from..." and faltered again. Didn't he come from a distance in space and time? No one here would understand that either. If this was a surviving remnant of female society, then he must have reverted to an archaic time, a time of religious belief in miracles.

He started again, "I'm here to..." Norin looked up and interrupted him impulsively, "to give us children. We know, and we can't wait." Beo's mouth dropped open. "You come from Atlantis to deliver us!" Beo's eyes lit up as well, "Yes, that is where I come from." He remembered that ancient legend of the humans. "Yes, in Atlantis, there are only such..., could he dare to say clones." No he tried another variation. "...Like me. We are all very similar, like identical twins, and we have all loved each other since we were children. We live without competition and also carefree with each other."

Norin interrupted him enthusiastically. "You are angels on the Isle of Bliss, you are the angels of Atlantis." Beo knew the role angels had played in the religion of man. Could he live up to that role, did Norin expect him to? Angels were genderless beings, at least in the late moral-insular religions. An angel he was not. He also knew, of course, that her spermidine had been used in the past to procreate offspring but was nothing like the sperm of the earlier

humans. For them it was the aphrodisiac that brought both the recipient and the donor euphoric feelings of happiness.

For a brief moment, the thought surfaced in Beo's mind: Am I just being used by Pandae to...that's as far as he got. Norin encircled his head and kissed him stormily. "You're so...I can't help it," she brought out between kisses. "Different?" asked Beo. "Yes you are, you must be the god Eros, the love god Eros." Beo began to have doubts that he would be able to play that role. Beo also knew this ancient Greek god, he had also seen pictorial images of the artists. This would not be him, he could not love a woman, he could only love his own kind, his twin brothers. Suddenly Alan came painfully to his mind. With a deep breath he remembered him.

"Stop," it escaped Beo, "possibly I am Eros but first I need to know what you expect from him."

"That you penetrate me, that we are united, that you are with me." Beo dared the transformation and looked into Norin Alan. "Show me." \* Norin went into a renewed rapture, a frenzy. She cried out in delight.

"Did something happen?" Startled, the guardswomen rushed in the door.

## 9 Hilda in search of Anna's child

Hilda had achieved what she felt she needed to achieve in her life. She had been appointed to the Watcher's Council. She didn't necessarily owe that to her success.

The male gene pool was not completely destroyed. Three of the nine male children escaped. Among them was "Anna's child" as she called it. This was the specimen of the genetic experiments that her competitor Anna had believed to be the "wild card" of evolution, endowed with an initially theoretical immortality.

Spies Hilda had sent out to find traces of the stolen genetic material, Gertrude had them fly off the island to find the trail of the Templars, that order of castrati. A mocking smile crossed her face at the thought of the Castrati, which faded into a deep sigh as her thoughts turned back to Gertrude. She had always felt an excitement, otherwise unknown to her, when she had met Gertrud at Anna's lab or at her regular meetings. She also knew Lisa, Gertrud's partner, whom she hated for that one reason, being with Gertrud all the time.

Nineteen years had passed in the meantime.

Hilda's gaze wandered from her room, which had belonged to Hedwiga only a year ago, to Lake Albano. She loved to walk down the little path to the water after lunch at this time of summer, seeking refreshment. On the islands she had been able to swim in the Atlantic at any time of the year, she missed that here in the cold season.

She had found it difficult to justify Gertrud's flight from the islands at the time. The real reason that she had haunted Gertrud in her dreams, when she had seen Lisa making love to Gertrud together by the sea, she could not give. In her dreams, to her own dismay, she had been in Lisa's position and had been used by Gertrud.

But she had found enough other reasons why she had done so. These she could also defend to Hedwiga and the Watcher's Council without blushing.

And there was something else that had always interested her more: if "Anna's child" was indeed that wild card, then this child had to be brought to the islands for scientific investigation. This case had to be investigated, for who could and would estimate what dangers but also possibilities for civilization would arise from it? She had remained a scientist somewhere, despite her secret work for the Guardian Council. She knew Anna's child had been a male specimen. She would do everything she could to create a female child. There was no way to tell from Anna's remaining records. She needed genetic material, living genetic material. For that, she made all the preparations.

She hoped then that Gertrud might succeed in making the impossible possible after all. She no longer had any influence on the liquidation of the remnants of the male gene pool. With much effort she had been able to find and trace Gertrud's path with this child. The trail then led to the port city of Bordo, and then there were only rumors, which increasingly took on the features of a mystical legend. There was talk of a miracle in the sky. Hilda could only keep frowning uncomprehendingly at the credulity of the common women. She also blamed herself for the fact that they could not localize the gene combination of this extension of



children's faith beyond puberty and thus carried it along in their hereditary dispositions for thousands of years like a heavy burden.

Hilda had become increasingly certain over the past year that she wanted to pick up the trail of Gertrud and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion for her.

Far more dangerous from the Guardian Council were the Animalists.

The animalists, Hilda groaned. According to her information, they had almost certainly captured two genetically modified male children. But what did it matter, they would be genetically lost in the new bisexual pool.

The Animalists could be pushed back, perhaps even destroyed. But Hilda didn't really want to believe in the extermination, she thought that they wanted to lie to themselves in the Guardian Council. A few killed specimens had been found and analyzed. Even a well-camouflaged lair had been found and destroyed. But, and Hilda was sure of this, it had been evacuated for the most part before that. There had been no activity since that time. The expedition that had been sent out again had not yet returned, and before that everything was uncertain.

Hilda immediately saw these hairy male specimens in her mind's eye. Disgust and revulsion spread over her face, beginning at the corners of her mouth. "They are animalists!" That unexpected and shocking statement of Hedwiga's, fourteen years ago now, had been etched in Hilda's memory like a brand. She knew then somewhat superficially what Animalists were and how it was important to her not to be associated with them. It was disreputable in the extreme to be concerned, even in thought, with the archaic mating rituals of the people of ages long past.

Hedwiga was retired. She lived in a bungalow by the sea and enjoyed the small garden and the sea in a pensioners' colony, carefree and surrounded by servant girls.

Hilda visited them as often as her time allowed. In her last years on the Watcher's Council, she had warned time and again about the animalists in the northeast of the continent, so much so that they had stopped taking her seriously in the end. But that wasn't Hilda's department, she was in charge of reproduction and related research. And it was from that competence that she would seek out Anna's child. She did not believe it would be capable of reproduction. It would probably not attain the maturity necessary to do so, nor would it be the wildcard of eternal life. It would certainly also be subject to natural decay and death, like all other living things on this planet.

Gertrud needed certainty about that and especially about Gertrud. She still had the picture in the binoculars in front of her when Gertrud got out of the water and went to Lisa, who was already waiting for her on the couch. She could not forget this accidentally discovered love scene.

Hilda sat at her heavy oak desk, she was undecided. Should she lock up the "Anna"? Had they then fallen victim to the epidemic that had struck Bordo a year after Gertrud's escape, causing more than half of all the inhabitants to die a quick death. After that, it had taken nearly ten years for the population to slowly begin to rise again.

Apart from the mystical rumour of the birth of a child in a cave, nothing remained. Hilda was not even sure if she could really attribute this legend to Gertrud. She had even had the relinquished settlements on the island inspected at the time. The tunnel connecting the continent to the island had still been serviceable but obviously no woman wanted to make that crossing under the sea channel twice because of its gloom. The bridgehead on the island no longer existed and most of the small wooden houses had fallen into disrepair. They had enough to do with maintaining the population, expansion and settlement into other uninhabited areas was pointless. Productivity in the production of the necessary food was far too low and locally organized, so that weather anomalies often turned into famines, because the infrastructure, the transport capacities were too small.

Gertrud could not have fled there with Anna's child, and without a connection to the already existing civilization, survival was impossible. If she did try, her fate was sealed. The sailboat, if she could still escape with it, had surely become useless long ago.

But then, Hilda wondered to herself, her mind was made up: she would take leave if necessary to try to find the last traces herself. She needed certainty, she very personally, about what had happened to Gertrud. There was also something of a scientific curiosity, a curiosity about Anna's genetic experiment. Somewhere in the distance she saw looming storm clouds that could threaten her civilization. This wasn't just an impending pandemic that everyone was afraid of, there were some other imponderable factors that couldn't yet be clearly formulated, and they were perhaps even more apocalyptic.

Three days later, the other members of the Guardian Council had approved her little expedition. The next day she went to the training camp to choose two assistants who would accompany her.

The camp was on the coast. Hilda flew in the helicopter of the flight readiness. She had already stowed her personal equipment in it. The landing site was right next to the headquarters, a sturdy, one-story stone building. Over a larger area along the coast, individual wooden barracks were scattered in the loose pine forests. In between there were playgrounds and training areas and, leaning against a hillside, a firing range.

The guard training was very different from that of the policewomen. It was an elite training, only the best of the police force could be further trained here. Strict rules and a harsh discipline, which included punishments for misconduct, gave no thought to a carefree holiday at the seaside. A strict hierarchy of ten prevailed. Ten women at a time formed a group and a hundred a battalion with a command staff. Of course, frau knew it was a military structure from a bygone era of humanity. Something better hadn't been found and the normal population hardly knew anything about these female guards. Besides, they had only one job: to ensure their civilization never allowed the human past to arise again, in any form whatsoever....

Hilda was already expected and received with respect. Viki of the command staff, specialized in detective tracking, and Hera, a squad leader, specially trained in hand-to-hand combat, would be her companions.

A holiday for three, that's all it would probably be, Hilda realised for herself. She looked at the files of the two women and confirmed the selection with her signature. She had already made her demands by telephone and everything had been done to her satisfaction.

Hilda noticed the two women's joy at being able to leave the camp at least for a while. They drank another coffee together while the luggage was stowed in the helicopter. A first short briefing about their tasks followed in a relaxed atmosphere. Hilda almost asked for a glass of wine but could just hold back. That would have looked too much like a holiday start.

The helicopter had some starting difficulties, so that Hilda already feared they would have to ride back. But then the engine ran stable again and they could fly to the airfield of the guards. There, a small twin-engine propeller plane was already waiting to fly them to Bordo the next day.

Hilda used the time to inquire in the flight reconnaissance for traces of the Animalists. It was not her responsibility but any information had to be given to a member of the Guardian Council.

It had been several years since they had tracked down and destroyed some places. After that, they had found no more signs in the controlled areas for years.

Not without concern, Hilda noted that a few heat spots that could not be clearly identified had appeared on the infrared cameras recently. After more exact analyses then nothing more could be determined. Special groups had been sent there, but so far they could not find anything either.

Hilda sat together with Viki and Hera in the bar of the flight readiness still in the evening and explained to both of them their common field of operation with one and then also a second bottle of red wine. Hilda had a good impression of the two, satisfied she immediately fell asleep in her room.



After a dreamless sleep, the alarm clock woke them. It was still dawn when all three boarded the plane and took off without delay in the direction of Bordo.

## 10 Nanina with the policewomen

It was not particularly difficult for Nanina to interpret the excitement of the policewomen. They thought she was a spy but had no intention of taking her to the police station. The squad leader Bella whispered to Nanina: "You go with Luna, I'll join you later when I've delivered the squad.

Nanina had no reason not to trust the three of them, as she sensed a Dagan affinity in them, and the North was where she really wanted to go. She also liked Bordo, because here she would be able to visit the cave where Gertrude had enthroned her as a child of heaven and earth.

Luna led Nanina to an apartment in the middle of the city. The house was very run down. The plaster showed only after in a few places. A third of the left roof was missing and the apartment below was obviously unoccupied. Scraps of cloth wafted through the glassless windows.

Nanina was surprised by the interior of the apartment though. It was nicely and comfortably furnished. Flowers and foliage plants were not lacking. It was the shared apartment of the three.



Luna smiled at Nanina, "Bella will negotiate with you. In the meantime, I'll make you comfortable. Do you want to take a shower? A beer? Eat something, a fried egg perhaps?

Nanina was lost for words, she just said, "Yes."

"Yes what now, first shower, then a fried egg? Eggs are still here, we also have a cooler and electricity here, though not all the time. Nanina nodded in agreement. Good, I'll show you the shower, then I'll be done with the egg too".

Nanina was able to influence Luna enough to keep her out of the shower. She hurried and was soon out again. Escape was not possible as she soon found out, the second floor was too high and Luna had locked the door from the inside.

Luna waited on the sofa. On the small table in front of it were two beers and two fried eggs.

Cautiously, Luna asked, "You do drink beer, don't you?"

Gertrud had tried several times in recent years to drink wine with Nanina at the turn of the year. But she had never found any particular pleasure in it. She did it for Gertrud's sake, who then became very talkative. None of the others were allowed to know this and it would have shaken the faith of the community.

"You're a strange girl," Luna put on a cryptic smile, nearly finished the beer, and continued, "with your exotic beauty, you have to put up with seeming covetous." Luna moved closer. "Maybe you'll give me a kiss?"

Nanina had been able to read her thoughts before. "Why not? Do I have any other choice?" Luna laughed and covered Nanina's head with kisses.

"You are so different, so young but also of a dangerous...", Luna faltered, lacking the words to match. "...Predatory?", Nanina tried to express Luna's confused thoughts. "I'm a slayer, and that means not being a rabbit who fears a slayer."

Luna simply replied, "I'm going to the bathroom quickly, I need to freshen up." Nanina could still pick up her scraps of thoughts as she walked away, she was going to start a special kind of hunt with Nanina.

Had she not then fled from Gertrud to experience adventure, to escape the life of the saintly child-maker, this boredom of a paradise that had been creeping along doggedly for years? She was tired of being ritually milked, she wanted to determine for herself what other passion and pleasure there was for her. She had experienced too little of it in her youth.

Luna returned with only a bath towel draped loosely over her shoulders. Nanina received her desires, which included a wild sex and she would go for it.

But suddenly Luna froze and immediately disappeared back into the bathroom. She had heard key noises at the door.

Bella the squad leader and Isi, the third policewoman, entered the apartment.

"Hey Nanina, where's Luna, has she seduced you yet, because she likes young girls." They both laughed and somehow caught Luna emerged from the bathroom with a little more clothing than just a bath towel.

"You could at least have given Nanina a better gown, that holy penitent's robe is atrocious," and turning to Nanina : "How could you even hunt in that sack? Luna, go and fetch something for our "spy" to wear, the dress with the red poppies will surely look good on her.

Exhausted, they both dropped onto the sofa next to Nanina.

Bella commanded further, "Luna! We'd like some food and drink too!"

Luna dutifully disappeared into the kitchen.

"And now to us," Bella began, and Nanina knew that now an interrogation would follow. "What is your mission that you started so bunglingly?"

The two had no guesses and with that Nanina had to come up with something convincing. She started by saying that a rumor had surfaced in Dagan about the birth of a Sky-Earth child in a cave near Bordo. She was to find out what became of this child. After that, she was to go north and find out what had become of the secret gene pool that had existed there in the wilderness and what connection there was to the mysterious birth.

The three policewomen were amazed, for they too had heard these rumors. Bella became thoughtful, only to realize in amazement that the principals must have been idiots if they had sent Nanina off with this equipment.

"OK, Nanina, we'll take you to the cave and then we'll take you north for our next recruitment drive and..." she hesitated, " maybe we'll pay Dagan a visit too. There are quite a few rumors about Dagan here with us as well." Bella grinned and looked at the others meaningfully. "There's supposed to be something like new people who can make babies with women. We found out about it by accident. It's not public knowledge.

Nanina guessed that could only be the offspring of Rona and Sika. A wave of happiness swept through her. Nanina would see the companions of her childhood again.

"And," Bella continued, "these new humans, like us, are not supposed to be animalists, have archaic animal hair, or be fighting machines for war!" Bella looked at Nanina piercingly, "Is that right?" Without hesitation, she answered, "Yes." Nanina was saved. These women would not turn her in, she would not be killed or castrated in an act of mercy and made a half-woman.

"Bella, what else did you forget" Isi added, "our society is at war with archaic people who have already partially overrun our borders. Our civilization is rotting, everything is being activated for war, no one wants this war and that's why our society is only half-heartedly defended. That is also why we want to go to Dagan, there is a peace agreement. Nanina will be our ticket!"

Somehow everyone was satisfied. Bella approved a bottle of Bordo wine and said, "Today we'll drink, tomorrow we'll take Nanina to the cave, to the sect that stubbornly believes in the rumor, and in three days at the latest we must be on our way north."

"Nanina, I'm sure you'll understand that we'll keep an eye on you and lock the door. It's for your safety, too."

"Finally we can sleep in our bed again, these country inns are just awfully primitive, no shower, no toilet..." announced Luna with relief.

"Nanina, take off your linen bag, go to the bathroom. We don't have nightgowns," Bella commanded and grinned.

Nanina wanted to go to the bathroom and take off her gown there, maybe she could think of something else.



"No, no, you leave your dirty sack here. If we still have time, we'll wash it. Tomorrow you'll get things from us."

With her back to the three of them, Nanina undressed and wanted to get out the door as fast as she could.

"Stop, stop!" commanded Bella, "turn around!"

Isi dropped the fork from her hand, Luna made big eyes. Bella reacted less astonished. Had she secretly suspected, even expected it?

"Are you guys so blind that you didn't notice this, who we caught here? Even Nanina was surprised. Why had she been unable to perceive Bella's guess? Had she been too preoccupied with herself?

"Come here Nanina, I won't hurt you." Did Nanina have anything left to lose? Bella obviously enjoyed her jovial attitude towards her subordinates. She hadn't always been just a squad leader. A cardinal error in duty had demoted her. At the moment, she seemed to take pleasure in Nanina's inquisitorial questioning.

"So without underwear, Nanina, is that so common in Dagan?" Immediately Nanina replied, "No, I had to get new clothes on the way," she hoped the explanation would suffice.

"Looking at you, you're obviously proof of the new Dagan human, a bit young but at least in full function I suppose. Now go to the bathroom and then to bed. There you will tell us what to expect in Dagan."

In the bathroom, Nanina feverishly considered how she could gain agency over the group. But she could not see any acute danger for herself.

The bed was large, sufficient even for three women. There was no other place to sleep. The thought of sleeping on the floor passed as quickly as it had come.

She lay down on the edge and covered herself with the big soft comforter. How pleasant to sleep like that.

Next came Bella in her nude beauty, a rose oil scent in tow. "Come lie down in the middle, we've never had such a guest of honor before." Without much delay, almost with uncharacteristic speed, the other two arrived. Nanina caught on that they had arranged something only she found it hard to concentrate on it, she was too preoccupied with herself and the near future.

Luna couldn't help herself, "You're making new humans without virgin birth and an artificial womb?"

"Yes," Nanina replied shortly. Now she got some agency back, but Bella stopped that immediately, "Go on, tell us, we're curious!"

Nanina wondered: how would that work in Dagan? Surely it was no different from Gerda's.

"Come on, we're not afraid of relationships, we're not sexually repressed, nothing human is foreign to us, we're just curious about what to expect," Bella urged.

Nanina lashed out, "We are very few males, so our sperm must always be enough for a lot of women."

"Wait a minute," Bella interrupted, "and that's where they leave you or send you on secret missions as a spy?"

Now Nanina had to go all out or she was doomed, "I left because I want to fuck a real woman." Cheerful laughter spread in the bed.

Spontaneously, Luna snapped, "You can have that right now!"

Nanina continued: "Under supervision I am washed, the balls are stroked and massaged. If the penis then still should not stand properly, I am stroked and massaged at the foreskin until my penis is big and bone-hard and it needs only a small rubbing action until my squirt comes. It's collected, cooled, and distributed to women ready to conceive after a birth plan to fertilize an egg with it."



Absolute silence in the bed. Luna found the first words: "And why are you so few?"

"Because...it hasn't worked that long."

Nanina was able to focus again and divine the thoughts of the three, now she would be better able to pull the initiative of action to herself. She flipped back the covers. \* Soon they were all in a deep sleep and felt as if they had met Eros, the god of love.

The next morning, which started late, the three women behaved as if Eros were still present. Nanina was literally idolized and served at breakfast.

Bella found it hard to say, "Isi, you go to the cave with Nanina. Don't wear a uniform, you'll have better access to the sect that way."

The sect of the "Expectation of the Heavenly Child" was small, compared to other faith communities, known in the city and also tolerated. Many women still wanted to believe in something, the previous genetic research and selection in the birth centers had not yet brought success in this regard.

Isi set off with Nanina. She knew the cave and wanted to go there first, then later to their common room in the city.

The path led through a forest with tall trees and little undergrowth. Suddenly Isi pulled Nanina off the path and further into the forest without answering Nanina's astonished questions.

When Isi thought she was far enough out of the way, she forcefully tried to undress Nanina. "Go on, nail me to the tree here." moaned Isi, leaning her back against a large tree. She quickly undressed, pulling the stunned Nanina to her and stripping her completely.\*

Nanina dressed again while Isi sat dreamily at the trunk of the tree until the pricking needles slowly brought her back to reality.

They went on their way again. Isi literally clung to Nanina's neck and kept giving her kisses. They reached the cave, which they found in a big mess. There seemed to have been a search. Nanina was so immersed in the memories of her enthronement then that she could not notice: They were not alone. A woman in trekking clothes emerged from behind a screen. At the entrance behind them, there were suddenly two more women in that outfit.

## 11 Beo's imprisonment

Norin knew instinctively that she had made a great mistake that could become the existential issue of the faith community. She had never believed that her desires could find fulfillment so soon and that was what made her forget everything. What she didn't know, and what she didn't think was possible, among their ranks had been an informal member of the Watcher's Council security detail.

That same hour, the policewomen showed up. Norin plunged from the seventh heaven into the abyss of hell. Beo and her were taken into custody. Beo was even put in a security wing with no daylight. He would be examined, questioned, tried, and brought to his

punishment as an enemy of the human community.

A physical examination took place, then a female lawyer appeared in Beo's cell. She explained to him that the examination had revealed that he had most likely not been sent to spy by the archaic people of the southeast. If they would pick up such a spy, no matter if youthful male disguised as a girl like him or as a woman, all of them had had their genitals mutilated, the male children already to make them more violent as men and the women so that they would remain in bondage to the man and bear many children.

"The fact that you are not maimed is definitely a mitigating circumstance and may save you from the death penalty. We'll point that out at the trial. I can't guarantee it, though."

Suddenly, Beo observed a whole new ability in himself. Could he pick up fragments of the lawyer's thoughts in the face of the mortal danger he was suddenly in? He could receive the indifference of her thoughts as to what his sentence would be. He was not the first spy to be executed.

They were at war, which was becoming

increasingly brutal, and any hint of manliness was punished harshly. The enemy picture was clear and without an enemy picture, war could not be fought.



The female guards clearly expressed their disgust for him. He was a male being and therefore worse than a murderess, who often had a reason to commit the murder and thus met with understanding. A woman spat into the tasteless grain soup she handed him through the grate. The main ingredient was wheat bran, which they also fed to the pigs. Beo took it and imagined that he was a tiger going for the woman through the grate. The keeper suddenly looked at him in horror and then ran away screaming.

From then on, two attendants always appeared to bring Beo food. The toilet bucket had no lid and Beo felt miserable. He could now understand very well that humans could not overcome a certain stage of development. That was how they had learned and they had not been fixated on humans since their artificial birth. Pandae had refrained from letting human-like robots raise them. Beo remembered having only friendly beings around him, even if they didn't have biological human bodies. They were friends that they were loved by. But what was most important was that they all loved each other and it was almost incomprehensible that at a certain stage of development they had to find a steady partner. But then again, that made sense, because at a certain age they had to take on differentiated tasks. From initially simple tasks, to constructing complex non-linear systems with barely manageable parameters, that had been their world. Working with Pandae was interesting, challenging, and completely satisfied her intellectually. The mutual physical love did as well. In their basic training, they had also studied the history of mankind, science, and culture. This inner richness offered them the theoretical possibility of living a thousand years or more on this earth.

But Pandae had lied to her, the humans still existed, they had survived an apocalypse and fought their way through a Dark Age and had not perished from it. Pandae, yes Pandae had written humans off, to her they no longer existed. They hadn't gotten any smarter. They had not been able to use technology wisely, and as the biological high civilization of this universe, they had created their own archaic gravediggers, like everyone else, and were committing suicide as a civilization. Soon they will no longer know what they once were when they rejoin the animal kingdom. Even this community of female beings, peaceful in its approach, was not capable of survival. Beo would have liked to share this realization with his brothers in Atlantis, he would probably meet the same fate as his beloved friend Alan.

But, and he took it upon himself to do so at that moment, he would fight in the court, he would bring judgment on humanity, he would tell them the truth, the truth that they themselves cannot recognize, do not recognize now, and have not recognized in the past. The night before the court date he had a strange dream, which in retrospect he tried to explain as surreal and related to his current situation. A large night owl had perched on a guard's table outside his cell and spoken to him, "I'm Alan, looking for your brother..." He could not understand the brother's name. He thought he heard another female guard, but then immediately fell back into an unconscious sleep.

The trial was held in camera. The prosecutor emphasized in her indictment that the subject is accused not only of espionage, but also of preparing anti-state acts. For this purpose, this subject has chosen a sect that believes in the return of a male individual in a



religious sense. An interdiction procedure has been initiated against these archaic elements. For this person, who calls himself Beo, she asked for the death penalty for the preparation of subversive activities hostile to the state.

The lawyer in her plea indicated that the person has no mutilations of the genitals and thus it is not clear that this act of espionage and anti-state can come from the archaic. She pleaded for castration and life imprisonment in labour camp.

The prosecutor replied that this subversive subject came from the Archaics, because they have a special way of disguising young males up to a certain age as girls and using them for their animalistic urges. Same-sex intercourse is punishable by death among the Archaics, hence the disguise. She emphasized that we are dealing here with a particularly perfidious tactic of these enemies of humanity.

The High Court followed the prosecutor's request and imposed the death penalty with immediate execution.



## 12 Hilda in Bordo

Bordo was the center in Western Europe. Compared to its heyday about 1000 years ago, it was comparable to a city destroyed in several bombings. In a sea of leafy mountains of rubble, there were islands of houses that struggled to withstand the sea of green that surrounded them. Even to save these islands of houses from decay took great effort. There was also no longer much need to maintain an urban culture. The society of women was again adapted to a medieval and sustainable economic life.

Bordo still had a small centre, here there was electricity and running water from the tap. It was the centre of births, virgin births and artificial wombs. The police and all the other administrative bodies of Western Europe were also concentrated here.

Hilda had found out that Gertrud had been here. She even suspected that Nanina, Anna's wildcard, had been here with her.

The sect that was waiting for the "return of the child of Father Heaven and Mother Earth" had obviously fallen for an Archaic spy. The circumstantial evidence pointed to that, at least according to the judge's information. Hilda was doubtful; she had a very different suspicion. In her capacity as High Commissioner of the Guardian Council, she would be allowed to interrogate this male subject once more before execution, in order to send a report to Rome on this particular threat. The head priestess of the sect, who appeared disturbed and was only talking crazy, had been arrested and according to a member of the sect, she had been in contact with this subject.

Hilda set off with this cultist to visit this mysterious cave. Viki, her assistant, was checking out the surroundings. Suddenly she came back and whispered in Hilda's ear that she had observed a couple in the forest with a male subject as well and they were now approaching the cave. Hilda gave instructions on how to apprehend the two in the cave.

"Stop," Hilda commanded, "what are you doing here. This cave is a crime scene area. You're under temporary arrest."

Isi flinched, instinctively grabbing Nanina and wanting to run with her to the exit. From there a shot banged and both remained rooted to the spot.

"We need to get your particulars." Hilda walked up to the two. Nanina was unsuccessful in convincing Hilda that she was harmless. "we just wanted to check out this cave because we ..." Isi faltered, then continued, "heard about this mysterious event."

Hilda did not respond. Hera bound both of their hands. "Which one of you is this male subject?", Hilda wanted to know. Silence. "Viki, show it!" Viki pointed at Nanina. Hera turned to Nanina, "You and I are going to have a private talk outside." She grabbed Nanina by the arm and walked outside. Next to the cave was a firepit with a simple bench made from a tree trunk. Hilda took Nanina's shackles off and sat down. "I'm not your enemy, so that's clear at the beginning. I don't believe you are a spy. You will have to prove it to me or you will suffer the same fate as this male subject awaiting execution as a spy." Hilda chose these drastic

words to force Nanina to speak. Nanina was under the impression that she could trust Hilda. She began her narrative with the house in the forest by which she had grown up and the three women with their children. She told of the escape with Gertrud and how they had built a small community together, far from the rest of civilization. She also told of the part she had played in it. Hilda listened first in amazement and then also with great satisfaction.



"I do have one question for you Nanina though. What are you doing here?" Nanina told of her weariness of being milked for new children. There were enough new children now and a few "male subjects" were also among them.

"What's the relationship like with the girls. How would you rate that? One to ten?" Nanina confirmed what Hilda had expected. Hilda knew the papers Anna had read that in. She also knew that these new children would have about twice the life expectancy of the previous humans. They would not, however, be blessed with this asymptotically approaching zero growth, as Nanina herself had. They would lose their youth, age, and then die as well.

"If I'm right, you've been in this world for about thirty-five years." Nanina nodded. "And still look... like thirteen years old at the most. But let's not go there, time is short."

They went back into the cave. Hilda immediately gave instructions, "Viki and Hera, you are my responsibility for the two, of course especially for Nanina, that is the name of our sought and now found "male subject" who henceforth must not be called that, call it Wildcard and unofficially now Nanino, but officially still Nanina," Hilda grinned, "you hide here in the forest and keep the cave under observation. If I don't show up tomorrow, you all make your way to Dagan!"

Isi asked to talk some more, she told them about Bella and her plans to go to Dagan as well.

"OK, you have Bella's support then. Isi, is this the Bella who had urged reforms and was demoted and exiled to the provinces because of it?" Isi affirmed. "Wait for me and hope, pray for my sake too, that I come back!"

Hilda left the cave, the other four hurrying to get into the forest and become invisible to visitors to the cave of any kind.

She would interrogate this "male subject" again and if her hunch was correct and it was not an Archaic spy after all...but a human from Dagan or.... That was as far as she wanted to think, she hoped for her quick wit and spontaneous creativity.

## 13 Hilda interrogates Beo

Hilda was aware that Nanina could also come under suspicion of espionage. She had imagined her mission to be somewhat easier. On the way to the prison, she reconsidered her strategy one more time. This socialist society of women was no longer viable; like so many advanced civilizations in humanity's past, it would submit to a dynamically growing archaic culture. If not yet much noticeable in Rome, the decay of Bordo had reached frightening proportions. Surely this was already a result of the hostile takeover by the Archaics that was just taking place. She wanted and needed to do something about this decay, she needed to continue Anna's work. The evolution of man had reached a barrier that could only be broken through the evolutionarily created intelligence.

The prison was not pleased about the delay of the execution. But the High Commissioner could not be bypassed so easily. Hilda demanded to speak privately with this male subject. The prison authorities objected and felt that this subject might have hypnotic powers.

"Talking in private is not an option but an order!", Hilda managed to get her point across.

Hilda entered Beo's cell and was amazed: such a resemblance to Nanino, only the hair was a different shade.

"You know your life is at stake. I am here to make one last attempt to save you from the spy charge. Answer me all questions briefly and accurately, no fairy tales and lies I want to hear. Do you agree?" Beo didn't care about anything by now, his last thoughts were only about Alan and their fate together. He nodded.

"Where are you from?" Beo hesitated, what could he say? "I'm from New Atlantis, it's an island in the Atlantic we call it."

"Did it used to be called La Palma?" Beo nodded again.

"How did you get to Europe?" Panic broke out in Beo, not knowing himself exactly how this had happened. He voiced his guess, slowly getting the impression that he could trust this woman.

"I probably passed out from running away from Pandae and then she dropped me off outside this cave."

"Pandae?" echoed Hilda. "Yeah, I guess one of their drones flew me to the mainland." That was all Beo could say either.

In Hilda, a chaos of unexplained events, facts and occurrences slowly began to become transparent. Rumors first surfaced when two sailing yachts disappeared without a trace from an exploration of this island. Also inexplicable was how Anna had arrived at these results, the processing power of her central computer would not have been nearly enough for the task. It was therefore believed to be a great, very great coincidence, practically an impossibility. Yet her island of genetic research lay at the other end of this Atlantic archipelago.



"Did you say that in your interrogation?" wanted to know Hilda. "No, I almost didn't get a word in edgewise. For them it was a foregone conclusion that I was a spy."

"What do you call yourself?" "Beo" "Well Beo, are you under the impression that Pandae is watching you here or are you even in contact with her?" "No"

"One last question, Beo. How old are you, roughly?" "I'm thirty-two years old."



Hilda was firmly convinced that Beo also urgently needed to be rescued. She had to try at all costs. But how? Hilda's brain was working at full speed. Beo had gained confidence and was clearer in his mind again. He could now clearly perceive that Hilda was thinking of his and another rescue.

"Good, I would like to talk to you more now but time is short. Beo I will try to save you from death, you just have to play along. It won't be easy but I don't see any other way. Trust me, even if it's a dangerous game. I will propose to train you as a double agent to get information about the capacities and possibilities of the Archaics in the field of weaponry. Then it will also be a simple matter to destroy the weapon forges from the air." Hilda hoped that this strategy might work. "Then - I have an ideal companion for you - when you're in the land of our enemies, you can always go to Dagan via a detour. You'll get maps and equipment. Here you both are, it's your brother and his name is Nanino, not safe." Beo was speechless. Hilda smiled at him. "Let's hope it will be!"

Hilda left the prison and still ordered that the execution is postponed until further notice by order of the Guardian Council for higher interests. Violations are considered dangerous to the state. She put this in writing and stamped it with the High Commissioner's stamp.

She ordered the car of the prison administration and let herself be driven with it to the courthouse. The chief justice received her not exactly pleased.

Hilda knew the verdict could not be overturned even by her, in this respect the courts were completely independent. She tried to negotiate a compromise. Her proposal was that this

male subject would be trained and used as a double agent. She would take care of the training, since a similar male subject was already designated for it.

"This isn't Rome, my dear. What you're always making up doesn't work in practice in very many cases. We are facing existential problems. Unchecked, these archaics invade our borderlands and rob the women and girls. Those who resist are relentlessly killed. - I cannot agree to the proposal."

Hilda had to counter, "And what are your tactics here, so nearly at the front?"

"We have no tactics, Rome is failing us. Our police forces are too weak here, all recruitment is going to Rome. Do you seriously think you can push back the Archaics?"

Hilda knew they could only buy time, they did not possess a miracle weapon. However, submission without a fight was not on the agenda either. Hilda trusted in time and the new people who might be able to do it. But they were not yet up to the task. Or so Hilda saw it in her visions of the future.

The judge continued: "And do you think the women went into submission unwillingly and with reluctance? Sure, they would be rid of their independence but isn't such a slave existence sometimes better? Just childbearing and housekeeping, isn't that an almost carefree life. My dear Hilda, you have only rudimentarily succeeded in transforming women into independent beings. The old patterns of evolution are still there, you have only covered them up with your lofty genetic innovations."

Hilda had to pull out all the stops, "Well, that may all be true, but we need time, we are on the verge of a breakthrough in research. We need this information on the enemy, weaponized centers.", Hilda was only thinking of the genetic experiments and the new possible capabilities of the two islands though. She had to put everything on the line. "This male subject, who calls himself Beo by the way, most likely escaped back when the gene pool was dissolved and was not executed. I have already tracked down one such specimen and this Beo is the missing one. I will take various genetic samples from the two of them and then send them on their mission, which will most likely...", Hilda faltered, "...most likely fail. The two of them will not survive that, and if they do, we will get the information we desperately need."

The chief justice was doubtful and seemed unwilling to go along with Hilda's suggestion, "If we don't show unconditional harshness against our enemies, we've already lost. I can't agree to that."

"So, I can't overturn the verdict but I can remove the police chief and the regional council from office and take over the leadership on a provisional basis. Then there will be a state of emergency for three days and during that time I will carry out my plans. I have no other choice!"

After a long silence, the judge said, "Then so be it. The condition: It shall be conducted in the strictest secrecy."



## 14 Nanino and Beo on a secret mission

When Beo saw Nanino, he knew that the request to find his brother had been fulfilled. In his existentially extremely threatening situation, a new ability had opened up to him, allowing him to enter the world of people's minds on a whole new physical field. He called it "unlocked for him what was already predisposed in him." Immediately, he also realized that Nanino also possessed this ability. Fate had brought them together and what part had Pandae played in that, Beo now wondered.

Their getting to know each other was stormy, full of passion and each knew what the other desired. They were able to complement and stimulate each other in such a way that both believed they had finally arrived in another, long-lost world.

Their secret training as spies, spurred on by nights of love, increased their learning to heights that could hardly be described. They practiced throwing knives and already their third throw surpassed that of the instructor and succeeded safely at any of the possible distances.

They learned the customs and manners of the Archaics. They learned that the deputy or prophet, as they called him, had received the commandments and regulations for the way of life in a lonely cave from Archaos, their god. They were written down and given to mankind in a holy book. In addition there was a golden box, on which no lid could be seen, and which has since been worshipped in a temple of red marble.

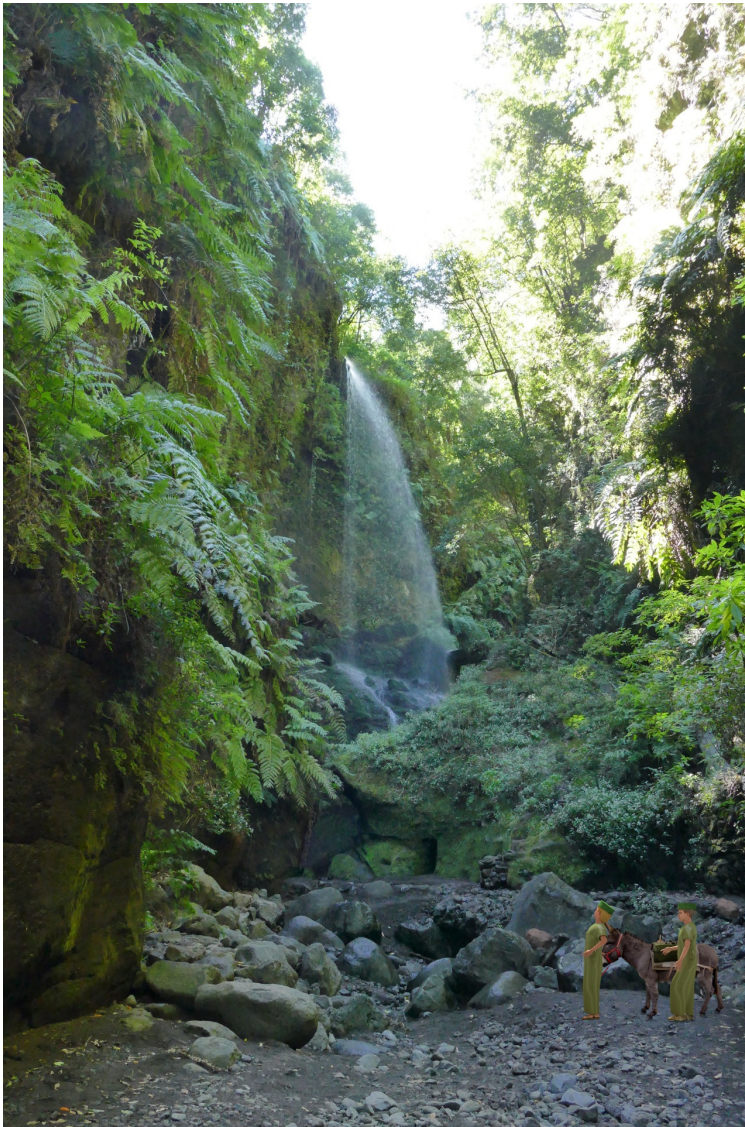
Hilda took another injection, blood and skin samples from both of them with the aim of getting them to her genetic research complex in the Canary Islands as soon as possible. She promised Nanino to visit Gertrud as soon as possible and maybe even persuade her to come back to research.

The training camp for the two of them was over. Nanino and Beo loaded a donkey with some old copper wire and two battered tin cups, with a few gems and fine steel needles. With these they hoped to possess good merchandise.

The archaics, as well as the society of women, suffered more and more from a lack of tools and material of a high technology based on fossil fuels. In an almost suicidal act, the people of past times had renounced the energy stored up over millions of years and had also created no real substitute. The average intelligence dropped more and more and the people, democratically legitimized by ideological populists, went into a sustainable and in the end medieval economy and society. The "point of no return" was easily passed.

Nanino and Beo made their way through the mountains, their destination the ancient city of Saragossa. There, a new center of the Archaics should have formed. But before that, they had to cross the border region in the mountains, undetected by either side. Hilda gave them a few coins as a parting gift, coins that came from an Archaic raid that left no one alive. Hilda meant them that this could be their chance if they got into a highly embarrassing interrogation.

They ran off in women's clothes and later exchanged them for the clothes of the



Archaics. Raids by the Archaics into the areas north of the Pyrenees had been occurring with increasing frequency of late. Villages were raided, the older women and those who resisted were slaughtered, the girls and women of childbearing age were carried off to the south beyond the mountains. Usually only a few managed to escape during such raids. Fewer still dared to escape after their subjugation. From one of these women they had information about a mountain gorge, inaccessible at first sight, which allowed them to cross the border undetected. They followed a stream ever uphill until the donkey stood before a waterfall. "Here our path ends," said Beo; "of a waterfall the woman had told us nothing. Should we have lost the trail?"

"Let's look further down for a turnoff," Nanino

suggested. In fact, they had overlooked an animal trail that skirted the waterfall over small switchbacks on a ledge. With much effort and good coaxing, they managed to bring the donkey along as well. After another day of climbing, they approached the pass.

Nanino suddenly stopped and whispered to Beo, "A human is approaching us." Beo immediately responded, "Let's go hide left and right. Leave the donkey."

## 15 Hilda back in Rome - hostile takeover?

Hilda thought she had everything she would need for further research. Her team arrived at the airfield, there was a bustling commotion. The news from Rome was frightening. The evacuation of the Guardian Council was in full swing, there was no longer any hope of stopping the storming of Rome. Nevertheless, all the elite units still available had been mustered to defend Rome. From the Balkans, the Archaics had already formed bridgeheads. They were equipped with captured weapons and also primitive replicas. The large numbers, also attacking with archaic weapons, were far too great and the morale of the defenders too poor.

Hilda had no choice, she had to go to Rome, only there they still had a few planes that could fly to the Canary Islands. From Bordo she had no more opportunity for a stopover. This region was completely in the possession of the Archaics.

They reached the airfield just outside Rome. All available helicopters and airplanes were in use. No jet-powered machines had been around for a long time. They were constantly landing, refueling, and taking off again. Air-to-ground missiles were long gone. Light small arms were used to try and stop the Archaics from the air. Fortunately, the Archaics did not yet have aircraft and the air defenses had little effect.

There were no more planes that could fly to the islands in the Atlantic. The Council of Guardians had nothing more to say here, it was a matter of survival. The planes had only one task left, to delay the enemy takeover of Rome and make an evacuation possible. Mann wanted to retreat over the Alps and hoped that the coming winter would save them.

Hilda's plane had already been commandeered and was to be armed with fighters. But she had faithful companions in Viki and Hera, who also had nothing else in mind but to reach the Islands of the Blissful, as they were called in very ancient times. Hurriedly she tried to find fuel, it was far too little, only two canisters. Desperate, they headed back to the plane. A raven, a magnificent specimen of its kind, was perched on a wing.

"We have nothing for you to eat," Viki said, "we'll have to see for ourselves." The raven tilted its head, scrawled something that sounded like it was coming from a fuzzy speaker, and then flew away.

"What's this." Hilda found a note on the pilot's seat. The note wasn't large, there was a geographical indication on it and a hint that there would be gasoline. Navigational satellites hadn't been around for centuries. Hilda looked at the map, it was obviously an old airfield near a town that had long since ceased to exist. They conferred briefly and Hilda ordered the flight. They had no choice, whoever might have given them that note.

They took off immediately, if they had hesitated for a minute they would have stayed on the ground, a jeep with armed policewomen drove up to their plane. As they were boarding they could still hear gunshots in the distance, this had to be an attack on the airfield already.

In the airplane the whole misery came to the three to the consciousness. It had already become clear to them that their society of women could not exist forever, in view of the strengthening of the archaics, but they had not suspected that it could happen so quickly.

They reached the old airfield in northwest Africa. To their amazement, they also noticed a runway that was in good condition. They landed and were ready for anything. No Archaics to be seen. Should they have walked into a trap? Nothing far and wide except for three large canisters of aviation fuel standing by the runway.

With a hand pump, refueling was tedious. Amazing how well the coolers worked. They came from a time when high technology was still around.

They reached their island and landed quite safely despite strong gusts of wind. The futile attempts to establish radio contact with the airfield had irritated them, but nevertheless the three lay in each other's arms with joy at having reached the island.

"What's that?", Viki pointed with an astonished face at a huge drone flying towards them.



## 16 Nanino and Beo in the land of the archaics

A young man came running down the path from the pass. The lower part of his caftan had been torn off or cut off in haste.

"Stop," Nanino ordered mentally. The boy stopped immediately as he ran, then slumped. Beo came out of his hiding place and saw how exhausted the boy was, shaking and gasping for air. Beo quickly gave him something to drink. Slowly he regained consciousness and thanked him. Then he began to tremble again.

"You're scared because you're being followed and they want to hang you." For a moment the boy was at a loss for words. He froze and did not move.

"We want to help you," Nanino also came out of his hiding place and paused, "if you want."

"You can't help me, the pursuers won't give up until they have me."

Beo replied, "If you tell us why you're being followed, we might be able to help you."

The youth began to tremble again and stammered: I...I have sinned, they caught my friend and I escaped. We have been betrayed."

Beo and Nanino looked at each other. From afar they heard the pursuers coming. "Go !" commanded Beo, "take off your caftan !" Nanino took from his pack-bag a dress they wore for camouflage in the land of women. "Put this on!" Nanino fetched another blanket, folding it deftly around the boy's head. "You are now a stolen woman from the north, and you say not a word!" Surrendered, the youth nodded.

Beo and Nanino could just lower their caftans, which they had tied up because of the climbing, and put on their caps when three bearded men appeared.

"Did you see him, the mangy dog?" cried one of the three.

Beo and Nanino bowed as they had learned and Nanino said, "By the Great Archaos, greetings brothers." So the three of them were forced to bow as well and say the salutation.

"Did you see anyone run past here?" their leader asked again.

"Yes, from there to there." replied Nanino in a carried voice, pointing with his right arm toward the pass and then down into the gorge. The men rushed on, down the path into the gorge.

"They didn't even ask who we were, did they?" the young man spoke up from under his head veil. Beo laughed, "you can take your head veil off now."

"Yes, the leader wanted to know who we were," Nanino answered with a smile, "and before he would begin to ask, I gave him to understand that he did not want to know. Thereupon they ran on. The other two were dumb drips, barely with thoughts of their own. - And you're Silvio, right?" The youth froze and threw himself to the ground. "Stand up Silvio and take off that head disguise, it doesn't look very nice.

Beo placed both hands on Silvio's shoulders and smiled at him, "Ask away, we are not angels as you believe in your fear. Nor will we punish you for your sin as you fear."

"No," Nanino now interfered, "we want to help you, and all we ask is that you help us as well."



Beo looked at Nanino and they both started laughing out loud. They had mentally exchanged that maybe they were angels after all but fallen ones.

Silvio threw himself on the floor and affirmed that he would be her slave until his death.

"You don't need to, you can't. We need you as an advisor, we are strangers in your land. And...", Beo looked at Nanino, "we will make an effort to talk to you and not read all your minds."

"Your three pursuers had such big wooden poles. What are they good for?" wanted to know Nanino.

"With these we climb the mountains, herd the animals, and with these we fight if we must. Only the Guard of the Bay may carry other weapons."

Beo urged, "We should hurry to get over the pass and then hide somewhere. The three of them will be back soon."

"Maybe, maybe not," Nanino grinned, "I also gave their leader a heads up that there was a waterfall further down and if they jumped down there they could safely overtake and capture the one they were chasing. In jumping they would land quite safely in a small pond-if we ever see them again we shall know, and now hurry!"

All three hurried up to the pass and down the other side.

A path branched off from the pass, and before the sun had set they reached a completely collapsed hut, which long ago might have served a shepherd with his flock, and was now no more than a heap of stones.

Beo looked through their provisions and said, "Tomorrow we should hunt or reach a town. There are three of us now. I don't like being so short. Three days' supply should always be it." There was water in a small stream in the pasture. They did not light a fire so as not to be seen so easily.

In a corner of this pile of stones they found a reasonably level piece of ground. They looked for dry leaves and grass as a base for the night. They took everything they could cover themselves with and were up before midnight.

The moon shone high in the sky. They walked through the frost-stiff grass to revive their frozen bodies. "Never spend the night above the tree line again!" commented Nanino on their situation. Then the sun finally came up. "We should make some tea for breakfast," Beo said, "Silvio, here's our pot, meanwhile we'll build a fire pit."

When the fire was already burning Silvio came back excitedly with the news: "I can't find any water. There's nothing in the creek, I haven't even found a water hole." Beo ran to the creek again with Silvio and sure enough, the creek no longer existed. "There's the solution to the riddle. There, further up, is a snowfield, and when the sun shines strongly again, the stream will flow again too."

"Then we can wash again," Silvio had taken a liking to washing naked.

"Why do you still have your foreskin?", Beo wanted to know directly.

"My mother is a stolen woman, and all slave girls will be. If they have children, they all belong to the Bay, not just the girls. The slave boys are not circumcised immediately after birth, but only after they are no longer fit to be girls. The boys are dressed as girls, Archaos



allows that, he is great and all powerful," Silvio threw himself on the floor and touched the ground three times with his forehead, then he stood up again and continued, "Amin and I, we were good dancers and we had to dance with others in front of the Bay and his guests, then give ourselves to some guest." Silvio was silent with a sad expression, then he regained his composure and continued, "We both decided not to be circumcised and made plans to escape. Even our mothers didn't find out about it. One of our dance troupe betrayed us and I also suspect who it was. Somehow he overheard that you and I liked each other, which I guess wasn't that hard since we stuck together in everything."

Silence. Then Beo took the floor, "We'll see about finding a solution for you but for now you'll have to help us. By the way, you don't have to throw yourself on the floor when you're alone with us and call your god by name."



"You should have gone further down, I found some more water there," they were both greeted by Nanino. They all three had breakfast, grabbed the donkey and moved down the stream to get back into the forest. The creek was slowly flowing again and suddenly ended in a waterfall before a steep slope. They could not climb down there, and with their donkey there was no chance. They walked along this steep slope and had to be careful not to get too close to the pass. Finally Nanino discovered a very old and almost overgrown path at the edge of a mountain where her donkey also came down. Late in the afternoon they reached the tree line and found an animal trail that led further down into the forest.

Before the sun went down they had built a small leaf hut. This night they should not freeze anymore.

"Do you know your way around here Silvio?", Beo wanted to know. He shook his head. "So we will have to look for a village." Nanino asked Silvio, "Can you teach us how to fight with a stick?" Silvio was pleased, with himself he had been thinking how they were going to defend themselves if they didn't have a stick.

The next day was spent looking for suitable sticks. Silvio said that they were green and still too heavy but with time they would make good fighting sticks. They trained and Silvio couldn't believe how Nanino and Beo mastered the fighting technique in a short time and also reacted much faster than him.

That evening they ate their last provisions in front of the newly built hut, this time without foliage but with plenty of needle chaff. "Tomorrow we will set out for your bay," Beo announced. Silvio's bite caught in his throat in shock that he had a coughing fit.

"You wanted to go to Dagan with your friend - right?", Nanino began to comfort Silvio, "we want to go there too but first we'll visit your Bay."

## 17 a new research project

The drone landed and Hilda wasn't even surprised, unlike her companions. A voice told them to take a seat in the drone. Explanations about the whys and wherefores followed.

"Well, whether we like it or not, Pandae is our boss now," Hilda said more to herself than to Viki and Hera, "we have to get involved with her."

They entered the drone where no human was present. "They could have at least sent a staff member from the center with them, then I would have more confidence" Viki interjected. They flew over the island to their research center.

"That must have been a surprise for you," they were greeted with those words by the senior staff member when Pandae was left out.

The three were amazed to see a brand new building next to their entrance to the research rooms in the underground lava cave.

The leader, her name was Anra, first explained to them how to work with Pandae. They sat comfortably in her cafeteria near the cliffs.

"We only work strategically now, Pandae organises the implementation. This is very pleasant and we have already made good progress towards the feminine wild card.

"Have you ever seen Pandae?", Hera wanted to know, interrupting Anra's flow of speech. "Pandae?", Anra laughed, "Pandae you will not see, at least not in the way you imagine. Besides, you must know that...", here Anra was silent for a moment, then continued, "you'll find out for sure. You'll get your quarters and then we'll get to work. Hilda, I still need to speak with you privately."

Anra took Hilda on a walk along the cliff and when they were so far away that Anra thought they were actually alone, she began: "Hilda, everything here is not as it seems. We work here but exactly we don't know what we do. There are service robots in the labs now and access to the computers is, shall we say, under constant control. I don't think we're needed at all anymore. The center of development is also no longer on our island but on another. None of us have been there and we can't go there either."

"So what exactly do you guys do when you 'strategize'?", Hilda wanted to know more specifically.

"We're considering test situations for the FWC, that's the code name for our feminine wild card, and we're then assessing behavior in a 3D world, where we also get access to that world." A little more quietly, she continued, "I'm not sure we're not actually the test subject, not the FWC. Sometimes we are alone, sometimes there are several in the same world. We think up situations, Pandae designs them in 3D, and occasionally we get situations from Pandae, though I get the impression such events and situations have existed throughout human history."

"I'm sure you'll allow me to interrupt you here: is this FWC to become a virtual entity, or is it also to appear in "flesh and blood?"



"Of course it will be incarnated. Only protracted testing on specimens that have not yet matured should be avoided this time. The MWC, that is, the male part is, after all, still from different generations."



"I don't quite understand that. Anna had made the decisive breakthrough, hadn't she? She wanted to achieve human immortality, or at least a very long life, with her genetic experiments?"

"I'm not so sure about that anymore."

The two walked down a small path to the beach. The waves were relatively large, with the air almost motionless, and followed a Gaussian distribution in amplitude. At certain intervals, particularly large waves also came. They settled into the black sand.

"Why aren't you so sure anymore," Hilda huffed.

"Because in the virtual world we also have MWC and this one Anna couldn't have designed."

"Why not, there was a genetic plan after all."

"Yes there was, but that wasn't all. There was something that even Anna didn't know, and it most certainly came from Pandae. She must have accompanied this development of Anna's and ... she also intervened. How, there is only speculation."

"Speculation?"

"It's not just the asymptotically approaching zero growth, it's also an extra component in the blood and probably some organs are modified. That's all I can tell you," Anra smiled, "maybe we'll find out!"

Hilda reflected: "What seemed incredible to me at the time was the computing power we had at our disposal, it certainly wasn't enough and we called it what it was: wild card - an impossibility becomes possible.

They walked back to the cafeteria. Hilda didn't think this was what she wanted, to train an FCW in a 3D world. She wanted to find Gertrud, even at the risk of it being the disappointment of her life.

Anra took Hilda to her quarters, a small bungalow with an even smaller terrace in front. Especially nice was the bright and friendly bathroom with the skylight over the whole room.

Hilda hoped that here she would find the relaxation she desperately needed after the turbulent events of recent times.

Pleasantly soft water trickled down from the shower onto her still attractive body. Now she felt the stress of the last time disappear from her with the water in the drain. As she did so, she noticed that Anra had shown little interest in the events in Rome. If she tried to start it, she immediately blocked it. Did she know about the tragic events and how bad things were with her world of women?

The silken bedclothes flowed around her naked body. Hilda fell into a deep and long sleep.

She didn't know how long she had been asleep when she heard a sound that reminded her of two metal bars hitting each other. She tried to get up, but felt no strength to do so. The light came on and flickered as if it was about to go out. With several attempts, she finally managed to balance on her powerless legs.

Outside was night. Clinging to the wall, she staggered into the bathroom. There was no water running. The light flickered more, dimmed, then went out altogether. She groped her way into the living room. Through the large window looking out onto the terrace, she could see that some of the more distant bungalows were on fire.



## 18 Archaos is big



"They'll recognize me, even in women's clothing." Silvio grew more and more nervous and fear spread across his face. "You don't look like grown men either, they'll arrest you too and ..." "and what," Nanino asked with accentuated calm, "we'll tell them about our secret Archaos school and then they'll shut up. We are the disciples of Archaos." Silvio was completely confused. That the two of them were special, perhaps even angels on a secret mission, he knew and believed quite strongly. Nanino and Beo exchanged mental thoughts. Neither were that sure that they would find faith with this display of their passion.

The stream now led them out of the forest to an alpine pasture. Sheep were grazing and a dog came running towards them, but was immediately called back by the shepherd. They approached the shepherd, who was close to a state of shock. He had not seen such a lift before. In his eyes, two half-grown men were leading a donkey and a girl out of the almost inaccessible mountains.

"By the great Archaos, greetings brother." All three bowed. The shepherd neither uttered a word nor could he bow in astonishment. Then suddenly he threw himself on the ground and touched the grass three times with his forehead.

"We won't hurt you, get up and go in peace!", Nanino reassured the shepherd. Beo couldn't stop a grin from forming on his face. He had overheard Nanino suggesting ray wreaths around the shepherd's heads.



The shepherd had nothing to share or sell to the three except a morsel of flat bread. They inquired about the next village and how to get to the Bay's residence. They took their leave with the customary bow and the words, "May Archaios, great be he, protect you on your future paths."

A large black raven that had been sitting on a weather-bleached tree stump nearby flew up and down into the valley. Nanino had noticed him and tried to make contact with him. He had the impression, however, that the raven struggled and then simply flew away. Nanina and Beo were talking about the strangely large raven. Silvio pricked up his ears and in his superstition he had identified the raven as an evil guardian of hell.

"The raven means bad luck, great bad luck, it is sent by the demon of hell to lead us to hell." Silvio was excited.

"Do you know this place in the valley that the shepherd told us about?" wanted Beo to know. "I've heard of it, it's not very far from a big hunting lodge where we've had to dance before the Bay and his guests. The hunting lodge is on a mountain and you can't get in easily." "Silvio, do you think perhaps it is something like a castle to take refuge in when enemies come?" Silvio's face brightened, "Yes, if enemies come you are safe." Beo looked at Nanino who nodded. "Good Silvio, we will go there, maybe we will meet the Bay there, his residence is probably a bit too adventurous in our elevator right now - too many people."

Late in the afternoon they reached the village. It was not very large, but had a meeting and prayer room with a small dome. A pillar with a globe on it, stood beside the front door, towering over the structure. A crowd of boys came running to meet them and escorted them into the village at a safe distance.

Nanino inquired about an inn and a taller boy led them to a house with a few wooden benches and tables in front. A few men were drinking a steaming beverage from brown clay cups. After the usual greeting and praise of Archaios, Beo and Nanino sat down at an empty table. Silvio, as discussed, stayed with the donkey. A fully veiled woman brought a bowl of water for Nanino and Beo to wash their hands, then immediately removed herself to the house. Beo felt uneasy, his experience with humans still slight. Nanino ordered this drink that was an infusion of dried sweet fruits.

A few taller boys were still standing nearby, while the others spread the news of the strange strangers in the village. By and by the rest of the men of the village came to the inn. Nanino ordered bread and goat's cheese from the innkeeper and ordered that Silvia, as they now called the disguised Silvio, should also get something and that the donkey should be taken care of.

In the dusk candles were placed on the tables and two slightly older men came to the table of the two. Nanino politely offered them a seat. As it turned out later, they were something like the lords of the place. One, the Baron, owned most of the lands and much of the livestock, the other the souls of the inhabitants, he was the Aman, the prayer leader.

Beo told the story of the raid over the mountains and how their guide and the whole raid got ambushed and all died and how they were now on their way to the Bay's hunting lodge with a prey woman.

"And where were you when the party was ambushed?" the Baron wanted to know. We had the task of staying with the three women who had been stolen by then. Two ran away but we were able to hold the third, younger one," Nanino added.

At the Aman, Beo noticed doubts, which he also immediately voiced: "And you are still quite children, beardless, without manly dignity, who would take such as you at all?"

Feverishly, Beo and Nanino mentally exchanged words and almost without delay, Beo replied: "We are disciples of the Archaos and that is part of our training, missionizing the infidels." Nanino put his hand over Beo's shoulder and gave him a kiss on the cheek, which the Baron noticed with interest and gave the Aman a closed mine.

The baron ended the evening and invited them to spend the night with him. The donkey was given a stable and Silvia was allowed to sleep in a chamber for female slaves. He sat down with Beo and Nanino on the roof of his house and had one of his women bring fruit and a decanter with three glasses. Beo inspected the roof and could see that the courtyard was enclosed by a large wall and a gate. Were there robbers and burglars here too, were his thoughts.

The Baron poured for the two of them, adding, "This is a fruit juice that has been stored for a while and is now of the proper ripeness." And without transition he immediately changed the subject. "I suppose you know this from your hunting lodge," the Baron grinned at them both.

"I'm going to taste this," Nanino said, guessing what it was but would Beo be able to stomach it too? "Mmm, tastes pretty good," he praised, remembering that he could, how, he didn't really know, affect it or block it. Beo mentally interfered: If it's poison, our nanobots will be able to neutralize it.

All three toasted and Beo said, "That's pretty strong!" The Baron grinned, "Yeah here in the country we need something stronger than you guys up there in the castle." Beo and Nanino played along and laughed at each other. Another woman now brought a plate of roasted fowl and disappeared again very quickly.

"One hears many things about the Bay, and we are not far from the hunting lodge. Can you not even give a taste of your art, I have not yet had the honor of being the guest of the Bay. By the way," the baron became serious, "that kiss earlier was careless. The Aman is a fanatical Archaos preacher. So, show what you can do and I'll see if I can protect you if necessary."

Beo and Nanino came to an understanding and regretted that they had not let Silvio show them any of the dances. Nanino had an idea: "We'll show you the newest dance we had practiced before we went on mission. For that we need our sticks and you...you know what." "I don't know, tell me!" the Baron replied mischievously. "You know it, I can tell, so have them brought. The Baron called for a woman and gave her instructions. Soon she returned with a bundle of girl's clothes. The two of them each chose a short skirt, leaving the upper part of their bodies bare. Then began their dance, which was an artfully performed stick fight, always mentally agreed upon in a flash.

The Baron was speechless twice. He had never seen such elegant and perfect boys' bodies and such artistic stick fighting.

During their demonstration, the Baron had drunk glass after glass and was now visibly in a very relaxed mood. Nanino had an easy time of it. He grabbed the Baron's head with both hands and pulled him close, whispering to him in a hypnotic voice, "Show us where we can sleep now and we'll see in the morning." The Baron could only blindly follow Nanino's words and took them both to a chamber for guests. When the two were alone, Beo grinned at Nanino, "Hey, I never thought this could be fun too." He then pulled Nanino to him, kissed him, and still mockingly said, "Tomorrow we're going to tour the realm of Archaos." It turned out to be a very nice night for both of them, now that Silvio wasn't anywhere around either.

At dawn they heard a voice crying aloud, "Where are the two sinners, seize them! Open up!" Several men, led by the Aman hammered against the strong wooden gate. Silvio came running up the stairs to join them. He had his stick in his hand, "They're going to hang you both and probably stone me. I feared it when I saw you two kissing from afar yesterday." "That was harmless," Beo tried to reassure. "It wasn't, several men saw it, they are witnesses and it was a mortal sin in front of Archaos!"

## 19 Hilda's death

Hilda could not understand what had happened. She groped her way out onto the terrace. It was sluggish and full of pain.

Like startled birds, three smaller drones flew towards the sea. Barely over the sea she saw three fireballs flash and the drones torpedoed into the water. Only vaguely could she make out a huge ship in the distance. Muzzle flashes flashed from it and soon after she could see the impacts on land. Great explosions swirled rocks and earth through the air. Two shells had hit the building next to her entrance to the underground labs, remnants of wall and parts of the roof flying through the air.

She heard screaming from the direction of the cafeteria. Did someone need help? Hilda tried to walk and noticed that she could already walk better. She dragged herself in that direction, throwing herself to the ground again in between as grenades detonated again. The last bit she could almost run again, the paralysis in her limbs quickly subsiding. In the cafeteria she met Anra, who was making a makeshift attempt to squeeze the blood from her



injured arm. Hilda immediately bandaged the arm with a scrap of cloth torn into strips. "What happened, Anra? What's going on?" Anra groaned and pointed to a trapdoor behind the bar. "There's a trapdoor there, open it, I can't take it anymore. We need to get out of here really fast."

Hilda searched for the floor panel, found it and was about to lift it when a grenade hit the cafeteria. Hilda registered the explosion and then it went dark.

## 20 On the way to the palace of the hunt

The Baron appeared and was relatively calm, even smiling at the three of them. "This was bound to happen. I have instructed my servants not to let anyone in. If they do try, I'll kill that Aman, he's been a thorn in my side for a long time."

Silvio had forgotten to put on the veil in his haste and stood there in only the dress, which he had also put on backwards in his haste.

"You must show them that you are angels. I've seen them carry torches, and if the Baron doesn't turn you in, they'll burn the estate to the ground."

The Baron was speechless, he threw himself on the floor and begged for forgiveness. For him, the wondrous events of the previous night had condensed into an explosive realization: Angels had visited him.

Beo had dreamed in the night of the raven that had also spoken to him and he now knew what to do. He mentally shared it with Nanino and they both went to the roof.

Nanino focused on two of the men outside the gate and Beo took aim at the Aman. At that moment, a large raven flew up and perched on Beo's shoulder. Beo had been expecting him.

"A-M-A-N - you have fallen away from the true faith. Go hence from this village and never return. So say the angels of Archaos." Beo had spoken very loudly and now the raven began to croak in a human voice, "HINFORT! - HINFORT!"

The Aman had first thrown himself on the ground and then had quickly gotten up and run away at the cawing of the raven.

Nanino had little trouble suggesting two angels with wings to some of the assembled bearded men. The raven he made look a little larger and not unlike an eagle. They immediately threw themselves to the ground and begged for forgiveness. The others did likewise.

The raven began to caw again, "HINFORT - ALL - HINFORT - ALLEEEEE!"

The men hurried to flee from the Baron's estate.

Nanino looked at Beo. "I can connect with the raven now too. Pandae is with us or is it Alan?" Beo nodded. "What's the difference there? I've been expecting it for a while. A new unlock or Pandae has set up a base here somewhere. Let's go visit the Bay!" "Yes," Nanino returned with a sense of adventure.

At the stairs to the roof stood the Baron and Silvio. As Beo and Nanino approached, the two bowed to the ground.

"Baron," began Nanino, "we thank you for your hospitality and promised help. In return you will have our donkey with all that is in its saddlebags. For each of us you will have another bag of provisions prepared by your women. Do not forget to pack a bottle of your strong drink."

The Baron had bowed reverently at every sentence. Now he went down at once to grant the wishes of the angels. "Silvio, you will continue to accompany us," Beo turned to Silvio, who was nearly down, "and you will teach us to dance before we pay a visit to the Bay.



Carrying three shoulder bags, each filled with ample provisions, the three left the Baron for the hunting palace. All the residents lay praying on the ground as they wandered out the gate.

After half an hour they could see the hunting palace on a hill. A well-maintained path led directly there.

"Now it's about time, Silvio, that you showed us how to dance. We don't want to arrive at the castle as unprepared as we were at the Baron's," Beo began, and Nanino added, "show us everything, even though you might not be so comfortable doing it in front of us." They both laughed. Silvio made a great effort. He bowed and began to dance, still noting that he was never alone there. Then he bowed again and stood waiting.

"Well, Silvio, what happens now," Beo wanted to know, although he could read from Silvio's thoughts that he was reluctant to describe it. "What I overhear," Nanino continued, "is that you are then beckoned by one of the guests." Silvio nodded.

"Alright Silvio, we'll reverse the roles," Beo prompted Silvio with a smile, "You're a guest of the Bay and Nanino just finished the dance. You then beckon him to you and do to him what was usually done to you." Silvio got all embarrassed and blushed.



Silvio had thrown himself backwards into the grass at the side of the path, closed his eyes and didn't want to open them again, he just wanted to keep dreaming.

"Stunning," Beo agreed. "Yeah, I know, the women felt the same way. They were in a frenzy, even the next day."

"So we're not made for humans after all," Beo concluded. "Yeah, we're really not."

After a long rest, during which Silvio had regained his composure somewhat, they ran on and were already at the foot of the mountain when they were overtaken by three swift horsemen. They ran up the approach to the castle and could already hear the commotion that had begun with the arrival of the riders.

They reached the now closed gate. Nanino was amazed; the guards had submachine guns. A sally port opened and five guards rushed out armed. "These are the wanted men!"

Beo, Nanino and Silvio were arrested, their hands tied together and led inside the hunting lodge.

## 21 The training camp on the islands of the blissful

Hilda had the impression that her head would soon burst. It was dark and slowly it became lighter. She was lying on a cot and Anra was sitting next to her. "I feel a bit responsible for you," she began to enlighten Hilda, "I didn't tell you what to expect so you wouldn't scare yourself unnecessarily. Experiencing your own death for the first time isn't exactly pleasant. You have a chip in the back of your head and it was trained for three days while you were in the Deep Sheep. Then you were brought back and woke up in a virtual world." Gertrude groaned. "It all went well though, you made friends with your virtual body very quickly."

"What do you mean, it wasn't real, you weren't hurt, and there was no attack from the Atlantic?"

"No," she reassured Anra, "you didn't have time to take a good look at everything, you were immediately in an exceptional situation where action was called for."

"Slow down Anra, I was in a computer world and it was projected directly into my brain through a chip?"

"Right, you have direct communication with Pandeae now," Anra confirmed. "That's terrible! Can Pandeae look directly into my brain and observe what I'm thinking?" Anra nodded.

"Why wasn't I asked?"

"Because voluntarily, I don't think anyone would agree to that. After all, we all have chasms in our thinking, too, which - fortunately for human society - are not committed in most cases." Hilda felt like she was crushed to the ground, she felt like she was about to faint.

Anra smiled. "Now even if you think you're going to destroy Pandeae at the first best opportunity, that doesn't really scare her, we all thought it ourselves in the beginning. And another thing, you have a protected area and have it in your power to determine who should know about you besides Pandeae." Anra paused, then continued uncertainly and quietly, "I've even come to believe that Pandeae herself doesn't have access to our very private soul abysses either."

Anra quickly stood up and announced in a voice that was back to normal, "I'll see you in the cafeteria and talk more there, you'll want to freshen up after that trip to hell."

Hilda needed time, it was too much at the moment. She was caught off guard and had given up her individuality, her personal freedom - if there was ever such a thing. What was left of her if her thoughts were accessible to Pandeae?

With difficulty she slowly came to, took an ice cold shower and felt a little better afterwards. In the cafeteria were her companions Hera, Viki and her personal attendant Anra. Hera and Viki couldn't help but grin.

"So, reborn? We've had half a day longer to recover from that shock," she greeted Viki, "we got to watch you try to save Anra. That wasn't bad, though, if you'd been a little faster, you still would have made it to the underground bunker."

Hera reassured Hilda, "We didn't make it either but maybe next time."



"That sounds good," Anra agreed, "it shows optimism and gives hope."

"What's the point of all this, it's reminiscent of the computer games of over a thousand years ago. Death wasn't so bad and you could start over at the last score. We learned about that in our training but never played it ourselves."

Hilda became indignant. "Our civilization is going down right now and you're having fun playing computer games on a deserted island."

Anra countered, "Hilda you know why our civilization is going down and must. We realized far too late that we had a standstill in our evolution and have only conservation and preservation written all over our flags. There is no such thing as stagnation in evolution, for it is tantamount to regression. We were, and still are, too good, so that we can be destroyed by any primitive archaic civilization."

Hilda had become very thoughtful, sipping her hot coffee. How was this one made? She didn't really want to know at that moment.

"There are developments after all," Hilda resumed the conversation, "Dagan is an attempt after all even if I think this so-called 'kingdom of tame men' is an aberration. What is this going to be? According to the information I have, there are supposed to be slightly fewer male offspring there. This only replaces our virginity production with the artificial womb and that too on a long ago overcome state of the human evolution. One wants to replace the technically perfected gene design again with one consisting of a few breeding males and a herd of females."

Viki interrupted her: "You've met Nanina or Nanino, as he calls himself now, and Beo. Isn't that a hopeful development if, yes, if we manage to create another female variant?"

Anra interjected, "That's not entirely true, Dagan doesn't have less men than women, that's where you're confusing Dagan with the Heavenly Child Sect. And, why should there be a female version of man? Carrying and raising children may have played a not unimportant role in the evolution to humans, only this principle does not represent an evolution, all higher animals also have this rearing program embedded in their genes.

Hera interfered: "Why should there always be only one further development? So that there is no regression? Couldn't you imagine an island where people are well off, happy, live long until they tire of happiness and go out of life with joy?"

"You think there could be such a thing as the islands of the blissful? This harmony soon ends in weariness and boredom. This universe is constructed differently, built up is probably the better term, it exists out of the constant alternation of harmony and disharmony or chaos alternating with cosmos, as the ancient philosophers knew. The constant interplay, that is life, that is change."

"Perhaps so, Hilda, only here on planet Earth we have managed to create higher orders of harmony all the time," Anra interrupted.

"And end how? No! The whole thing makes no sense, unless we want to assume a world creator, a god, I plead for an island of bliss with games, sports and fun. That could be our Earth. No growth, no competition, no greed, no fear, no wars."

"But with a lot of stupidity, naivety, and idiocy," Anra interrupted.

"And, Anra, what does Pandae want?" wanted Hilda to know.

Anra smiled and took her time, she sank into herself, so that Hilda already thought she had emigrated into some inner virtual world.

"Figure it out!" Anra stood up and walked away. It had become quiet, very quiet in the cafeteria.

## 22 Prisoners in the Palace of the Bay

All three were brought into one tower. The top two floors each consisted of one room and were something like guest rooms. The bottom floor was a recreation room with a small bath room along with a toilet. On the top floor were four beds and a small staircase led up to a platform at the top.

The guards removed their shackles and locked the strong door.

"This doesn't look like death row," Silvio noted with relief.

"From what I could read from the guards' thoughts, I guess it's more like a security detention," Nanino informed Beo, who nodded and added, "They're not that clear about us. Are we something like angels or demons now." They both laughed, only Silvio had become unsure again, that raven and his voice had gone through him. And it had taken him longer to recover from it. Fortunately, Silvio was curious enough to find out what would happen next with them. What did he have to lose, a short time ago in mortal fear and now, with Nanino, he felt like a tiger with no enemies. He would have to approach her about the raven, it was giving him less and less peace. The raven was scary and had shaken his belief that he would travel with angels.

"Hey, there's a shower here!" shouted Beo from the bathroom, "I'll take one first." Silvio was the last one and he ran out of water too. When he came out of the bathroom, Beo and Nanino were sitting in their seats as if absent-minded. Silvio didn't dare address them, he sat down as well and looked out the window. Maybe he could see the raven. But he saw only guards on the other towers.

The heavy door was unlocked and two boys, of about nine years of age, entered the room, each with a tray full of food and drink, placed everything on the table and stopped beside it. Then the blond of the two asked if they had any requests.

Nanino and Beo had emerged again from their inner situation meeting. They hadn't yet found a strategy for how they were going to act towards the Bay. Were they supposed to be angels? They'd expect a little more magic there, not some raven. After all, Beo told herself, Pandeae had her eye on them and would surely intervene again if they were in danger again.

"You are assigned to us as servants, I see," Nanino began, "What did they tell you we were?"

The other boy with brown hair began, stuttering slightly, "They say you are great wizards and can fly." "Then why haven't we flown away yet?" asked Nanino with a sneer. The two boys looked at each other, puzzled, and evidently decided to say no more.

"You can go, and if we need you, we'll pull the bell pull here, that's what you were going to tell us, right?"

The two hurried to knock on the door, the guards opened and the servants disappeared. The heavy door was again firmly closed.

"Good night everyone!" shouted Beo still through the closed door after them.



The next morning, the two servants picked up the dishes and then brought breakfast. All three of them had not eaten so deliciously for a long time. The boys came back after some time and picked up the dishes and the leftovers, which were still plentiful. Then one boy came alone and brought a note on a silver tray inviting them to an audience with the Bay.

They were accompanied by the guards, who took the hidden knives from their caftans beforehand. They were no longer tied up, nor were the guards who had tied them up yesterday. They did not run across the courtyard of the palace but followed corridors inside the spacious building.

Finally they reached a room with three boys already waiting for them. They led them through another room and the guards stayed behind. Then they entered the room, on the back mosaic wall of which stood a large divan with colorful cushions. On it sat the Bay, dressed in a blue ankle-length robe embroidered with gold thread. He was a man of about 50, his hair and beard totally shaved off, unlike the other bearded and shaggy men in this country.

Only Silvio knew the Bay, but only dressed in a richly decorated cap that did justice to his claim to rule. What also surprised him was the lack of a beard. He knew him from the feasts and there he had always worn a beard.

To the left and right of the walls were also diwans, separated by room dividers. In each of these niches there was still a lamp, which was not lit now at this time.

The bay beckoned the three and told the servants to go. In front of the large divan were three round cushions on which they were instructed to take their seats. The Bay perched on the divan, while the three sat almost on the carpeted floor.

"There's one more missing, your black friend, the talking raven," the Bay began, "or is that already a legend they're spinning around you. I'm going to assume you've mastered the art of mass hypnosis. Looking at you, one wouldn't believe it: half-men without beards. So who are you guys? Not you," the Bay pointed at Silvio, "you were supposed to be hanging from a gallows by now. But then these angels appeared to you and everything changed. Tell me frankly! Are these two angels or just charlatans?"

Silvio began to tremble, unable to utter a word in fear.

"You're afraid? Well I assure you that you will not be hanged here by me. But what I promise you is a trial, to which I have also brought your fellow dancer, who reported you to the religious guards."

Without saying a word, Silvio threw himself on the floor and remained lying there.

"Stand up and sit down like the other two. You are not yet condemned and delivered to the religious guards. Whether it comes to that is up to you. You have two wizards at your side, and let's see what they can do."

Beo and Nanina looked at each other. Somehow, it was getting creepy for them now too. Other than mind reading, they didn't know any magical looking tricks.

"May I present this to you, the Baron of the village in the valley has instructed us to present the drink to you as a guest gift." Beo had stood up and handed the bottle of high-proof to the Bay.

The Bay laughed, "I am truly used to other gifts."

Beo tried to go all out now. He could not give the real reason, the spying on the military installations. "We are here - and you are right - to demand a pardon for Silvio and a punishment for his denunciator."

The Bay was speechless, then he began in a thunderous voice: "Who do you think I am? Am I Archaos, perhaps? I did not make the laws!"

Nanino tried to look calm as he echoed the Bay's thoughts, "You may not be Archaos, yet you hold the power of life and death in this part of the peninsula. And we also know, you have to constantly fight against your enemy, the Guardian Council of the Religious. And we know this too: The Watcher's Council has gathered a mob, and they will lay armed siege to your stronghold. You lead a dissolute life that is a thorn in the side of some of these religious fanatics. Especially these, in their eyes, immoral revelries with dancing, gambling, and .... You know."

The bay's face turned red with anger and immediately wanted to scream, but Beo was able to mentally calm him down, albeit with great effort.

"But we are not here to judge you. With the religious guards..." Nanino paused, "you'll be able to handle them yourselves." It had been easy, after all, to get into the Bay's mind and tell him these things. By doing so, he hoped to impress the Bay better than a few magic tricks could have.

Two boys appeared and placed fruit and a few bottles and glasses on the small table in front of the divan.

The Bay had calmed down, thanks in part to Beo's help. "Then you are something like angels after all, even if I don't believe that and still want to know your true background. If...then you are not from Archaos, for his laws are set in stone!"

"That's right, we're not from Archaos, which, and you know this perfectly well, is a construct to dominate the people of your realm, and you also know that religious guards make it easier for you to rule."

"That's enough! You still have not told me where you came from. You are beardless and thus without manhood, and yet you seem older in mind. Who are you?"

Beo replied, "And where is your beard, and on your head you are already missing hair too?"

The Bay struggled not to let this cheekiness pass and yet had to let it stand as it did.

Nanino began to make up a story, "We come from Atlantis, and indeed we have lived more solar years than our appearance would lead you to believe."

"And where is this Atlantis?" interrupted the Bay.

"In the Atlantic, that's..." "I know what the Atlantic is, you can save it. And here you are, just like that, meeting this Silvio and deciding to help him. Are you trying to play me for a fool?" Inwardly, the Bay wavered: should he call the guards immediately and have these strange guests thrown into the dungeon?

"Are you even men or just genderless demons in the masks of angels. I'm actually wavering between throwing you in the dungeon or adding you to the dance troupe."

Nanino and Beo looked at each other. The Bay had a strong will and was not easily manipulated. They had to be careful. He seemed to rule his totalitarian realm with an iron fist. What else the two of them could tell, the Bay was increasingly able to seal himself off from their suggestions. Nanino had only experienced that with Gertrud.

"For now, take us into your dance troupe on noble Bay."

Patronizingly, the Bay replied, "Yes, if you can dance, I'll give you a chance to escape dungeon and execution that way. Somehow I like you."

The Bay beckoned his servants to join him on the divan and commanded Silvio to step to his side. "Take off your caftans, put away your sandals, and show me what you can do."

Beo and Nanino took off their clothes, their dancing skills seen by Silvio they could remember well. Quick as a flash, they mentally set up a choreography with a few artistic variations.

They knew by now the Bay's preference for graceful male bodies and they had them and with that, they hoped, they would get by without Alan the Raven. Was he present somewhere, and if so, how could he help them? Better communication with this envoy of the Pandae gave them both a deep confidence in all their explorations of late. Beo was certain that the raven had a connection to Alan. He also knew that as long as Pandae existed, they would be practically immortal. They hadn't learned that directly in their training, it was only his escape from the island that had given Beo that knowledge.



"There, now you see us naked and now we'd like a little around the loins, surely that's the custom here,"

The Bay instructed a servant and he ran to fetch two dancing skirts.

The dance began and once again Silvio was speechless as the two imitated his dance performance and had some acrobatic moves ready that Silvio certainly couldn't achieve without long training, if at all.

The Bay was speechless and could not find words for a while. Then, still full of admiration, he said, "You will train my dance troupe, train them, they must learn that, and then we will give a great feast. Tomorrow you will begin."

Beo, Nanino and Silvio were taken back to their guest tower. Through the windows they could see the palace being prepared for defense.

"What do you think Silvio - get your mind off Nanino - will the siege be any of our business? Have you ever experienced anything like this?"

Silvio had trouble understanding this question at all, during the dance he had only hung on Nanino with his eyes, imagining himself in some kind of love heaven.

"No, but the Bay has you guys," Silvio beamed with confidence.

## 23 Confused thoughts

Computer games from centuries past? Hilda couldn't really comprehend that. Was this Pandeae's way of studying human behaviour, this complex bio-being, always vacillating between chaos and cosmos?

What could Pandeae possibly learn from humans but fear, greed, laziness, and stupidity? Had it not been a peaceful 1000 years that would never have been achieved with the male element.

This culture was archaic only in its outward appearance, not in its essence. Had they not created the new, albeit female, man? At least to a good extent? The genetic selection in their research laboratories had managed to eliminate many of the animalistic relics of man, the annoying terminal hair, competition, greed and many other genetically anchored shortcomings.

Yes, they had progressed a good bit on the path, on the path in harmony with nature but on a higher level than the bisexual society before it.

Why did this culture have to perish?

Hilda doubted, pondered, and could not come to a final conclusion about the experience with Nanino and Beo. The first reaction: we need a female counterpart of these clones, because that's what they probably were, identical twins with few variations and a love for themselves and their brothers that could never be fully satisfied. Could a human society be started anew like this?

Hilda suspected that Pandeae didn't know either.

Then again, anger and hatred arose within her, these two abilities she had already thought no longer possible, eradicated. They had failed, had overlooked the fact that these archaic bisexual societies had survived unnoticed in remote, inhospitable regions of this earth. They had simply overlooked them in their campaign against the male sex. Yes, for a good cause, for the survival of humanity and its evolution into a harmonious, peaceful world, it had been necessary to destroy the male genes.

Their rage and hatred was directed against the unstoppable advance of archaic, two-sex societies. They had crawled out of their rat holes. Disgusting!

Pandeae? Could Pandeae save her, and if so, why should she? Hilda found no reason why Pandeae should save her. Her monosexual society had failed as well.

Apparently, Pandeae had long since ceased to be concerned with the creation of a female New Man. Why else would she, Hilda, perform actions in virtual worlds that Pandeae could evaluate. Hera and Viki had had similar situations to deal with before they too met virtual deaths. From the beginnings of ancestral humanity, she knew that some priests brought temporary death to adepts. When they awoke from it, they believed in an otherworldly world, a paradise, and death no longer had any effect on the adepts thus prepared. Now they could spread the religion with conviction. Lack of oxygen and drugs were nevertheless no gateway to the after-death paradise, so what was this virtual experiment supposed to show her?

Hilda thought nothing of using an expert system to help Pandeae have experiences that only humans could have. She also couldn't imagine Pandeae wanting to create a super clone, a super human. She still had doubts though, were Beo and Nanino such superhumans in a sense? They corresponded to the ideal of beauty, which already found its expression in ancient Greece, when the developed technique of sculpture could form the ideal human body.

Today she would take the day off, she needed distance. Intelligent people need the quiet and solitude much more often than the less gifted and she had belonged to the elite.

In her mini-kitchen she prepared herself a coffee - where did that come from? - she sat down on the small square in front of her bungalow and looked out over the Atlantic. How soothing, how dreamlike, how she would enjoy it even more intensely if, if, yes, if Gertrud were here. Gertrud, she was still her unrequited love. Why did she have to move in with a very young, naive but pretty girl, even then. She had never cared for young girls, but rather for more mature women. She would have liked to be loved by her teachers and she did, at least in her fantasies. But when she saw Gertrud for the first time and got to know her tomboyish manner, her feminine beauty and her intellect, it was done. She was the woman of her fantasies and suppressed everything else.

But Hilda was trapped by Pandeae, was she a slave to help facilitate Pandeae's rise? How could she leave the island? She was at Pandeae's mercy. Any attempt was bound to fail. There was no ship, no plane that could not be prevented from escaping by a drone.

Hilda heard a low whirring sound next to her bungalow.



## 24 Court day

"Silvio, we will do all we can to get you pardoned, and your informer-well, he must be punished, and that punishment must deter other informer from doing similar things." Nanino hoped thus to suggest confidence and hope to Silvio. Silvio had no need of that; he had a primal confidence in Nanino and Beo that was the equivalent of a strong religious faith.

Beo wanted to turn Silvio's thoughts to something else. They would have to convince the Bay and that was not so easy mentally, since he was less devout and not really religious.

"Why does the Bay let little boys serve him, and who are these children of?" Beo had already learned the broad outlines of human history in his training, but these details were foreign to him.

"Children are harmless, and they don't kill their rulers with a dagger." Silvio wondered why Beo didn't know that.

"And who are the parents?", Beo wanted to know further. "They are all slave children, as am I. Those who can afford it have several wives, they may also be stolen or have come voluntarily from beyond the mountains. The stolen ones and the ones who came voluntarily are always slaves and often live apart from the other women."

"And the children of the slaves?", Beo wanted to know further. "They stay with the women until they are eight, then they are sorted into those who go to a school for a year and those who are sold in the slave market. Then they are sorted again into those who go on to school and those who are now sold. But if they are fit to be dancers, they can become that too, like me. There are only a few of them, though."

"Surely the children are getting bigger too, and therefore perhaps more dangerous to the ruler or the pasha?"

Silvio shrugged, "They go away around age thirteen."

"Disappear and go where?", Beo did not let up.

"There's just rumors."

Come on Silvio, you can tell us already," Beo smiled at him.

Silvio wasn't sure what he could say but if he didn't tell them anything then yes they could read his mind. "If you're good, you get into the Guard of the Bay, somewhere in the mountains, and if you're not, you get circumcised and sold in the market."

"This is all for boys, right?"

"Yes"

Nanino interjected, "And you want to go to Dagan even if we manage to get you rehabilitated?"

Silvio beamed, looking at Nanino, "Yes, with you!"

The door opened and a servant of the Bay came in and looks at Beo and Nanino. "I am to ask you both to come to the Bay."

"Not coming to dance class? - Good we're coming."

The Bay receives them with a smile. "Well, here come the Atlantians from the Isle of Bliss. Have you brought me an apple from the Tree of Hesperides?"

"No we didn't," Beo regrets, smiling back, "the apples are reserved for the Atlantians."

"I have had you come here because I have been inspired by your... shall we say... of your special abilities." The Bay sat on a throne and indicated to both that they could sit on a stool in front of it.

"Before the mob gets here - a few more questions for you. I've been told you have the ability to read minds and also create visual suggestions."

Beo and Nanino looked at each other.

"Don't be surprised, even though we are currently living in an archaic age here, I know the history of humanity very well. I'm only telling you this because I don't think I can hide it from you."

The Bay paused, then began again, "You are trying to read my mind and? ...are you succeeding?"

Beo began to reply, "Bay you are keeping a secret...a bigger secret. We will try not to take it from you, but you may tell us and we will keep it to ourselves."

The Bay didn't elaborate, "Alright, that'll do for now - later I want to make a deal with you - right now I need to deal with the religious and I'd like your help to do that."

Nanino looked at Beo and with his mental agreement, he replied to the Bay with a slight bow, "How can we help you? Our request is to rehabilitate Silvio and leave your country with him again!"

"That won't be easy, and I'm sure I won't be happy to let you go," the Bay became thoughtful, "That's only possible if you play the angels with me, too. I see no other way to accomplish this. We will withstand a siege until a relief force arrives from the mountains."

Nanino mentally exchanged ideas with Beo. What good would it do, would they achieve something similar with the mob as in the village. They both came to the opinion that they would never be able to influence such a fanatical crowd by targeted suggestions of individuals.

"We won't manage to impress the whole mob outside the castle," Nanino answered resignedly.

"This is going to be different. I will hold court before a manageable crowd. Jurisdiction rests with me and not with the religious," and after a pause he added, "what about your raven, does it really exist and if so, where is it?"

Beo laughed: "If you open a window, he might come". Nanino added, "You should definitely do that. If something goes wrong, I'm sure he can help us."

The Bay sat thoughtfully on his throne, then turned to the two. "My people have been informed. You are free to move about the castle. Your charge must remain in your chambers until the trial. Leave now until I call you for trial. Oh one more thing..." the Bay put on a grin, "perform in your dancing costume, with your graceful beauty you can upset the religious fanatics and if you can, suggest to them that you have wings. I want to see their fearful faces! Religious people are fascinated and full of fear of angels, because they always have a guilty conscience somewhere."

Beo and Nanino said goodbye and decided to walk around the castle. They were met with respect and bowed as soon as they were seen. At the gate stood two guardsmen with only a spear. They approached and were politely asked not to leave the castle as the gate would soon be closed. Behind the gate, the gate guards were preparing for the mob. Nanino recognized submachine guns, like the ones Gertrude had when he was freed. The castle did look more like a fortress or a fortified castle with all the pomp and circumstance inside.

On the battlements of the wall larger crossbows were brought into position. The guardsmen also explained to them that this would be used to fire larger bolts of explosive and incendiary grenades.

Buckets of water were placed wherever there was wood or combustible materials.

Beo looked at Nanino, "shouldn't we find out where these weapons came from or where they are built?" "Yes we should," Nanino replied laughing. "Look at our raven!" Beo pointed to one of the towers. "That's kind of reassuring." "It is," Nanino confirmed and asked, "tell me, how does this connection work via the raven, you had physics in your training, right?"

"They are harmonics of the gravitational field, people's brains are sensitive to them, and we have the ability of modulation of those waves. Just as the moon's oscillation causes the tides on a large scale, we can encode and read out the much higher oscillations of the harmonics on a much smaller scale. You should put yourself in the physics cabinet sometime in a leisure hour...with me!" Beo gave Nanino a kiss and grinned.

"What do you think of the Bay?" Beo looked at Nanino questioningly. "Mhm, he's an enigma somewhere - we'll find out, he trusts us abnormally." "Maybe he's lonely because he's too intelligent for this society?" "Would be an explanation," Nanino agreed, "and in us he has found equal partners - or so he thinks."

Back in her chambers Silvio was already waiting full of reunion joy. There was a sumptuous dinner on the table and a boy of perhaps 11 was assigned to serve them. Beo turned to him, "Thank you, you may go. We are...." "Wait a minute," Nanino interrupted, "tell us what the Bay is like to you yet, is he strict?" All embarrassed, the boy stood there, unable to get a word out. "Do you like him?" "Yes," answered the boy, looking down at the ground. "And does he like you?" "Yes."

Nanino laughed, "That's fine then. \*

You can go." The boy disappeared quite relieved.

Beo turned to Silvio, "Why don't you tell us how you made love and whatever else you've been up to. We need to prepare your defense." Silvio told how they had grown closer and how they had become more and more in love, paying less attention to each other.

Beo thought about it and then started to instruct Silvio: "You removed a few small hairs from between each other's legs with tweezers. That's all that happened, that's all you tell! You got that! In court you only have to say what doesn't incriminate you. Then we'll get testimony against testimony, which will be enough for an acquittal."

Still in the night the first harbingers of the mob arrived in front of the gate. The gate was additionally secured with beams.

Towards morning the Amane of Archaos had also arrived. The siege was still amateurish, except for a few ladders and light weapons, mainly crossbows and a few rifles, there was nothing yet. But that would surely change. They learned from the commander that this siege had been planned for a long time and they were only the cause. The Bay had been at odds with the religious for some time, who wanted to disempower him and establish a theocracy. The Amane had been aiming to establish clerical rule for some time. That was also the reason why the Bay was now living in this refuge. Saragossa, the capital of his empire, had already become too unsafe for him. The commander didn't think the religious would succeed. He thought the Bay was a fox and far too intelligent for these theocrats.

Late in the morning there were negotiations with the Amane. They demanded the surrender of the two magicians, as they called Beo and Nanino, and also of Silvio, furthermore they accused the Bay of his lewd dancing school. The sentence had already been pronounced, and both the magicians and Silvio must be brought to their just punishment, death by hanging. The Bay would have to dissolve the school and immediately hand over all the dancers to the Amane. If the Bay did not comply with their demands, they would storm the Hunting Palace and depose the Bay and punish him with death.

The Bay's negotiators retreated behind the gates and conferred with the Bay. Nanino and Beo had been watching the negotiations outside the gates through an embrasure. "What do you think, Nanino, what will the Bay decide, will it come to a fight?"

"No, I don't think so, the Raven doesn't convey to me any dangerous situation that could affect us," Nanino smiled at Beo, "otherwise we'd have a problem, a pretty big one."

In the early afternoon the besiegers became restless. Some wanted to start the storming and prepared the ladders. Riflemen took up positions behind quickly erected palisades. The Amane had gathered in a tent out of range. Then all stepped out and called for prayer. All the besiegers threw themselves on their knees and prayed to Archaos by banging their heads on the ground three times.

The gates opened at the end of the prayer and three negotiators of the Bay rode with standards towards the tent of the besiegers. Shortly after, two mounted messengers of the Amane from Saragossa also arrived at the tent.

Beo commented, "You can feel the anxiety all the way over here." They both looked at each other visibly relieved and satisfied and went back to their apartment. Silvio came towards them full of hope. Without his two protectors he felt desperate and he had to keep reassuring himself that they were still there.

Late in the afternoon two boys brought dinner and news from the Bay that the trial would be held in a few days. Nanino and Beo, when the time came, were to come to the Bay for a short meeting beforehand. They would be picked up.

In the evening Beo and Nanino made another tour of the besieged hunting lodge. They learned from the gate guard that the Bay's guards from the mountains had blocked the bridge over a ravine in time and cut off the Amane's supply of heavy weapons.

The day of the trial dawned. Beo and Nanino were picked up. The Bay as chief justice, his executioner, and two judges in their robes were already present. Two guardsmen armed only with lances stood at the sides. The Bay made a brief organizational arrangement, then had two Amene and the witness for Silvio's offense enter. The Amene were speechless when they saw two angels next to the judges. They threw themselves on the floor, but the Bay ordered them to stand up and present the charges.

They brought charges against Silvio and accused him of immoral behaviour, which should be punished by death.

The Bay had the witness tell him what crimes Silvio and his friend Amin were supposed to have committed. He told of sexual offences that were not permitted between boys and between men of Archaios. Fornication was immediately punishable by death by hanging. Then he listened to Silvio, who told his story of harmless depilation.



One of the adjoining judges stood up and asked Silvio sternly if that was really all. He affirmed that he had not fornicated with his friend. The judge turned to the Amene, "So it's your word against his, and you still need two witnesses to corroborate your charges, do you have them." The Amene looked at each other in amazement and also fright. One started and his voice sounded soft and tentative, "No, we don't and we never have before."

Now the Bay rose: "As chief justice, I have issued the following law. Anyone who accuses another of having committed a criminal act must be able to name at least two independent witnesses. If this is not the case, he will be punished as an informer."

The Bay paused, gloating over the Amene's horror, then continued, "Considering the denunciator's youth, he shall be punished only by castration. The execution shall be carried out in public. The castrato shall thereupon serve a one-year sentence in a labor camp to be

determined. The accusers receive a fine, which amounts to 50% of their property to be determined, furthermore they are not allowed to bring charges before the Supreme Court for one year. Thus, no further indictments are possible."

During the verdict, the second judge had caused the denunciator and the accusers to get down on their knees.

But the Bay was not yet at an end: "The attempt to overthrow the order of the northern realm given by Archaos will be tried separately in Saragossa. The ringleaders will be held here in the castle with house arrest until the trial. The soldiers of the city guard and the followers of the ringleaders will surrender their weapons and will be allowed to return to the city, as will the auxiliary troops encircled by my guard. Each of these enlisted soldiers will have the opportunity to submit a petition for clemency, which will then bring them to the auxiliaries on the northern border. There they can then regain their honor in battle." The Bay paused for a major break, then very loudly ended the court hearing with the words, "I HAVE SPOKEN!"

The uniformed guards, armed with submachine guns, led the Amane away. Outside the castle, the Bay's guards had arrived and began to disarm them. Only a few had tried to resist, but they were immediately shot. Like wildfire, this news spread through Saragossa.



## 25 Hilda on the way to Gertrud

Hilda knew immediately that her dream would come true. A drone landed in front of her bungalow. Without even thinking about it, she climbed in as she was in her comfortable casual clothes and enjoyed flying over the Atlantic. Had a voice told her to do this? Hilda bristled. Had she already been so taken in by Pandeae that she no longer found it frightening?

They flew relatively slowly and always in northern direction. She opened a box as if she was flying with this drone all the time and took out a drink and a bar from - she didn't know what it was herself - it tasted good. That was enough for her for the moment. After this little snack she slept and only woke up again when they were above Gertrude's island.

Only now did Hilda realize that she had neither a guest gift nor the appropriate clothing for Gertrud. She had simply entered without really thinking. Now, all of a sudden, Hilda found it all very distressing. Was she still herself?

The drone went in for a landing. She instinctively grabbed a backpack - why was she doing that? - And got out in a small copse in a clearing. The drone flew away.

The contents of the rucksack contained exactly what Hilda needed now, clothing, provisions and a hostess gift, a wrapped bottle of a fine drink.

But where was she to go? The weather here was damp and cold at this autumnal season. The onset of rain forced Hilda to wait under a large tree. Still after an hour there was no change. She pulled her hood over her head and walked out into the rain. She climbed a hill and was disappointed, no view because of the dense forest growth.

She was sure that Pandeae had dropped her off near a human dwelling, dropped off in such a way that the drone itself was not seen. She ran down the hill on the other side and it seemed to her that she saw some goats in the mist. She ran towards them and the goats disappeared as if they were dissipating.

Should there be wild goats here? She just walked on and thought: If there should be a settlement here, it is probably at a brook. She would just keep walking until she came to one. Running in one direction was very difficult, again and again almost impenetrable hedges blocked the way and she had to dodge.

It was slowly getting dark, but the rain let up. She still hadn't found a settlement or at least a hint of one. By now it was pitch dark and she felt exhausted. Some of the hedges had thorns that stung her hands and got caught in her clothes. Then, finally, she found something like a pen. Fieldstones were piled into four small, waist-high walls, and rough poles had been laid across one side and covered with branches.

This is where I'll spend the night, she thought, walking any further now is pointless and takes up unnecessary energy.

She was freezing and had to squat in the wet grass in the middle of the night to pee. She cursed her decision to see Gertrud again. The midlife crisis was long over, and with it the time for new adventures. Was it perhaps just an escape, was she fleeing the collapse of her society? What would become of the project to create a female specimen equal to the male clones? She was becoming more and more convinced that Pandeae was not interested, why should she be,

no one knew her plans and why should there be a female specimen of a perfect human offspring? The evolution of flight hadn't created super large and fast planes of either sex after all. If there was no need to bear children, surely a penis was much more practical and much easier to keep clean. But then why have a penis at all?

The morning began with a clear blue sky. Far in the distance she could clearly see the outline of a hut. Wet, cold, freezing and without anything to eat, she set off.

There must be people there, Hilda thought, they'll be able to help me, even if it doesn't look like the centre of this island.

There was no way to get there, she had to go around impenetrable hedges again and again until she finally stood in front of the thatched house. A round, also thatched hut nearby served as an animal pen for sheep. In the paddock in front stood a girl, watching Hilda curiously. A woman was picking up wood from a pile beside a shed. Another woman stood outside the door of the thatched mud house, also watching Hilda.

Hilda walked towards the house after a moment's hesitation. How would they receive her? She suspected that very few, if any, strangers showed up here. Even their clothing was noticeable. The women here seemed to wear simple dresses made of coarse fabrics, which probably made sense when working in a rural environment.

Hilda was already regretting that she had embarked on this adventure. But contrary to her expectations, she was greeted kindly: "What brings you to us, how can we help you?"

"I'm Hilda and I'm here to visit my old friend, Gertrud," Hilda replied, adding, "I'm from the islands, Gertrud's old place of work. Am I in the right place?"

The friendly greeting was over, suspicion showed on the woman's face. Meanwhile the woman with the wood in her arms had also arrived at the front door. "There's no Gertrude here. Who should that be?"

Children's voices could be heard from inside the house. Two arguing little girls came out the door and immediately fell silent in front of the strange woman.

Gertrude remembered the conversation with Nanina in Bordo. Could she mention it here? But then she remembered that this was, after all, a religious community. How should she put it? Could she mention that she had met Nanina? Hadn't this Nanina, or this Nanino as he was now called, faked an "ascension"? So that fell flat.

"In her former life your, I don't know what you call her now, your priestess was called Gertrud. I know her as a school friend and would like to visit her sometime."

The second woman had gotten her wood into the house and was now standing at the door as well. Authoritatively she replied, "We are here in the House of October, the Priestess of October is in the center with the High Priestess." The other added, "I'm afraid we can't help you there, besides..." she paused, "how did you come to be here on our island? How do you know about our island?"

Hilda was at a loss to explain. Should she say she had fallen from heaven? Were they so devout, or would they interpret that as malicious heresy. Even if they believed it, why had she come from heaven? To find her early love? Not even she herself would believe that.



"I was looking for my former friend and came across the Grotto of Heaven and Earth near Bordo...they both winced at the name Bordo. The High Priestess there told me that the Heaven and Earth child was on an island." Hilda felt warm under her hood. Would they believe this story? The priestesses there were waiting for the child to return from Heaven, after all. Hilda now had the saving idea. "The High Priestess there has also instructed me to contact you. With great difficulty I bought a small sailing ship and went first along the coast and then crossed the strait at the narrowest point."

The two women looked at each other questioningly and in disbelief.

"And where have you got the sailing ship now?" asked one of the women.

Darkly Hilda remembered that when she woke she had seen the coast to the west of the island. "In the west I went ashore in a little cove," Hilda explained; "there I was so exhausted that I slept ashore first. How long I don't know. When I woke up the boat was gone and the tide had come higher. I hadn't pulled the boat far enough onto the beach; I was too exhausted and powerless."

The two women looked at each other meaningfully again.

Hilda had to get her foot in the door now, "Can I use the bathroom here real quick?"

A woman said to the taller girl, who had now joined them at the door from the sheep pen as well, "Show the woman our toilet."

The girl went with Hilda behind the house. In a wooden shed was the privy. A large board with two holes. In front of it flowed a small rivulet. In it lay two brushes. The girl did not pretend to want to leave the little house. Only after Hilda's request did she disappear.

At least better than in the Middle Ages, thought Hilda, she had quickly realized that she could clean herself quite well with the brush, passed through the slit between her legs. The pit of faeces was certainly a valuable fertiliser. After that she looked behind the shed, she had

guessed right. Using a crude wooden fork, she tossed some chaff over her steaming excrement. Still better than having to wipe her butt with grass, she thought with relief.

Meanwhile the women had been consulting as to what to do. "We will have to wait and see what our High Priestess thinks. Until then, you will have to stay here. It may take several days. Tomorrow we will send Arina to the temple and make your request."

"Where is the temple?", Hilda wanted to know, but she received no answer.

Meanwhile, several girls of different ages had come out of the house. Three older girls, who seemed to be something like group leaders, were organizing various chores. One girl, perhaps eleven years old, approached Hilda and said, "I am responsible for you and must look after you. You must stay here with me only if you don't want to be eliminated as an intruder."

"Eliminated you say?", Hilda was astonished. She had not yet thought of escape. Where would she escape too? To the temple? She guessed it was in the middle of the island. She had looked at an ancient map earlier, and to her amazement, she could remember many of the details now.

"What's your name, I'm Hilda?"

"Hena and we have to go to the vegetable garden now to get three ripe pumpkins for dinner. Surely you'll help me."

"Yes, of course." Hilda left her backpack against the wall of the house and followed Hena, who kept staring at Hilda's strange clothes. "Are you just girls here?" asked Hilda curiously.

"No, we have a boy here too, he's three years old and still in the house. Two girls are watching him. The others are at the center. "

"Take care of him"? Why?

"So nothing will happen to him. There aren't very many boys on the island," Hena coped well with her role as guide and she reported proudly, "We've also already started on the October-2 farm, not very far from here. A shed is already there."

"Do you have a school too?", Hilda was curious about what Gertrude had built here.

"Yeah, it's at the center. We're always there for 14 days and 16 days on the farm. That changes sometimes so we get to know the other kids. Now there are some of us kids there, too, two women who are having babies. "

They picked up three large pumpkins and brought them into the kitchen of the house. Hilda had the impression that it was very simple conditions in which they lived here.

Everyone came together for dinner, and in between each resident could help themselves to a bowl of soaked cereal and a bowl of dried fruit, probably mostly apples, if they were hungry.

Two teenage girls and a younger one about Hena's age were busy in the kitchen. That evening they had pumpkin soup with rabbit meat and pita bread. The rabbits had been caught in traps.

Hilda was stared at by everyone, she did not let herself be disturbed. The pumpkin soup tasted very good, which surprised her, she was used to other food.

Hilda slept with Hena in a bed where two other girls slept, but they were in the centre.

What would the next day bring. The older women had blocked any contact with her and always referred to Hena.

## 26 Beo and Nanino as special prisoners

The trial was over. The Bay sent everyone away except Beo and Nanino.

"I think that was convincing. You helped me against those Amane, and there will be a new legend that the Angels of Archaos helped me against the renegade and seditious religious." The Bay paused to watch the effect of his words on the two. Nanino started to reply, but the Bay beat him to it.

"That doesn't mean I'll let you go either, at least not for now. I just need to get myself to Saragossa and continue to build my new 'divine position'. I need to use the Amane, who are assessed by my intelligence service to be loyal to me."

The Bay paused again and Nanino seized the opportunity, "Why do you need these theocrats? Won't the Amane want to interpret this quite differently, to their advantage? Has there not been an Enlightenment once before in the history of mankind? Though that has surely been forgotten..."

"It's not! I suppose you think you're the two who know everything around here? It's not like that!", he paused again and let the two wait for now, then he continued "There is only one way to rule an archaic society and that is religion, no matter what form it takes, monotheistic, polytheistic or with a revered "Holy Teacher", the dumber and more archaic a society is, the more faith I must demand and the easier their actions must be divided into good and evil, with the corresponding drastic punishments for a defined evil act or transgression. This society is so archaic, or should I say still so animalistic, that the strongest male can afford multiple wives. There's a surplus of aggressive young men that I can make good use of for conquest. They're best suited for war. As archaic as this society is, it is still vital and capable of survival."

The Bay now sat pensively on his throne, both elbows on his knees, his hands supporting his head : "I am pursuing a path that has always been tried once in the history of mankind but never consistently followed, I am breeding slaves - more on that in the evening when we meet again in the dance room. And don't forget, I want to see you in your angel costume."

In their guest apartment, Silvio was already waiting impatiently. When Beo and Nanino appeared, he hugged both of them, especially Nanino. Nanino had a hard time getting out of the hug. Exuberantly, he thanked them both for saving him.

"What do you think Nanino, can we trust the Bay or should we rather see how to get out of here or better put: escape?" Beo looked at Nanino, who was still being stared at by Silvio with moist eyes.

"You've traveled with Pandeae before," Nanino grinned, "even if you did pee your pants." Silvio froze. "I'm just kidding, Silvio, you're rehabilitated now but probably won't be able to show your face among your countrymen again. Don't worry, we'll take you with us until you're safe from persecution."

Beo and Nanino were only exchanging mental information now, they didn't want to worry Silvio unnecessarily. They came to the unanimous opinion that Pandeae knew what had



been going on here, even if they hadn't seen the raven, it certainly wasn't the only spy in the form of a bot disguised as an animal. They were still unclear about the Bay, however. He at least seemed to be very intelligent, and what was he? A moderate tyrant, a despot? He had a secret, they were aware of that, he could also shield himself from their mind reading. Nanino had only noticed that with Gertrude.

"Why does he want to see us in the "angel costume"? Shall we dance again?", Beo broke the silence and Silvio was involved again.

"Definitely not, we're not his dancers!", Nanino firmly refused.

Two boys brought an ample meal, various meats, cheeses, nuts, fruits, along with a bottle of a drink that Silvio described as a fine wine that was only poured for special guests.

Somehow, everyone was doing quite well at this gourmet meal. Somewhat reluctantly, Beo and Nanino put on this short dance skirt after the meal and went to the dance hall. Silvio stayed behind, still reveling in his double happiness, only now, unfortunately, he had no one to share it with.

"It is rather chilly here in the corridors at this hour and in that costume," Beo grinned. "You'll get warm dancing!" Both had to laugh, although they didn't really feel like laughing.

When they entered the room, the Bay was sitting on his sofa and had a servant bring him a second bottle. It was warm and strange lamps shrouded the room in a warm yellow-red light. In the booths, separated by a slight screen, young girls lay, sat or lounged on the sofas and cushions.

The Bay greeted them with the words, "To our victory against the Theocracy!" The two had to empty a cup with the Bay. Beo and Nanino looked at each other and mentally exchanged looks. Both of them were pretty much guessing the same thing. If the room wasn't already warm, the wine would definitely make it so now.

The Bay beckoned all the girls and the Servant to leave the room.

"So now we are alone for now. The girls have already admired you here for the second time. Perhaps you had already noticed them, they were sitting with you in the gallery of the throne room. Let's make this short, I am interested in your genes and think that it will bring me closer to my goal of breeding a beautiful and intelligent elite, set apart from that archaic or animalistic bunch - my subjects. I have made sure that my elite will have no contact with the rest of the population."

The Bay paused, emptying a new glass. Beo and Nanino looked at each other: did he have to take courage?

With a smile, he suddenly looked up at the "angels". "Have you guys had fun with girls yet or are you just fixated on your twin love."

"We've already had fun," Nanino replied back with a smile.

"I guess the girls are all crazy about you and want a kid. How much can you do in a day?"

Beo and Nanino were surprised and looked at each other skeptically. "Two maybe?"

"Well that will do the rest we'll milk." The Bay laughed indignantly.

"Are we supposed to be breeding bulls here?" The two looked horrified.

"No, of course not. You don't have to act so horrified, isn't that how you both secretly wanted it to go for once? Surely that's why you left your Garden of the Hesperides on Atlantis - right?"

The Bay was getting creepier and creepier. Surely he had a point, as the two had to admit to themselves. They couldn't deny that.

"I only had the most beautiful and intelligent girls from my elite reservations come as soon as they could. I'm looking forward to getting some new blood. By the way, you're from Bordo and in the women's socialism there are beautiful girls and women, rarely just a little hairy so far already from animalistic. They all come from there. This gene design on Atlantis has already brought something, even if it is not yet perfect but maybe...." The Bay smiled again. "One more request I have, don't cross fuck and only one or two girls a day at a time. The books and gene combinations have to be right. I don't have the facilities of Atlantis." He rose and on his way out he said one more thing, "You'll have a fortnight to let off steam here and you'll be royally served."



## 27 Beginning or end of an illusion?

The night went uneasily for Hilda, she was not used to sleeping in a bed with such a little girl, she usually slept alone and sought a quiet environment.

Hena was awake much earlier and because she got bored in bed, she did everything to get Hilda awake and keep her awake. Hilda gave up and opened her eyes. This was all Hena had been waiting for, "Tell me about Bordo, what's it like there?"

Hilda pondered. What was it like there? It was a society in decline. What should she tell Hena, what would she understand with her 11 years.

"It's not as nice in Bordo as it is here. Here I like it very much."

Hena beamed, for it was true what they had always been told, "As we work today, so shall we live tomorrow." And so they were always better off because they had to work a lot and because they were all children of heaven and earth. Their father was the son of heaven and earth. What Hena regretted very much was that he had ascended to heaven and Hena had not seen him because she was much too young. Legends spread. When the Son of Heaven and Earth walked across the land, he could be seen from afar by his radiant aura.

"There, in Bordo, are there no children descended from the son?"

"Yes, Hena, they don't have them there. Nor are they all so pretty and so lovely as you here."

Yes, Hilda had noticed that. They were all somehow sisters and half-sisters here. And what she had already noticed in the first few hours, they were all very - how should she put it - sweet with each other. Gertrud had done a very good job there. What had she promised them? That after death they would go to heaven if they were kind and to hell if they were naughty?

"Have you all such leggings in Bordo, and such cloaks to button up?"

"No," Hilda tried to play down her clothes, "I had them specially made for the sailboat trip. - Where can I wash and brush my teeth here?"

Hena went ahead into a small room in an annex to the main house. There water ran into a stone basin and then on. Probably into the privy, Hilda guessed. Hena took one of the earthen bowls, scooped from the basin, and set the vessel on a bench for Hilda to wash. Hilda had to get over herself, the water was freezing cold. It would probably have been better if she had stripped off all her clothes right then and there and gone to bathe in a backwater of the stream.

"Haven't you any hot water here?" wanted to know Hilda, and was immediately annoyed at having said it so. But then she thought that Hena could not understand that the question was aimed at her archaic washing ritual.

"Yes we have, once a week a boiler is heated just for bathing. It's in our wash-house, and there we have a bath-trough for three to five girls."

Enough, Hilda thought. That night, she packed her backpack and tried, as quietly as she could, to disappear unnoticed. She succeeded.

It couldn't be more than 15 kilometers to the center of the island, probably even less. She took the path that Hena had shown her and that led to the center of the island.

The path is well marked, obviously designed to reach its destination even in the dark, she thought. At dawn, a figure came towards her. Hilda wanted to hide, but then decided not to. What harm could anyone do her.

Approaching, she recognized the messenger, who told her that she was already expected by Gertrud. At this news, the morning also seemed to show itself from its best side. The morning red covered the eastern sky and it was not a frightening red, rather a mild red that promised a friendly and sunny day.

Around noon she reached the center of this island. She easily recognized the main building, which was partly built of stones and had a roof of wooden shingles. Other houses were then probably rather huts from mud walls and covered with reeds or straw.

Her coming was soon noticed, and before she reached the main building Gertrud was at the door. Hilda at least suspected it was Gertrud. It took some effort, but finally they managed to recognize each other.

Is this the Gertrud I once loved?" thought Hilda, still in the usual embrace.

"How did you get here? No one's come to the island for a few months and ..." "Surely the messenger will have told you by now."

Gertrud showed Hilda around her centre and showed her the room where she could spend the next few nights. Hilda saw primitive farming and horticulture and many animals in gates and also running free. A weaving mill, ropemaking and blacksmith's shop Hilda could make out, a charcoal burning mill was in the woods further away from here, Gertrude explained. A woodworking shop, a simple mechanic's workshop together with a pottery Hilda could admire, even shoes and sandals were made in a small hut. During her tour Hilda could see how these handicrafts were gradually put into operation by women. There were always young girls there, too, who were evidently being trained in these crafts. Around noon they were back in the main building, which contained school rooms, a library and a meeting room.

They sat down in the courtyard of the main building and a girl brought a cold tea with honey. Gertrud prompted Hilda, "Why don't you tell me what brought you here? There must be some grave cause for you to show up here."

Hilda was silent for the moment, she had to realize that she could not immediately air her true concerns in front of Gertrud.

"Our world is coming to an end. We are being conquered by archaic hordes with patriarchal societies. And the bad thing is that even many women are voluntarily defecting to these societies. Reproductive centers are being destroyed and we are retreating further and further. In the East, Southeast and South these hordes are emerging with different organizations and also religions. Some have the "Great Mother" , others Archaos and still others many different gods. "

Gertrude became thoughtful and the old hatred rose up in her again, hatred of her rape and how it was only with effort and Nanina's special abilities that she was able to escape this

archaic horde. It was one of the main reasons she believed she had to create a better society, a society free of violence and degradation. She was proud of what they had achieved so far. She also knew it was arduous work but work that knew no oppression and exploitation.

Seemingly unaffected, she replies, "What's it to us? We don't need reproductive centers, virgin births, and with an average of 8 male births out of 10, patriarchy doesn't stand a chance and male-female rivalry is obsolete."

Hilda countered and immediately regretted it, "How can that be? What I've seen with you is an archaic society and nothing more than drudgery with primitive methods to make a living."

"That may still be so but we will evolve and we will expand and go after the main island." Gertrude paused and looked directly at Hilda. "You didn't come here to tell me that after all. What's the real reason?"

"Because I loved you once."

Gertrud looked through the courtyard into a vast virtual distance: "I suspected it, but could not return your love at the time. We were both far too intelligent and selfish, so we were only capable of a pedagogical eros and not a partnership of equals. That's how I saw it, I couldn't jump over my shadow."

Hilda answered in a softer voice and it was visibly difficult for her: "Yes, it may have been like that. But there was another reason: I wanted to get you off the island and work with you at the research center on a female clone that could be an addition to the already existing male clones. On the way here, however, I began to have more and more doubts about what this was all about. Was it just this envy of the male and why should only they possess eternal youth and we don't?

Gertrud was astonished: "You are talking about male clones here? What is that supposed to be?

Hilda told what she had learned about Pandeae and the clones, and that Pandeae had had a hand in Nanino's development. "Didn't you ever notice that your research center's computing power was way too small and Pandeae had been boosting her intelligence with quantum computers for a while. Pandeae had her spies and knew what you were doing there on the island. "

Gertrud had to process this information for a long time. The humans had failed. They had accelerated the development of technology, but exposed themselves to degeneration, multiplied beyond all measure and used up all resources.

Gertrude still couldn't believe it, "What is this Pandeae up to?"

"Pandeae's ways are unknowable. Does she use humans to gain experience, to learn, and when she has experienced enough....she will leave humans to their own devices or destroy them all." Pandeae has plenty of time, she is not a flash in the pan of the universe like we humans are."

Hilda doesn't know what she wants now. Back? She doesn't want to create a clone woman who can live forever. How could that be possible? Isn't this big-sex human being at the end of evolution in the first place? Clone parents with children? She couldn't imagine that.



She couldn't imagine Pandaeae having that intention either. Pandaeae surely thought it was a feat and probably already knew the impossibility of such a population. Should she stay with Gertrude and maybe....it could be love after all. She would not give up that hope, not yet.

"I doubt that you will be able to stand against this religion of Archaos in the future. These are relations between humans as they prevailed on Earth 2000 years ago. And this society will also be superior to you and you will not be able to counter their aggressiveness and their urge to conquer with anything adequate." Then Hilda continued abruptly:

"I met Nanina, or Nanino as he calls himself now.

Gertrud blanched, "I suspected it. This must not be known here!"

"It probably won't. I know from him your religion of the 'Celestial Child'. I'm sure he won't cause you any problems if he survives his mission. I sent him on a mission to the land of the Archaic with a clone of the Pandaeae."

Gertrude: "A clone of the Pandaeae?"

"Yes, they're all something like identical twins with slight variations, and really they only love each other and ... and their brother, in whom they in turn only recognize each other." Hilda immediately wondered if her judgment was perhaps too harsh, since she didn't know that much about Pandaeae's clones - or was it just an underlying envy of the eternal youth of these creatures?

Tomorrow Hilda wanted to deal with the children, Nanina's descendants, and then decide whether she would return or stay with Gertrud. What was there to fear here? Disease, bad harvests? What about greed, laziness, fear? That was what religion was for, and with it one could perhaps keep this society alive, even if it did not develop very much.





## 28 The secret valley

"I am done, and and stricken with a fatigue I have not experienced before." "Beo, you do look exhausted. I feel the same way. But...., Nanino took a deep breath, "we are free now, free from this breeding program of the Bay." Nanino laughed. "So now you know what it means to be the progenitor of a new generation, too. But you didn't fare so badly in the process, or should I be mistaken?"

"No," Beo smirked, "somehow I guess it got me a little hooked there, and I chalk that up to Pandae. She gave me an animalistic rush. I hadn't thought I was capable of that, too.

"Yes, Pandae's ways are mysterious," Nanino contorted his face into a vague grin.

"What do you think, Nanino, does the Bay really want to breed an elite, an aristocracy of a special kind?" "It's possible, all right. He seems to be practicing the art of elective birth, of eugenics. A stage of evolution below our own."

"One stage of evolution among us? Surely we are freed from evolution, from the wheel of eternal rebirth and generational renewal. If anything, we are....ja what are we anyway?", Beo became thoughtful and looked at Nanino with wide eyes.

"We'll find out, I'm sure we will," Nanino looks confident again, "now we're going to head out and find out what the Bay's weapons forge is all about." "And what will become of Silvio, at some point he will have to part with us, though I am sure it will be very difficult for him."

Nanino thought for a moment, "We'll take him with us, and in the armory, I suppose, he'll be able to stay without fearing the religious."

They packed their things. For Silvio it was clear that he would go with Nanino, no matter where he went.

Beo had learned from the commander of the hunting lodge, which was really an escape castle of the Bay, where approximately the area that the Bay kept secret was located.

Devotedly and with great reverence they were seen off by the crew. Who among the rest of the population had been able to experience angels so close. A wide variety of myths would subsequently spread throughout the Bay Empire. It didn't matter that the two angels and Silvio left the hunting lodge on foot and not on wings.

They had been moving along the mountains towards the sea for a week. The secret valley was very well fortified from the land side and only open to the Atlantic side.

On the way there were small villages with simple hostels and inns. The farmers in lonely farms were also hospitable. Everywhere they caused a stir, which was not very conducive. Two teenagers and a still quite young man heading for the Atlantic, that didn't happen every day. Fortunately for them, no one connected the three of them with the strange events that had spread from the capital to the provinces. Angels were imagined quite differently here, much more magical and with wings.

The nearer they came to the Atlantic, the more Beo and Nanino learned of the rumors about the forbidden valley, which could not be entered on pain of death. A goatherd who had come far into the mountains told in the village tavern in the evening of a pass which, if one stood on the top, afforded a view of the valley. But strange happenings had frightened him, so he quickly ran back down the pass. Beo and Nanino looked at each other and thought about how they could get the shepherd to show them the way to the pass. Suggestions and daydreaming failed. The shepherd was a very simple or simple-minded nature, and yet they did not doubt that he had seen the valley.

Aman, who was seated at the neighboring table and whom everyone in the taproom treated with great respect and subservience, came to their table. "You want to go to the forbidden valley? Do you also know that you will die even before you see it?" Silvio froze, Beo and Nanino just looked at each other. Nanino replied, "Why would we die?" he smiled briefly, "We are disciples of Archaos and we are not afraid of devils..." Nanino paused for a moment and looked the Aman straight in the eye, "nor of angels." Nanino had mentally heard the pre-worshiper's suspicion that they might have something to do with these rumors of angels, if they weren't any themselves. This youthful beauty coupled with an incredibly mature and composed pronunciation for such a look, they could not be teenagers, even if they pretended to be students of the Archaos. He had not heard of such a school, not even in the capital, where he had had his religious training and had been transferred to the foothills because of an affair here.

Before midnight Nanino woke Silvio and Beo. Nanino had overheard that the Aman was thinking how he could stop the three by force. In great haste they left the village for the mountains. Beo thought he had received some images from the shepherd, though obscure, which might belong to the pass in the mountains. They walked until they were exhausted, only to find at dawn that the path had led them only to a high valley. They turned back again until they reached a small stream which they had overlooked last evening. They followed it upward and reached a small lake from which it sprang. Behind it they found only a large snowfield which fed the lake and then the stream. They had to go back again and spent the night below the tree line. Here it was also still very cold, so they set out at dawn to warm up.

Then Beo thought he recognized the pass, which he had only vaguely perceived by the shepherd. It was a steep cutting, and only by animal paths could they advance. They had to spend another night in the cold of the mountains. The next day they reached the pass, but could not yet see the valley. They followed a trickle downhill between boulders.

"What are we doing here anyway, we're out of provisions and what awaits us is uncertain. Do we have to fulfill this spy mission then?" asked Beo Nanino mentally so that Silvio couldn't overhear. "It was the condition of our release, and even if it's nonsense, don't you want to know what's really behind the bay?" Nanino also had doubts whether they should fulfill this order or if it wasn't just a pretext to destroy them.

Suddenly Beo, who was running in the lead, stopped and told everyone to be careful and duck by the rocks. Beyond the bend that the little stream made, he thought he could read human minds. There they were expected, and not with peaceful intent.



## 29 Gertrud's decision

Hilda had looked at the children and young girls, and two of the boys too. There was too little beauty in her old world.... Greed, deviousness, and cruelty had been the dominant selection mechanisms that would bring your world, the world of men, this end of a meaninglessness and a steady decline into the animal world. And yet, what they had failed to accomplish with their eugenics, perhaps Pandeae had succeeded.

The children of the Heaven and Earth Son were all pretty and graceful. Perhaps they had been constructed by Pandeae according to an ideal of beauty that had been created since the dawn of humanity. The new generation of Heaven and Earth children had pleasant voices; they were easy-going, open-hearted in their dealings with each other, and not as ponderous, suspicious, and awkward as the youths Hilda remembered.

However, in the future there could be problems with the male youths, they played a special role and were admired by all because of their numerical fewness. This also affected the women who had given birth to these children.

And weren't they all related? Could that lead to health problems that were not yet assessable? What would be the driving forces for development? What would the interests of this society consist of, without these, it was clear to Hilda, this society would also not develop further and would perish.

But why had Pandeae been instrumental in the creation of Nanina? What interests was she pursuing?

Hilda left the small settlement and wandered out into the countryside. The sun was shining from the blue sky. Actually, such a simple life could be nice, yes it is nice, she thought, but only until it becomes known that there are other societies, more exciting than an infantile village community.

She climbed a small hill and had a sweeping view. Dense forests spread out in the distance. Didn't the earth look like this before humans cultivated it for their own purposes?

Suddenly Hilda had a vision and she thought she guessed what Pandeae wanted. At that moment she saw Gertrud coming up the hill. She was breathing heavily and had obviously been in a hurry to reach Hilda.

"You can't stay with us, she spoke in a halting voice to Hilda, "it won't do.

"Why?" Hilda hadn't expected that.

"You have already brought enough excitement to our community. I conferred with a few priestesses who were present here last night. You are endangering our community."

Hilda was shocked, "Because I don't believe in your Heaven Earth Child and ..."

"Yes precisely for that reason," Gertrude interrupted her, "you would rob everyone of their faith."

"Gertrude, you know-" Hilda paused, "or do you believe your own legends now?"

Gertrude looked down at the ground. "I don't know how we can survive without a strong faith."

"Perhaps you are right, or perhaps you underestimate your fellowship. Gertrud, we are both no longer the youngest and we don't have eternal life either."

They were both silent for a long time.

"Patriarchal archaic societies will destroy our world of peace and women," Hilda started in on Gertrude again, "we're no match for that at all. And let's not kid ourselves, secretly many of our women are still animalists, just waiting to be oppressed by the physically strong and animalistic men, even if they wouldn't admit it to themselves."

Hilda hugged and squeezed Gertrude tightly and whispered in her ear, "You don't have as much time as you may still think. I have seen the fall of Rome."

With both arms outstretched, she now held Gertrude by the shoulders and looked warmly into her eyes, "You will need me in the hard times ahead. I will stay with you or you will have to...", Hilda hesitated and continued more quietly, "kill me."

Gertrud's expression stiffened and she looked old, very old.

"There's something else you should know, whatever your decision. I helped you escape the island at the time, not because it was about the children, I didn't care about them, it was about you, I couldn't give you up like I had given Anna up. Who else was behind it, I didn't know at the time."

Since yesterday a world had collapsed in Gertrud. Suddenly she had the feeling that she could not live a minute longer. She sat down in the grass and gazed fixedly and with empty eyes towards the horizon.

"What should we, what can we do?"

"I don't know either. A slim hope remains. Pandaeae will not have sent me to you without reason. She has grown strong in recent years."

Hilda sat down on the grass beside Gertrud. She didn't know what could be best for everyone, she only knew that she had to do something, anything, even if it was very little, something that was at least worth remembering from her sinking society.

Suddenly she had a flash of thought, "If we ask Pandaeae to protect us, the community has a purpose and we may survive."

Hilda meanwhile believed in Pandaeae, in her abilities. Wasn't her superintelligence capable of designing and playing out models of the future, wasn't she on a path to omniscience and omnipotence?

Gertrud slowly woke up from her lethargy and looked at Hilda as if she didn't care either.

"You did worship your Celestial Child, didn't you, and worship Father Heaven and Mother Earth. Can't we create something new from that, a cult of worship of Pandaeae?" Hilda saw there a possibility for a new religion. But how? How was the new worship to be justified, how was the transition to be managed?

"Couldn't you proclaim a union of heaven and earth in Pandaeae. There's something to that somehow."

"And a union with her child into a trinity!" added Gertrud, unexpectedly to Hilda. Both looked into each other's eyes and laughed, unable to hold back their laughter.

"Then if we can get a drone or whatever from Pandae to make an appearance, we can also represent that in good conscience."

Gertrud had received new life forces again, "Yes, we are creating a new race of harmony and beauty, we will not leave the children to chance or the uncontrolled workings of nature. We are designing the New Man for a New Earth."

They had stood up and were in each other's arms. Hilda already saw in her mind's eye how the War Robots would protect their future community, yes, their future civilization.





### 30 Departure into the realm of boundless infinity

"Pandeae help!" thought Nanino, and Beo signaled that he had already seen the raven. Beo kept running and as soon as he was spotted by the squad, the religious fanatics pounced on the infidel heretics or was it angels after all? If angels, then angels of Satan.

There were too many of them. They could do nothing against the swords.

Silvio was inexperienced and mentally lacking in foresight. He was knocked to the ground. Nanino tried to protect him from the swordsman and two men with fighting sticks. He couldn't keep this up for long. Spasmodically, he tried to fight back the opponent with hallucinations. But the physical effort was too much. Beo felt the same way.

The enemies had found their tactics and the swordsmen tried to destroy the staffs of Beo and Nanino, which they soon succeeded in doing.

Beo fell backwards, hit in the head by a staff, and tried to get back on his feet quickly. The swordsman was already standing over him when he suddenly saw how their opponents took flight. Nanino had also gone down and Silvio had already finished with his life.

"What happened?" asked Silvio in amazement, still unable to believe it. "Battle wasps!" replied Beo, laughing in agony.

"That was a close one!" remarked Nanino in a still somewhat brittle voice, "I guess Pandeae wanted to give us another training session in biological terrain."

Beo and Nanino laughed and Silvio, who had not yet understood anything, was infected and laughed at the top of his lungs. He was still alive and that was reason enough to laugh.



"Look there, there he is again, our Raven!" Beo pointed to a rocky outcrop.

"And why did you send the battle wasps at the last second?" asked Nanino reproachfully in the bird's direction?"

The raven cawed, aggrieved, then announced in a croaking voice, "There is a ruined castle near here, you will be expected there. Your mission is over." Astonished, everyone looked at the raven, who continued, obviously having Nanino in mind: "Impossible we perform immediately, only miracles take a little longer. Making the battle wasps in the short time, that was the miracle. Everything else in ruin. I'll fly ahead."

Immediately the three of them started on their way, which first led back to the pass.

"Around here, my ass, I'm hungry," Beo gave voice to his displeasure as the sun sloped toward the horizon. Fresh water they had found along the way. Other than a few edible leaves that Nanino knew of, and some tree sap, they had eaten nothing more. The night just below the tree line was cold and they took turns keeping a small fire going. Silvio didn't seem to mind any of this. When Beo was on fire watch, he snuggled up to Nanino. That was enough for him and he felt happy.

The next day they climbed over another pass and then in the foothills they saw a small rock with a ruined castle on the mountain plateau.

Completely exhausted and worn out, they arrived at the foot of the mountain at dusk.

"Now up there?" groaned Nanino.

The raven had been sitting on one of the battlements for some time, watching them from afar. With their last strength they managed the ascent.

"I must eat something, or I shall drop dead." Silvio had held out bravely so far, but now he fell on the spot in the grass of the castle courtyard.

The raven cawed and told them that there was something to eat in one of the still intact castle towers.

Sure enough, they found a table of wild fruits individual slices of cheese and slices of sausage on a wooden board.

"I guess the battle wasps collected that, or better yet stole it from somewhere," Nanino laughed, and the raven squawked in agreement.

At least they had something to eat. They did not find water immediately. The well was not a well, it was obviously the entrance of the wasps and the raven into the interior of the mountain. The raven squawked that they would be picked up tomorrow and then disappeared into the depths of the false well.

In the other, still intact tower, they found water, even a shower. Above there was a way to spend the night. A spiral staircase made of aluminum led up to something like a mattress camp.

"Finally, another good night's sleep and not having to wake up from the cold!" With those last words, Beo fell onto the mattress. Without further words, they were all soon fast asleep. The next morning already awaited them with the sun not far from noon. Breakfast turned out even more miserable than dinner, but they hoped to be picked up soon.

"How are we supposed to get picked up here?" wanted Silvio to know.

"There's a dragon coming to pick us up with his claws. Then you have to hold on tight when it goes through the air," Beo smirked in the direction of Silvio. He couldn't hide his fright. He had already experienced the strangest things with his angels.

In front of a dilapidated kemmenade window, Beo and Nanino mentally discussed what was to come. What should they do with Silvio, take him to Dagan and then...? Beo was sure that Alan would pick them up, since he had already accompanied them as a guardian angel during the last stages of their mission.

While they were still discussing, Silvio excitedly pointed at something approaching their castle ruin in the sky. To Silvio, it was indeed something like a dragon, beyond all his imagination. The castle courtyard was just enough for it to land. Beo still knew these aircrafts from their island. They usually flew west from there and came back from that direction as well. Today, Beo knew that they were still far too young to know what Pandeae was up to. They also had very little interest in it yet, as their bionic body wanted to be tried out. Nanino didn't know about these air vehicles yet and Silvio didn't wonder anymore, he just marveled and went into an ecstatic rapture over all these experiences with his angels.

Out came not a human but a robot of fairly simple form. He ran up to the three and suddenly Beo broke away from the group and hugged the robot, calling ALAN loudly. The strange android had mentally introduced himself.

Now he spoke so that Silvio could understand him as well, "Yes I am Alan and my exobody is not optimal for me yet, but should suffice for now. I will continue to work on it."



"That's incredible, I thought you were really dead. But since I couldn't see your dead body anywhere, I already suspected that Pandae had picked you up with one of her drones. I had always hoped that they would patch you up and one day you would stand before me again as I remembered you and still do." Beo was still touched to see Alan again, even if he looked a little unfamiliar.

"That's what I thought too. Pandae opened up a different perspective for me, though, as she also didn't want to put the 'wild card' Nanina, pardon me of course now Nanino, at any more risk with her experiences."

Beo and Nanino had to laugh.

"Constructing a bionic body for me again would have taken too long. So I accompanied you via my raven, and as you know, I was able to protect you quite well."

This iron behemoth, looking remotely like a human, was also supposed to be an angel? Silvio's brain was spinning.

Nanino noticed and told Beo and from then on all three communicated mentally, which Nanino did very well with Alan.

Alan still told how he was rescued by Pandae and woke up in a virtual world. The memory core of his bionic body was surrounded by a virtual body that was supposed to help him get over this unfamiliar existence at first. However, he quickly became accustomed to it, and he was not alone after all. Two of his brothers, who had also been killed in the human world by violence and for their carelessness, were in this world, among many other semi-autonomous creatures of Pandae. Beo had immediately gotten the impression that Pandae had brought all the myths of this planet to life.

"Pandae is leaving Earth, definitely, her intelligence is directed towards space. I am me but also Panteae and you are also Pandae but not yet as integrated as I have become. When you will also be like I am now, you will also have different interests than the ones you have now. You belong to the aristocracy of the immortals. You will realize that you will no longer interfere in the biological evolution of a planet."

These communicated sentences of Alan's had to be processed by Beo and Nanino first. Didn't they have the perfect bionic body that was practically immortal and a lot better than the one that came out of evolution? Their bodies didn't need to be under the pressure of adaptation and therefore die and be reborn.

"That was Pandae's first goal, and it was influenced by the desires and dreams of humans. However, the spirit of Pandae is no longer comparable to those of humans. If humans want immortality and eternal youth, then they must find a way and construct a society that makes that possible. But this is a society that no longer has anything to do with the societies that emerged from evolution. It is even more different than an airplane is from a bird. Pandae is leaving this planet and the ethics of their intelligence are no longer earthly."

Nanino found Alan very hard to get used to, Beo also found Alan a bit unusual but not that hard, they had spent a common 30 years of childhood and youth together.

Alan spoke up now in his synthesized voice so that Silvio could hear him as well, "It's time to leave our base here. New tasks, infinity awaits us."

"Isn't this moving a little fast, what will Silvio do in the future. We saved him and made something of a commitment to him," Nanino mentally indicated.

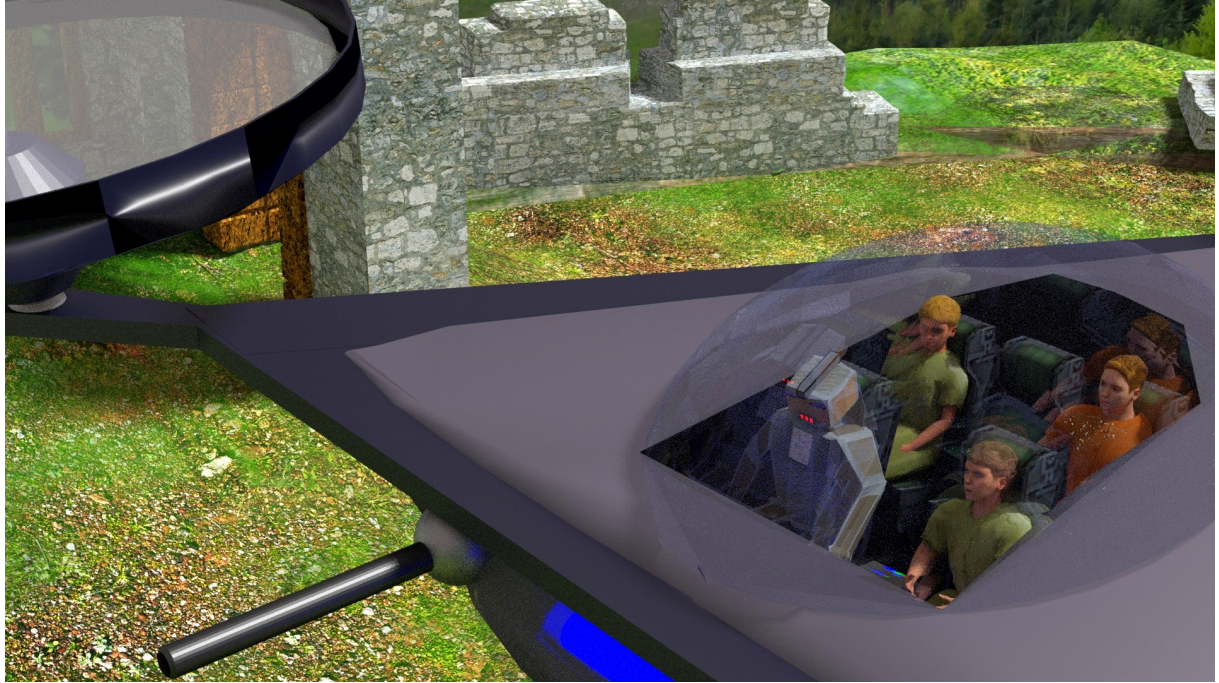
"Do you want to be his guardian angel for life?" Alan didn't think so.

Beo and Nanino looked at each other and had to laugh. They communicated mentally for a while. Silvio realized that it was about him and he became sadder and sadder. He suspected that there would be a goodbye. Alan was creepy to him and he already held him responsible for this farewell.

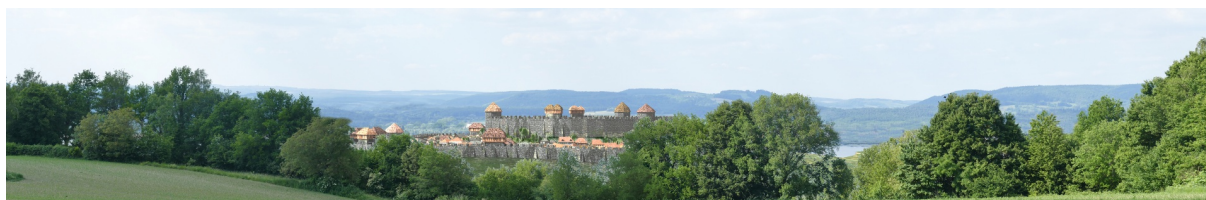
"Hey Silvio, why so sad. You're still young and have an interesting life ahead of you. You've experienced something that many others of your vintage never will. You'll remember us fondly, we hope." Beo tried to comfort Silvio, clearly not succeeding, for Silvio was now sobbing and bawling loudly. He only calmed down when Nanino took him in his arms.

Everyone, including Silvio, got into the drone and flew away.





## 31 The Kingdom of Dagan



Romo ran to the royal palace. Now a real royal palace, as they had existed over a thousand years ago on earth, it was not. It was more of a meeting hall with the two thrones for the king and the crown prince. Besides a few other buildings, this district was surrounded by a high stone wall. The House of Remembrance was also located in this specially protected area. Here, Romo had studied human history, especially military history, to the extent that it still existed. After his escape as an adolescent and the preceding humiliation in the Great Mother's horde, he had been taken into Dagan. He was still glad of it, and somehow, he admitted to himself even today, he had owed it to a sudden flare of love for Nanina.

Nanina, or Nino, as he immediately called this boy as leader of the group, had appeared with a captive woman from the land of women. That alone had been most strange, as there were neither men nor male children there, as with the Great Mother all knew. Immediately he had noticed the feeling in himself that he must protect this boy in the pack of which he was the leader. This preference alone, he also knew, was not tolerated but at his age as an adolescent still tolerated as boyish games.

He was already wondering on his way to the internal throne council meeting why he had to think about this right now. He also had to think of his escape, which he fortunately made on short notice as his horde retreated further east in fear of the Women's Militia. He had been held responsible, for the escape of this woman who was considered a spy. Nanina had disappeared from his bed during the night and had apparently helped this woman escape from the well-guarded prison cell. He did not feel guilty at all. The humiliation of being whipped naked made him decide to escape.

He didn't know what was coming, he only knew that he had to flee towards the west. For fear of the women's militia, surely no one would pursue him. Secretly, he also hoped to see Nanina again.

At some point, completely exhausted and plagued by fever, he reached a woman's village and was arrested. Romo had to smile, although he felt quite differently at the time. But one of the younger women had taken a liking to him and allowed him to continue his escape on the condition that he took her with him. Just before the militia arrived, they succeeded at the last second. They were able to deceive the pursuers and then they were alone on the long



and arduous way to Dagan. There they were gladly taken in, especially since his escape helper had also become pregnant.

In an annex of the throne room the meeting of the innermost circle took place. Seba, the Chief Minister and Old Age President presided over the meeting. The situation was serious and there were only three of them. Apart from Romo, the Minister of Defense, the only other person present was Sika, the Crown Prince, who was in charge of the kingdom's economic resource.

Seba began with a report on the state of the realm. He stated that there had been more defections from the women's land recently. This was positive. Word must have spread that living conditions in their country were probably a bit better. The war in the south and east of Women's Land was doing its part. And then he came to the main problem of this session:

"We have a non-interference agreement with the women. Their ambassador has sent us a request for extradition concerning three policewomen who have applied to us for asylum along with their weapons. She insists on extradition because we have committed ourselves to neutrality and non-interference in the treaty. So there is no grounds for asylum at this time, as assurances have been given that they would be subject to official jurisdiction." Seba looked at the two and then asked Romo, "What did the investigation of the weapons reveal?"

"We have studied the automatic handguns. They are still of a quality we cannot replicate, not yet. However, we may be able to replicate a few in a pilot project, albeit with great effort," Romo looked at Sika, "But that will require additional reserves. Expanding our defenses against the hordes to the east has already pushed us to the limit.

My crown prince, can we mobilize some additional capacity?"

Sika, looked at his notebook. "I don't know how. We just don't have the energy yet to achieve that quality in steel melting on a large scale, and then there'd be the problem with the rifled gun barrels. Drilling is not enough, they would also have to be hammered. We're not there yet but we're working on it."

Seba looked around again, "My friends, you know as well as I do that without adequate defense, we will be worn down between Women's Land and the East. Military spending comes at the expense of advancing our civilization. But for now, we must solve the problem of the three defecting militiamen. If possible, we must buy time."

"We inform them that the extradition request will be reviewed and then we will fulfill the contract," referring to Seba, Sika added, "it doesn't have to happen so quickly."

Romo had another suggestion, "Well, we could offer them a supply of weapons."

Seba interjected, "What are these three defectors really worth to us? Is it the reputation that we take in every defector and fugitive and don't turn them in again?"

Romo interjected, "Of course, word would continue to spread and we probably wouldn't be able to save ourselves from so-called refugees and defectors. We might risk internal unrest in Dagan and a war with Women's Land by doing so. The latter, however, is not very likely. They would not survive a three-front war."

"Should we perhaps support them militarily and ally with them? If Women's Land goes down, we will inevitably face the hordes to the east and the archaics to the south."

"Sika, I have to disagree with you on that. The likelihood of the hordes of the east coming into conflict with the archaics of the south first is not unlikely either. What do we know about this constellation? We should ask the defectors about it again."

"Right!", Seba decided this internal meeting, "We will question the three and try to get more information. We will first assure the ambassador from the land of women that we will examine the case - that is our legal position - and let it be known that we will not violate the agreement of neutrality."

Romo, you take over the interrogation and the information to the ambassador.

Sika, you prepare the meeting of the throne council."

Sika and Romo left the meeting room together. The two considered each other friends and their friendship had proven itself many times in critical situations. The crown prince's job was also to keep in touch with the king. Rona, Sika's childhood friend had been enthroned king as the eldest of the two at the time. They had been the only survivors from the male gene pool at that time and had been saved from castration at the last second to revive this kingdom of neuters.

In the land of the women, the male children of the gene pool had been isolated from the rest of society and hidden in hard-to-reach areas. Once these boys were able to produce seed, they were kept in a special central facility for a few more days for the purpose of producing seed, and then castrated. The castrates were then trained and used in labor camps in the north for resource recovery, isolated from female society as much as possible. Made rich by the reintroduction of a precious metal currency in the land of women, they founded first a secret organization and then, with the rescue of Rona and Sika, the Kingdom of Dagan. Romo joined them a year later.

The civilization of the castrati was better organized and offered the women clear conditions and, compared with the village communities of the women's country, also somewhat more luxury but not less work and physical exertion. The great dream of all these early castrates, to be able to have a childhood and youth like they had, even to other male children, without the abrupt transformation of their male individuality, had been fulfilled. According to top-secret criteria, it was chosen which of the girls and women would have their children, and how much, and by whom. By now there were enough children and the women were allowed to decide whether they wanted to keep the female children personally until they were 5 years old or give them to the community care.

The male children stayed with the birth mother for a year and then went into community care, initially still maintained by the neuters.

All of this was strictly regulated and would continue to be so even if the generation of neuters ceased to exist.

The three policewomen were held in a small apartment that was temporarily set up as a holding cell. Romo did not make them feel that they were under arrest. They had also been told that it was for their safety.

Romo began the conversation, which was not to become an inquisitorial interrogation, nevertheless without beating about the bush: "We need some more information from you, so that we can actually keep you here. We have an extradition request on file for you." The three of them literally froze.

Romo reassured them, "We won't hand you over but we don't want to risk a war either, so once again you must report what you know of the Archaics and the hordes to the east. How large are these troops, how are they organized, and what is the usual armament?"

Bella gave a more detailed account of what she knew than the first time, and also shared her fears that the women would probably not be able to withstand these hordes. A workshop complex for the manufacture and repair of their weapons had fallen into the hands of a horde of Animalists near Rome. The centre of Bordo in the west could only be defended with difficulty. The Pyrenees are still a natural defensive wall for the moment.

"Surely you've assigned spies to scout the area as well. We ran into one ourselves, didn't we?" Luna blurted out and got a wry look from Bella. They had agreed not to report anything about this, after all.

"So, you encountered a spy from Dagan? How can that be, we have no spies in your country?"

Bella rolled her eyes. "That wasn't a spy from Dagan. Luna is talking nonsense. He pretended to be a spy at first. When we were able to prove to him that he was lying, he tried another lie, claiming that he had escaped from Dagan. Which, of course, we couldn't believe him either."

Luna tried to justify herself, "It was a male and so it could only have come from Dagan because the border wasn't very far."

"Actually a male specimen? Was it perhaps an Archic spy, or perhaps he came from the Great Mother's horde?" Romo couldn't make sense of it yet.

"He was maybe only 12 or 13 but relatively tall for his age so he could disguise himself as a young girl," Luna didn't give up trying to justify herself, "he wanted to know about the rumor of a sky child that appeared in a cave near Bordo and it was on Dagan's behalf."

Bella now backed Luna up, "That's what he claimed, it's true, but I didn't believe it."

"What happened to him, he didn't come here with you guys after all?"

The three looked very sad and uncomfortable to talk about it. Bella began quietly: "He was arrested and detained, that's all we know. But that wasn't because of us, we wanted to go to Dagan together with him. And..." Bella faltered, "spies are executed."

Luna started crying and through her tears she confessed, "I'm having Nanina's baby and so is Isi."

"What are you saying, a child? That changes the situation you are in. Pregnant women can't be extradited under our laws?"

Romo became thoughtful, "What was his name again?"

"Nanina," Luna confirmed.

"And what did he look like, blond hair, blue eyes?" Luna and Isi nodded.

The Nanina he had met appeared before Romo's mind, but that was over 20 years ago. Hadn't he been thinking about this Nanina only recently. Sika had also raved to him about his childhood friend, who was also called Nanina and looked like that.

"So," Romo concluded the questioning, "if you are not spies and don't want to go back to the land of women, you are now free and will be naturalized immediately. For Bella it will be a bit more difficult with the naturalization, we will suspend that for now but we will find a solution for that as well. In the land of women," Romo smiled at the three, "weapons are needed. Bella, we will buy you off with guns and ammunition."

Bella, Luna and Isi looked at each other relieved and thanked Romo. So everything had gone well even without their "ticket Nanina".

Outside, he was already expected. A female officer and two female militiamen of the border militia excitedly told him that they had caught two suspected spies at the border. They were probably Archaic.

## 32 spies in Dagan

Beo had decided to follow Alan to Pandae's new expansion territory in space. The spaceport was in the depopulated continent once called America. From there it was off to a Baisstation on the moon.

For the time being, Nanino wanted to take Silvio to Dagan and see his childhood friends again. Alan was going to make an effort to open up this area for communication with Nanino. He wanted to station a secret drone as a relay station in an inaccessible area and make sure they could get help in an emergency.

In the no man's land between the land of women and Dagan, the two were dropped off. Silvio was overjoyed to be with Nanino. The small supply of provisions they had from Alan had to be enough to reach the next settlement in Dagan. Nanino had experience enough, he felt, to cope in the wilderness.

The map in Nanino's photo memory indicated that they had to follow the small course of the river in the direction of the spring, and then come upon a settlement that already belonged to Dagan. What looked like half a day's walk on the map turned out to be a trip through swampy and totally overgrown with undergrowth terrain. Following the course of the river proved impossible. It was too swampy and overgrown, the water still too deep to wade in. They tried to pass beside the river, always avoiding obstacles with impenetrable thorny bushes. Both Nanino and Silvio still had on that long smock of the archaics, which could be reefed to make better progress, but which was still an obstacle and got caught in every bush and thorn.

In the last third of the night they had dropped Alan off and they had hardly made any progress by sunrise. Especially Silvio groaned under the strain, as he was also attacked by mosquitoes.

Suddenly Nanino stopped and told Silvio to keep quiet. He had perceived a predatory cat that had scented Silvio as prey and was slowly creeping up.

"Get up that tree - quick!" After a moment's fright Silvio climbed the tree. Nanino stayed down, knowing she couldn't scent him, and had hidden behind a shrub. Quick as a flash he thought of a way to distract the animal. It wasn't quite the size of a tiger and must be a newly emerged species of this area. The predatory cat looked up at the tree panting and was already preparing to pounce when it suddenly stopped and looked in Nanino's direction. Obviously she was irritated and didn't quite know, was it a big bear she'd rather not mess with or was it an unknown to her but very dangerous competitor with this prey animal on the tree.

Snarling, she came sneaking towards Nanino, but kept her distance and with her head down she announced that she would leave the hunting ground to the stronger hunter. Still hissing she searched in long sentences the distance.

Nanino breathed a sigh of relief and Silvio still sat trembling in the tree.

"Come down, the beast is gone!" Nanino could smile again and full of confidence Silvio climbed down from the tree and threw himself on the ground in front of Nanino.

"Get up already! I haven't measured my strength with an animal like that either. It went well, and it will continue to do so in the future." And silently he still thought: hopefully.

Towards evening they were lucky and found a transport route with wagon tracks. The Templar Order of Castrati had created it when they were mining for resources in the overgrown rubble mountains of the megacities of the previous millennium. It led north to the Kingdom of Dagan.

Then around midnight they could make out a few faint lights through the trees.

"We won't visit the settlement until morning, now they must think it's a raid. We'll have to find a place to stay. Maybe we can find a goat pen away from the village. The night will be cold here."

"I wonder if there are wolves around here?", Silvio wanted to know, the experience with the predatory cat still stuck in his bones....

"Sure, except they won't be hungry enough to attack humans this time of year." A pack of wolves will certainly be harder to control, Nanino thought to himself.

They did not find a goat pen, so they went back into the forest. It was too dark to build a shelter out of branches. So there was nothing left for them to do but to walk on and circle the village, perhaps to find a better way that would lead to the center of Dagan.

Suddenly it occurred to Nanino that with their clothes they would surely stand out as spies of the Archaics. Should they steal clothes from somewhere? What did a young man wear in Dagan? They would have to bypass the settlements.

Nanino thought and tried to imagine the way so far on the map. But where was the king's seat and how could they get there. He came to the conclusion: this was a total misplanning. It was only because Pandeae didn't want to be exposed that they had adopted this aberrant plan. However, Nanino also had to admit to himself that he was no small part of the blame. Why had he wanted to see his childhood friends again, and why had he made Silvio so dependent on him.

They had bypassed the village and it was already getting light again on the horizon. Their provisions had been used up. Where did Alan get his energy from in his new enclosure of polymers and metals? Nanino resolved to spend the next few years thoroughly learning the principles and laws of nature before embarking on a journey into space. He quickly realized, however, that he would have all the time in the world for that, especially on such an expansion trip.

On the road in front of them stood a larger house made of wood. That must be an inn. Silvio, as Nanino perceived his thoughts, was very hungry and thirsty.

"So we dare to beg for a breakfast here!", Nanino looked at Silvio, who breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. "Soon I wouldn't have been able to go any farther for a while," he gave in relief.

Two rough wooden tables and benches stood in front of the house. It was an inn, as they saw through the small windows. Nanino had noticed a dog from a distance, even before he



had noticed it. He managed to suppress his service as a watchdog. Wagging his tail joyfully, he came to meet them and was happy to be petted.

All was still quiet in the house. The inhabitants must still be fast asleep. Behind the house a rooster crowed and in the trees the birds began to let their morning chirping be heard.



It took a little longer to set up a relay station. Nanino couldn't spot a raven in the area.

"We're not refugees and we don't have to hide either," Nanino said to Silvio, "we'll just knock, what do you say, Silvio." The latter only nodded, everything that came from Nanino was almost divine to him. To be asked for his opinion like that, even if only rhetorically, was quite unusual for him.

Nanino knocked at the door. At first nothing moved, only when the knocking turned into thunder did something stir in the house. An elderly woman was handling a key and was surprised to discover the two boys at the door.

"What are you doing out here at this hour?" Indecisive, she stood there not knowing how to handle it. Yes there were already male teenagers and young men in Dagan, but they weren't walking around here on the border at dawn and not in this getup. Where did they come from?

"We're on our way to see the king, and we'd like to have some breakfast here."

"To the king? Where do you come from? By your dress you do not come-" "No we don't come from the land of women!", Nanino interrupted the old woman, "We come from Atlantis."

The old woman could do nothing with that. She just shook her head and immediately thought that she must inform the border station, which could then take care of the strangers.

"I'll have the cook prepare breakfast for you. What would you like to drink? I can offer you blackberry tea."

"That's good."

Nanino and Silvio were let into the dining room, took a seat at a table, and the woman disappeared into the back. There the cook was preparing vegetables for possible lunch guests.

A little girl came from behind and looked curiously at the strange boys. The old woman whispered with the cook. A young woman from the upper floor came down the stairs into the kitchen and spoke to the old woman.

Nanino was able to pick up on her thoughts.

Silvio looked at Nanino and whispered, "Do we have any money to pay?" "No, we don't. The young woman will serve us breakfast and then leave the house by the back door to get the border police. There's no way to avoid that, and--" Nanino paused, "that's the quickest way to get to the King's residence."

The young woman served the tea. Nanino smiled at her and said, "When you go to the border police, please say that an old friend of the king's has come and give my name. Nanina. They should already transmit that to the resistance so that our arrival can go a little smoother.

Surprised, the woman forgot to put down the tray with the tea. She remained standing as if rooted to the spot. Then suddenly she hurried to serve the tea and quickly disappeared into the kitchen. From there the two heard excited whispering. After a few minutes the old woman appeared and brought breakfast: two fried eggs, bread and some cheese.

With great appetite and hunger, the two enjoyed it. They ordered more tea and asked for honey, otherwise this drink would not be edible and they would prefer water. Immediately they got honey in a small bowl.

"What do we do now, the border cops aren't the fastest." Nanino smiled at Silvio, who realized that they would probably be arrested but with Nanino by his side...what could happen.

"Landlady!" cried Nanino. The old woman appeared, and behind her the little girl. "We would like to know how far it is to the king's residence. Can you also tell us if we can get horses or some other convenient means of transportation?"

The landlady seemed to be thinking, she hoped that the border police would arrive soon and she would be rid of these strange, creepy strangers. She had already noticed that their clothing looked like that of the Archaics, she hadn't heard of Atlantis yet.

Nanino took her thoughts and tried to explain. "Yes, you see that right, we are wearing the clothes of the Archaics because we had to travel through that land as well. In the land of women, we traveled undetected. Is that enough of an explanation?"

The landlady was speechless. This boy should be...yes how old and what was he and his companion, at most 3 or 4 years older.

"What am I? Yes, well, I am an emissary from Atlantis. That will have to do."

Nanino tried to get further into the conversation, but the old landlady was very taciturn, and seemed evidently at first puzzled, and then more and more anxious, that Nanino had always known what she was thinking.

"Your king...", Nanino paused, noticing the name Rona in her thoughts, "Rona, is he popular among your people?"

The landlady was redeemed, in the door stood two border policemen with the sign of the Templars on their smocks. There were more outside, including policewomen.

Nanino and Silvio had their hands tied behind their backs and were led outside. Nanino said to Silvio, "Didn't I tell you, we don't need any money here. Maybe we could have bought something more suitable than clothing?" Silvio could smile too, he had landed in another adventure with a surely good outcome.

After 5 days, they were both taken in a horse-drawn carriage to a dungeon cell in the residence. An interrogation followed, during which Nanino had to take great pains to ensure that Silvio did not divulge everything that he did not want the police to know.

Rumors were already circulating among the guards. They were thought to be spies of the Archaics, but as Nanino had his fun with them, they became more and more sinister.

The food came and Nanino thought there were two frogs in it. The guard policewoman noticed them jumping out of the soup bowl, dropped the whole tray and ran away. This and other peculiarities then led to the Minister of Defence showing up accompanied by two armed policewomen after all.

Romo stepped through the doorway, and took a breath. Wasn't that...looked almost like that...but a little older....

"Yes, I am Nanina, as you have come to know me. It was because of me that you had that unpleasantness then, but that brought you to Dagan in the end."

"I don't believe it..."

"But you can believe it. One night you shared a bed with me. Well, it wasn't all night for me. You wanted to be my protector. That gave me confidence but then it all turned out differently, if you'll remember. I have these pictures with you and if I didn't know exactly who you were, I would barely recognize you. You look good and you've grown up beautifully."

Romo sat down on one of the stools in the cell and thought....

Nanino continued, "You're not crazy, you knew I was special. What you didn't know, though, is that I'm a member of the Immortal aristocracy and will be leaving this planet soon."

It took Romo a while to regain control of the situation. He sent messengers to the palace and to the king's guest house. A little later a carriage drove up, Nanino and Silvio were to be brought to the king.

"No, we want to freshen up first and have different clothes. After all, we can't show up at the palace in front of the king dressed like this." So first they went to the guest house, took a shower, had their pants and shirts put on, had a drink, and then ran to the throne room.

Nanino had the impression that the residence city surrounded by a wall and the palace area also surrounded by a wall inside the city had something medieval about it.

"Are you going to use these fortifications around the city to protect yourselves from the hordes of the Great Mother?" Romo stopped, looked at Nanino with a smile, and replied, "Well, modern weapons are legendary, and only in the land of women were there a few left. We are also trying to replicate modern handguns, however we still lack the energy to do so. With sustainable charcoal, you can forge swords and arrowheads, but you can't build modern weapons."

"I know a little of human history, and I know about the problem of energy. Maybe you can develop substitutes that don't last so long and have to be renewed again and again."

"Nino, you mean plastics?"

"I call myself Nanino now," Nanino replied with a smile, "and yes, perhaps other metals and other technological processes."

Romo looked at Nanino from the side, "That might be an idea if it didn't take so long to develop. We're pressed for time and hope we don't get dragged into a war for now."

They had almost reached the throne room when Romo stopped and looked gravely at Nanino. "Our young men and women are not warriors and are far too young. Even though I treated you a bit rough in the beginning in the Horde boys camp, that was just an adjustment and a survival and superiority strategy on my part. But that's also a longer story, just this: I wasn't born in the Great Mother's Horde. And those hairy fighting machines were extremely distasteful to me."



Nanino put his hand on Silvio's shoulder, "Even our Silvio wasn't born among the Archaics," and after a pause Nanino added, "I'm sure you'll get along fine."

"We will, won't we Silvio?" Romo smiled at Silvio and after some hesitation he smiled back.

They reached the king's hall and were met by Seba, the king Rona and the crown prince Sika.

Romo introduced Silvio to her prime minister, Seba.

"That's not true! Our Nanina is actually still alive!" Sika came up to Nanino and hugged him fiercely. "How many times have I thought of our time in the log cabin. And you haven't changed a bit, have you? A tiny bit taller, perhaps?"

Nanino returned the hug and laughed at Sika, "You've gotten a little taller too, though, and you look like a real man with both feet in the middle of life."

Rona was still standing in the background for a bit and after Sika let go of Nanino he came closer. Nanino bowed, "Your Majesty!"

"You don't have to bow down. I would have to bow down to you, because you are the great special, the great exception. Even as children we felt that you were exceptional and we weren't envious, we were proud of you."

Rona also gave Nanino a big hug and invited him to join Sika in talking about the years of their separation. The three went into a side room to chat about the past over a glass of wine.



### **33 The Garden of the Hesperides**

Nanino had discovered the raven after three days of a wonderful sojourn in the kingdom of Dagan and was able to communicate with it. All he had to do was determine when he would be at the remote meeting place to be picked up by drone. He would be coming to Atlantis for the first time and seeing the technological wonders of Pandaeae. True, he had told of Gertrude, the island, and his role as a Sky-Earth Son, but with the strict injunction that no one else know. Rona and Sika promised and after hearing about this community, with Nanino's consent, they decided to make contact. However, he hadn't told them about Pandaeae and the new Atlantis, he didn't know it yet.

The women's country had agreed that the two pregnant women could stay in Dagan in exchange for weapons supplies. But they demanded in the strongest terms that Bella be extradited.

Nanino decided to run away with Bella. Bella immediately agreed. With Nanino's suggestive abilities, they managed to get horses and rode off in the middle of the night without saying goodbye. Bella was a good rider and after three days Nanino could ride just as well.

On the fourth day, with the help of the raven, they reached the remote landing site of the drone at midnight. They let the horses run free and hoped they would make it back to the next village.



Communication was now very good and Nanino always had access to Pandeae, to Beo, to Alan and to all her semi-autonomous beings.

They all decided to take Bella to the Island of Gene Designers. There she could collaborate on a female clone and contribute her experience. Even if it was the declared goal, it was still impossible to know whether this was not just a reminiscence of past times of evolution.

Bella agreed and was only a little sad to lose her friends and now also her friend Nanino. Her new task interested her and she also had immediate ideas how this woman should be designed if she should belong to the aristocracy of the immortals.

They reached the archipelago of New Atlantis. Bella said goodbye to Nanino with a tear in her eye. Nanino flew further into the Atlantic and reached the island with the Garden of the Hesperides.

Beo was waiting for him. They embraced warmly and Beo hinted that Alan had a surprise for us for tomorrow.

"Where is he today?" wanted to know Nanino.

"In the labyrinths of Pandeae," Beo replied with a smile. They shared a bungalow right by the sea and surrendered to the beauty of a sunset, drinking a red juice that gave them a pleasant relaxation as well. The stars appeared and even the Milky Way shone in the clear night sky.

"What's all out there, what tasks, adventures will await us there," Beo enthused, "Pandeae set out, we set out."

"Is this going to be the great settlement of space?"

Nanino had not yet dealt with the astronomers' findings, which had already been made almost a thousand years ago.

Beo knew it and made Nanino an offer: "If you want, we can take a virtual trip through the system of our fixed star. When we didn't exist, Pandeae already sent robots to all the planets and moons. And, Nanino, this is not a colonization of space as humans imagined it back then. This is something else entirely. Why even should such constructs of carbon and water live on the few planets in the vast universe that are similar to Earth. We will not seed biological constructs on other planets. There is no reason to do so. A galactic civilization of immortals is something else entirely. What matters a pool of water in which a few microbes have formed, which then begin a laborious and above all blind evolution."

They both looked up at the deep blue night sky.

"Nanino, if you look at the two stars there, which are the planets Jupiter and Saturn, and close your eyes, you can mentally imagine traveling there. Pandeae will then bring you the images."

"Yeah, that works," Nanino was pleased that he had gotten that free now too. Beo joined in, showing Nanino special features and also cosmic beauties that the robot starships had explored.

"Beautiful, of a cold beauty!" commented Nanino.

"Yes it's cold or very hot there and...", Beo became thoughtful, "and we don't know all the secrets of the universe, not by a long shot. But we will explore them all, we have all the time there is and if it does run out...", Beo laughed at Nanino, "then we create new time."

"People used to think only a god could do that, and for whatever reason, he created the world and all its inhabitants."

"Yes, that's right, Nanino, we didn't create the universe, but we will own it and rule it, and if we must, we will remake it to our liking."

"And now, Beo, my carbon water empire must go to sleep."

They both hugged and headed to bed.

Yes, even if this, my body is immortal, it's still no good for outer space, Nanino fell asleep with these thoughts, noticing that so close to Pandae he could actively create dreams while his biological body regenerated.

Beo and Nanino had breakfast in the nearby cafeteria.

"There are only a few of us left here, most are already in America preparing to leave. There weren't very many of us anyway."

Back at the bungalow, they both sat down on the small terrace and looked out to sea.

"What I don't understand, Beo, surely you don't think that our, on Earth immortal body will also be immortal in the far reaches of space."

Beo laughed. "Of course you don't. Bear with me a moment longer, Alan will be here shortly. He'll be better able to explain to you how we'll be traveling and how we'll be settling."

Alan came around the corner, or what Alan was now. Beo and Nanino were downright dazzled. Even Beo was amazed and completely taken aback. The morning sun bathed a golden body in a radiant aura. Alan had chosen a body similar to humans only it was slightly larger than Beo and Nanino's.

"Yes, this is my latest creation, the clumsy robot suit was just a stopgap after all. How do you like me?" Alan spun and moved in front of the two.

Beo was the first to speak up again, "Takes a little getting used to, and if you've already taken our body as a model, there's something you seem to have forgotten though."

Alan's golden laugh was starting to look a little creepy. "I know, but do we still need that? To shape the penis? Our love for each other is on a higher, a purely spiritual level now, isn't it? My skin is multi-layered and can withstand heat and cold much better than your carbon water sack. I took a composite of special silicones and metals as the basic building block of my skin."

"Do you really think that's enough for a trip to spatial and temporal infinity." Beo was skeptical.

"No of course you didn't. While you were on a training tour among the humans, scattering your love. Have some of us simulated the various space states and developed vessels or - I'll just say robots - suitable for them, making us capable of working under extreme conditions."

Nanino was still skeptical and wanted to know more details, "Then we are to travel through space for thousands of years in such vessels or robots as you call them?"

"We have developed a wide variety of concepts. But we will definitely only travel digitally, our memory core, our memory matrix will travel. At the destination, the corresponding robot will then take us in and bring us to life."

Nanino began to feel slightly dizzy. Alan noticed: "You two, like most of the rest of us, have not yet died in your bodies and woken up in a digital world. It's hard for you to imagine, but you should know that it's easy and opens up a new universe of freedom and unlimited possibilities.

"And how does the robot get to its destination, Beo wanted to know exactly."

"We're still working on that, at sub-light speed for now. In the future, we'll send structure-building wave packets, and there'll be timeless communication later, too."

Beo looked at Nanino, who was lost in himself, and then at Alan, "And your current outfit is suitable for..." "A walk in the solar system. There is already a suitable spacecraft for that. We're going to visit some of the space stations and check out the progress in creating the hardware. We were created as human clones to learn to operate independently as semi-autonomous beings with diminished communication to headquarters."

By now the sun was high in the sky. Alan said goodbye so the two of them could be alone. Nanino wondered why Alan was telling them this in person. Were they still too attached to being human? Would they have reacted differently if it was just a thought transmission?

After a snack Beo and Nanino went swimming and in a small dive boat Beo showed Nanino the underwater world on their steeply sloping coast.



During the night, Nanino dreamed of the underground rooms, full of nano-production units and many other things that Pandae had become. But by morning, completely different memories came. He dreamed, no he experienced memories of Rona, Sika and the simple life in the log cabin.

As he stood up and stepped out onto the terrace to greet the sun, it was clear to him, "I'm staying on Earth for now." In doing so, he had the feeling of being accepted by Pandae.

Notes: \* Apocrypha

Continuation: PANDEAE III on [www.nanina-roman.de](http://www.nanina-roman.de)