



A Dry Seed

Lee
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A

Dry

Seed

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This is dedicated to the unnamed and unremembered electronic engineers who set us on the road that leads to this and the remainder of The Second Expedition.

See www.kassidor.com for background information on the planet Kassidor and other stories by Lee Willard.

Cover sketch by Lee Willard.

The Expedition of Gordon's Lamp

A great ship is under construction and you are invited to be part of it. Named for our illustrious founder, Gordon's Lamp will be the best equipped exploratory vessel yet launched. With quips enough for fifty six souls, it will carry more minds than even our fleet on its way to Centorin. And these will be some of the foremost minds in the study of the physical. They will have at their disposal sensor technology which wasn't available when the Centauri expedition was built. In command of the expedition will be none other than the great Kelvin M'Kintre, distinguished in both the military of the Pan Solar League and the ministry of our church. He has recently voluntarily ascended to take the helm of this great vessel.

Even though a single grain has not yet been turned at Centauri, you already know that the investments made by the Centauri shareholders have already returned a hundred-fold. Investors in expeditions which have not yet returned data have returned ten-fold already. If you think you've missed the initial investments in all the major nearby systems, you haven't.

Gordon's Lamp will be the second expedition launched, but the first to arrive at the triple star system of 61 Cygni. This system contains two healthy young K-type stars and a brown

dwarf so small it was once mistaken for a planet. In addition to these stellar bodies, the system swarms with smaller planets, moons and no less than three asteroid belts. In addition to all that, there is a gravity-locked but otherwise terrestrial planet in the system which might be the nearest opportunity for terminator-ring terraforming. Several theoretical possibilities exist for liquid water, and though the odds are low, a full biology laboratory, headed by none other than the immortal soul of Alfred McReady, is part of the expedition.

While the visuals of this system are currently only conjecture, we now know that it is nearly a certainty that this system will soon be sustaining growth as rapid as any other targeted for development. Because you are a member in good standing of our Church, and the Christial Church is the coordinating body of this expedition, you are being offered the special opportunity to make this exceedingly fortunate investment. And because the Church which has saved your souls is guiding this expedition, you also have the assurance that the exploration and exploitation of this system will be carried out in accordance with your moral principles, all the way to and including the seed of mortal humans, chosen from good pious families such as yours.

Gordon's Lamp will be a fast ship, reaching its destination in only a century, a trifle now that you are immortal. But your

investment will grow right from the start as people learn of the potential riches in the Cygni system. All you invest in this initial offering will be secure as soon as construction starts and financial analysts confirm the fitting out and staffing of this great ship. Read on and examine the plans yourself, then decide how big a part in this you'd like to play, for yourself and for your church.

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i. Security Breach

A thin and pale teenage boy fidgeted nervously at his terminal, alone in his cramped room of metal walls loaded with devices and screens. In his sixteen years of life he had never taken a greater risk, his heart beat faster and his palms were sweaty with the excitement. Alan was in some of the most secure areas he had ever probed, his other breaches of privacy were nothing like this. Until now he had done nothing more serious than gain access to restricted data from the study planet below. Now he was in the crew's personnel data, all the crew of the whole expedition of Gordon's Lamp, both human and Angel.

Getting here wasn't really the hard part, it was making sure that he didn't leave tracks. Doing so meant getting to the very lowest levels, bypassing all the system resource accounting. None of that could have been done if Ava hadn't tapped into the hardware data layer long ago and laid down passageways that could get under that accounting. He knew about nano-amp cross-checking also and had to plan carefully for his edits to those values to cover where he had been. He had spent months writing monitors to do those calculations.

Alan worked at the hardware level and just above. Above that was a labyrinth of complexity he would never even try to

master. All he needed of those levels were the display functions to show him the data, and he knew how to access those right down at the driver object tables. All he had to do was follow it up to the display method of the data object and invoke it directly over the bus from the hardware right in his screen. He'd already compiled hardware for his own use that would render an Angel vision stream on his screens.

His best Angel friend was Ava Bancour. She was the systems expert who had started his education in the secrets of the virtual universes where the Angels lived. Hers was the first file he looked up. She had been mortal from 2136 to 2148. She had been the first Angel resurrected in the Americas, even before the original 144,000 were brought thru from cryofreeze. Her records seemed complete, but Alan had a sense there were parts of her records he could not penetrate. There should have been more to record the career of so brilliant a technologist. He could find no record of her ACTUALLY joining the Christial Church for instance, though she worked for it most of her career. He could not find links to the actual programing she had done, but she had already shown him how to set up his own file system, so there was little doubt that she had private storage somewhere else.

Her whole career had been spent as an Angel, working with the science that had allowed her soul to continue functioning after she died in the parking garage where she spent her childhood. She knew the nuts and bolts of the

science that allowed a human soul to be simulated in logic to a level of detail so complete that none can determine that it is not the dead relative brought back to life.

Because of this knowledge, she had godlike powers. She could build whole universes in virtual space, for virtual space was so limitless that every Angel could have an entire perfect universe tailored to their own desires. An Angel need not feel any discomfort, an Angel could fly thru the heart of a star without harm. The majority of Angels just thought their universes were in other dimensions, but Ava, and now Alan, knew the truth, they were just lots and lots of specially programmed gates running lots and lots of software that simulated the functions of the human mind and the entire universe around it.

Ava chose to appear as a slender young woman with smooth dark brown hair and a light tan, very much grown up from the body she died in, looking like she was still in her early thirties. She had an unanimated personification in her file, like a virtual body she wasn't using right now. He enjoyed undressing it to view what she would look like naked, for she presented as quite a fine looking woman. He had to remember that this was private, part of her medical file, or he would have thought it was pretty racy having that there. If he had really wanted to get raunchy he could have animated it into much more erotic positions than he did.

She lived in a wicker and rattan house on a beach in a universe free of biting insects under the shade of some

spreading palms just back of the sand. There were maps and plans of her property. He had seen it before when he visited with her by screen. When he did, he could see her home as if he was there and his eyes were the camera, but since he was mortal, he could only see it projected on a screen or eyewear.

Ava chose to be very fair and give each Angel the same powers with virtual control panels to use in building the universe they desired. They all built different universes, but almost all were free of biting insects.

The journey to 61 Cygni had taken almost a hundred years, even with the advanced Bussard power that let them accelerate half the way here and decelerate the other half. Unlike the mortals, who had no choice and had to go frozen, most Angels chose not to suspend themselves but continued their lives in their universes thruout the whole journey. Their lives were effected only by the fact that their communications to anyone outside the expedition took longer and longer til mail was the only viable format. The round trip was now twenty three years and only big news got sent, expedition data mainly. The news from home was available, but it was over eleven years old. In their day-to-day lives many of the expedition's crew were not really effected by the fact that they had finally reached 61 Cygni, especially if they worked in a specialty that wasn't directly involved with physical space. Ava was little effected directly with their arrival, she was just generally busier now as he saw from her duty reports, but it was all the same duty. She was the lowest

ranking person to report directly to the captain.

He found the records of the captain himself. Kelvin M'Kintre had been mortal from 2111 to 2174 when he was granted voluntarily ascension to take command of this expedition. Gordon's Lamp was the pride of the young nation called the Pan Solar League. It was a major Angel seedship and Kelvin hoped it would make a discovery rivaling Centorin.

When Kelvin was involved in the planning of this expedition, the first reports had already come back from Alpha Centauri of a double-sun system rich in minerals with an Earthlike planet currently dead like Mars but 7,016 miles in diameter and only 138 million miles from the 'A' star. They had already begun lining up volatiles to impact it. Texas Industries and Hyundai were both starting studies for expeditions. There were three more expeditions currently on the way to Alpha Centauri including the huge Chinese daedalus, New Shanghai, launched in 2121 and scheduled to arrive at Alpha Centauri with three thousand sleepers in 2288.

The League was divided over getting in on that action or taking a chance on O2 Eriandi, another star with an Earthlike planet and no report in yet. There the planet was probably seven thousand miles in diameter and had a year of over two hundred fifty days, so it would probably be cool. There was one at Procyon on the small and cold side, and eight more stars with Earth-sized liquid-water planets between twenty

and thirty light years out. There were several more systems with orbital opportunities for civilization. Astronomers were discovering more Earthlike planets in expanded habitable zones routinely out to fifty light-years now.

They could not arrive at O2 Eridani first, but there was a third Earth-sized planet in a habitable zone within fifteen light years. and Bussard drives had advanced to the point where they could beat the Brazilian daedalus sleeper-ship that had been launched in 2148. That star was a little K5 called 61 Cygni, but it had a planet maybe even larger than Centorin only twenty five million miles out. This planet could only be a terminator-zone planet at best because the star is so small, but the rich belts of smaller bodies made them decide that 61 Cygni would be their destination. Those sleepers from Brazil would wake to find they'd been beaten by a nation which had not been founded when they'd left. Kelvin had left a personal note that he had supported the plan to be second at O2 Eridani. Alan was surprised he hadn't deleted that.

The Captain had been a great military logistics officer for the Pan Solar League, the governmental arm of the Christial Church, and Gordon's Lamp's nation of registry. He had a long list of feats and accomplishments and awards that Alan got bored with long before he finished.

He presented his personification as tall and dark with tight curls of magnesium-grey hair and large hands, forehead and shoulders, just the way he looked the day he mounted the steps to the freezer in which he ascended. His medical

personification was of no interest to Alan. At meetings and assemblies the Captain floated in space with the other Angels between the ship and the planet. The ship floated in space between the planet and it's largest and innermost moon. This moon circled the planet just three times in the time the planet rotated once, precessing just a few minutes in every one of the planet's days.

The captain never allowed anyone into his own universe, and gave no hint of what it might be like. Alan suspected he just dismissed everyone from right where he was and remained there, staring at the great ball of what should not be.

The captain was not happy with the planet they had found, that came across clearly in his notes. He was nervous about orbiting here even though the native civilization could not possibly attack them. It probably couldn't even detect them, he agreed, but if they somehow could, there could be a frenzy down below.

It was also true that the presence of an existing civilization lowered the worth of the expedition to it's investors. He was conscious of how souls back at Sol were going to feel about finding aliens here. The captain believed it was obvious that the only outcome of ever setting foot on the surface of this planet would be disease, war, endless court wrangling, strangling budget battles and a no-win situation. He was also sure that the fact that it existed was a political death blow to his career. He knew only the head of state could make first contact, yet he also knew the discovery

couldn't be ignored. He'd had a certain 'dead man walking' look to him ever since. He was willing to re-group at the B star and see what they could make out of that. It would be centuries before the locals would be able to reach it. He could stay there and wait for orders from Sol about the extant civilization.

The main interest of the funding of the expedition had been in the rich asteroid belts that surrounded all three stars in the 61 Cygni system. The famous research economist Elmore Bovok calculated an exploitability index of $1.6e17$ while they were in decel. An index that might even be energy limited. From back at Sol before the expedition launched there had been instruments that told them that there was a much greater percentage of the mass in small bodies in the 61 Cygni System than at Sol, and that was now borne out by closer observation. There were two small stars twelve billion miles apart and one very tiny brown dwarf a third of a billion miles from the larger. A dense band of rocks which could be called a ring circled the tiniest, two bands circled the primary star and several rings circled the other k7 star. There were only three other large bodies in the system, the terrestrial planet eleven and a half thousand miles in diameter twenty five million miles from the largest star and bodies of four thousand and six and a half thousand mile diameters shepherding the rings around B at eighty four million and four hundred twenty million miles. There were no gas giants

in the system unless you counted the brown dwarf, which wasn't very much bigger than a gas giant at two hundred thousand miles in diameter.

Colonel Bovok now commanded Economics for the expedition as well as astronomy, which was part of Physical Economics. He had been mortal from 2058 to 2149 and had been one of the first mortals to settle in the orbital states, living in New Dallas from 2118 till his death. He had also served in the military of New Dallas and retired a Colonel in 2126. In the Afterlife he went back to his career in resource economics and formulated the basic equations of source universe utilization.

Angel civilization needs power and substrate from a source universe. Each source universe can sustain a very large but finite amount of virtual universe. His expertise was in finding ways to use the materials presented. The minerals and energy are much easier to extract from small bodies than large. Planets with deep gravity wells and corrosive atmospheres are much more difficult to deal with than bodies with unoxidized metals, microgravity, and an unshielded look at the local sun. This was a reason Elmore favored 61 Cygni as a destination.

Elmore joined the church in 2154 and emigrated to Ceres where he began his present career, putting his theories into practice for one of Heaven's up and coming nations. His faith was sound, but liberal toward mortals. Alan knew this from personal experience because he had conversed with Elmore

many times. Alan suspected he wouldn't mind being mortal again. He had taken an interest in Alan's studies and helped teach him when he could. He had no <subject blind> entries, and had made no personal notes on his opinion of the planet.

Heymon Kruger, who had been mortal from 2121 til 2171, was the commander of Engineering and Facilities. He presented himself as a big man, sometimes in space like the captain but large enough to disassemble Gordon's Lamp or hold two hull modules it in his hands like a model and point to the part of it he was talking about. He had a barrel chest, brush-cut hair standing straight up, beefy arms and thick fingers. His voice was deep and gravelly.

Heymon was the officer most affected by their arrival. He had kept busy wrapping up decel, maneuvering them into orbit and then launching the prospecting remotes. He spent lots of time out in a remote himself. He was the only Colonel to go physical EVA with any regularity. Alan thought of the image of his tool tug as more Heymon than the medical personification avatar. He obviously lavished more attention on the physical uGrav explorer/sampler that he lived in most of his duty shifts now that they were here. His virtual human personification was just for formal occasions.

They visited the ring of star 'C' first. The Earthlike planet at this star emitted no energies that lead Sol-based instruments to believe there was a technical civilization here, their early approach agreed. Still, they knew an early

civilization could exist, but could not observe them a third of billion miles out. They could not decelerate in time to explore A's huge and tenuous outer asteroid belt. Remote sensing told them it was more like a Kuiper belt anyway, chunks of frozen gasses extending for billions of miles around the star. Alan had been an infant during that time Heymon was gathering that data.

Star 'C' itself was a beautiful object, more gas giant than star, dark on the night side, banded on the sunlit side. It also had glowing bands and swirls, the glowing swirls and flares were bright enough to see on the sunlit side, very prominent and colorful on the dark side. Glowing Aurorae could be seen out to five or six times it's diameter if you were on the dark side when it eclipsed the parent star. Alan saw this in his sky all thru childhood. Not that he actually saw much sky, that was just another view he could get on his screens. He would sit and look at it enough that it was familiar. 'C' was always going thru too many changes to be familiar.

While Colonel Bovok controlled the main scope, all the remotes except the atmosphere shuttle and atmosphere probes belonged to Facilities. This meant that Heymon was the chief prospector and thus was the one who told Elmore the bad news. This asteroid band was even poorer in metals than their worst fears and very poor in rich ores. The exploitation efficiency would be down around $7.8e14$. Unclaimed bodies in Sol's belt were higher.

Before they were out of decel the biology department had

already determined that the inner planet had life, lots of life. As soon as they were sure that biology was compatible, Alan had been conceived, thus he had not experienced the hundred year voyage from Sol. Instead his entire youth and childhood had been spent in the small cabin and exercise ring of the expedition's biology department. Of course his childhood seemed normal to him at the time, but as he grew older and read more of Earth's literature, he began to understand how different he really was.

His parents were incredulous that this greatest find of all time, an evolution of macroscopic life that was not from Earth, didn't have immediate priority. Heymon championed the cause of sticking to the mission plan and continuing to break for orbital insertion around C, using its gravity to provide some additional deceleration. They wouldn't get there that much sooner by skipping the asteroid belt between 'C' and 'A'. Biology countered with the thought that the chemical analysis they could make on the planet from here lead them to believe that it might very likely be habitable by unassisted humans already, and would report as much back to Earth. Heymon applauded that as much as any member of the crew, but in spite of that the Captain said he had a flight plan to follow and investigation of the planet would occur when scheduled, which was after the next asteroid belt. Alan was seven years old when they left the thick ring of gas and dust around 'C' for the much larger ones around A. There were two dwarf planets, a Titan and a Ganemede, dividing the ring

into half, quarter, eighth.

Alan was most afraid of accessing the files of Colonel Glayet Samrova of Security. She presented herself as a beefy woman with large arms and thighs, an iron-grey flat-top crew-cut and a long chin. She was in charge of discipline among the crew. As a Reverend Sister of the Church, she would also take it upon herself to enforce church doctrine. As this was a Church-sponsored trip, theology was content with that also. Thus she had enormous power over the small-fry of the expedition and wasn't afraid to use it.

What he was reading now was what her eyes only were permitted to see, the most confidential records on the ship. He felt like he was in her bureau drawers and she was sleeping fitfully on the bed he was leaning over in his search. How shocked he was to find a <subject blind> anonymous entry saying that she enjoyed her work too much to be totally sane and needed watching.

Her mortal years were 2092-2160. Like many on the ship, she had been born in New Dallas and was one of the first generation of space-born mortals. She joined the New Dallas city staff as a Custodial Officer in 2127 where she served until her death. After her death she learned the technical details of electronic surveillance and signal recognition. She was already a church member as a mortal, became a Sister in 2175 during admission to the crew and was escalated to Reverend Sister in 2212 during ceremonies marking the turn-

around.

In addition to discipline among the crew, her task also included security regarding any hostile beings or devices they might encounter. She had to start taking this part of her role very seriously when biology got some time on the main scope and got one of the first very good looks at the planet's surface. They were investigating a very large scale phenomenon that could be seen even from a hundred and seventy five million miles away while they were in the inner asteroid belt. A surface mapper had determined that some of the largest bodies of water were perched on continental plateaus at the same altitude. The main scope was turned on that feature, concentrating on the exits of those inland seas. There were thick jungles at many of the points where the rivers should have eroded their way out. There was the overgrown ruin of a pyramid at one. On the ground a tiny line of water was found winding its way along the contour connecting two of the largest bodies thru many smaller ones. In another picture, docks were seen on a river emptying into one of those lakes.

Glayet had no choice but to enforce precautions in case there was a civilization down there that could detect them. Gordon's Lamp was designed to remain undetectable to a civilization as advanced as their own and she clamped down that protocol. The captain backed her a hundred percent, his orders were right on file and very clear, they were not to be detected by any possible civilization on the planet.

She made the approach to the planet and the prospecting take even longer as they damped all transmission. They listened for any signals from the planet that could indicate higher technology. Prospecting was seriously hampered because all remotes had to be autonomous. That time was when Glayet herself was directly involved in monitoring signals from the planet.

Serious biological investigation had to wait for probes to determine what level the civilization was on. They were able to dispatch a couple autonomous rendezvous probes to get a little more detail while Alan was a pre-teen, but all thru the three years they took to swing by the planet and back out to Gordon's Lamp, Glayet kept them on silent running. It wasn't until the probes came back with detailed pictures from these fly-bys that the Captain and Colonels were finally sure the technology here was pre-industrial if it survived at all. Only then would Colonel Samrova and the captain allow them to approach closer. That order was also on file.

Brigadier Saint Arthur O'Conner, the head of Theology for the expedition had the most <subject blind> data of all! He had been one of the hundred forty four thousand in cryofreeze. He was a Minister in his mortal life, but it seemed he'd never really been ordained. He'd been active in televised religion from it's start, his mortal years were 1951-2034. He'd been more active in the finances of some of those churches than in the proselyting, but had always been a good

fund raiser, especially in the early years of the Church. He knew E. Adelphus Gordon personally.

He was the most powerful person on the ship, including the captain. He reported to the captain militarily, but as keeper of church doctrine, St. O'Conner directed the goals of the expedition, the captain just carried them out. Arthur knew this, as did most others. Sometimes it seemed that Kelvin was unaware.

As the Bishop of the on-board church, with a staff of three ministers in his department, two of them also holding the rank of bishop, he had higher authority than a commission in the League's starship fleet. Alan could see from his notes that he considered himself to be the one speaking for Earth and the Church's investments unless proven otherwise.

By now the ship had reached near-orbit, drifting in as slowly as possible. They intended it to look like a group of asteroids that had somehow become stuck in the gravitational null between the moon and the planet. The ship's chain of hollowed iron asteroids was now lined up end to end, undeployed. In a simple telescope, if these creatures could make one, it would look like they'd just drifted into position, coming to rest against each other. They'd have to have telescopes at least as good as 19th century Earth to see what this was, to the naked eye they were just a whisker off the moon's tip at best, sometimes a tiny pinpoint of light to the naked eye.

Alan knew that looks at the civilization from near-orbit hinted that it was in ruins, starting with the autonomous remote probe. They cursed that no fine optics were sent with the expedition and they had to get by with what the fabricators could produce, giving them clues but little that was definitive. Masses of stonework that might have once been great cities were covered with deep jungle growth, the areas surrounding them might have been covered with huts or nests of some native life form. They had enough resolution to determine that most large life on the planet was built on an alligator shape with about four legs on each side. One such species was common in cleared areas around the peripheries of the ruins.

Now that they looked closer, there was less clear evidence of civilization. There were the docks, from here ships could be seen, large crowds of ships in many cases, crowds of those animals and some smaller animals they couldn't quite be made out clearly moved things around on the docks and ships using wagons. It would appear that ancient quays were still in use transferring cargo even though all but one of the cities themselves had been overgrown. The one that wasn't overgrown was as big as the greatest of Earth, but it emitted too little energy to be occupied.

Alan also knew that as they stayed in this orbit and studied the planet more, they became more and more impressed with just how big it is. It had more area than Mars with air too thin for human consumption. It had twice the land

area of Earth that was covered with life. Most of it was forest or prairie and appeared pristine from what they could see from orbit. It had only 18% the salt water area of Earth and most of that was covered with life like a floating jungle with thousands of feet or even miles of water beneath.

The natives probably still possessed agriculture because microwaves showed the flatter regions of the planet were almost always covered with small bodies of water, presumably irrigation canals. Those areas were often brushy, covered in layers of open vegetation several feet deep. This could be the equivalent of subsistence farms. Even if they were only as productive as Earth's had been at this level of technology, there was enough area of that to provide sustenance for billions of the creatures. Mappers said this planet might have a greater cultivated area than Earth. They wouldn't know for sure until they could tell what was cultivated and what was wild.

Alan could tell St. O'Connor was contemplating the morality of this from the notes he had written:

God said to spread mankind,
be fruitful and multiply
. Link to a Church directive which spells out the duty of providing souls for the church. Alan got very bored with the theo-speak in this very quickly, way before it got to the point.
. Since mortal life was still the only way a soul gained entry to life, it was their holy duty to settle this world with mortals who would produce souls for the church.

. This world could support billions of souls, maybe more than Earth.

...<<<This world is inhabited already>>>...

. Is this another instance of creation?

. Is God the same here or had a different God created these beings in his own eight-legged image?

. Are we taking 'image' too literally and he meant his own spiritual image, knowing the same right from wrong, striving for the same good thruout the universe?

. Could these life forms, whatever they were like as mortals, mingle in a virtual universe or in neighboring universes? Would they live separate? Would freezers and virtualizers even work on the alien brain?

It was clear to Alan that evolution here had followed the same rules as on Earth, but had taken a different path. Still Alan was impressed by the notes the Bishop had made to himself. He asked himself how one would recognize the word of God in a species so different that they slept stretched out on beds of flowers with their eight legs folded under them, paws under their cheeks, each next wrist tucked under an elbow.

How would we learn their language? Arthur wondered. Alan thought that would come somewhere in the realm of Biology, maybe with some help from Ava.

Those were really the only Angels he was interested in looking up right now. The first lander was going to go down

soon, next duty shift, in the form of a balloon disguised as a native life form. It would come down over one of the vast desert areas, trying to look like a wisp of cloud while the upper gasbag was pumped into the dirigible body while it descended. Alan wanted to be awake again as results came in from that. He wanted to watch it live.

But before he slept, he looked up his own record. Mortal 2251-, as he expected. His studies were all recorded, except for these extra-curricular skills which Ava had taught him and the ones he had figured out on his own. Nothing had been such a really big surprise on this hacking expedition until he linked to his parents. The entries for them were just plain wrong. His father was listed as Paul Larkin, 2071-2156, Rector and Fireman. His mother was listed as Grace Larkin, 2075-2164, Catechist. Both born-again members of the Christial Church while still mortal. Met and married in the Afterlife.

He stayed up a lot later than he wanted to, trying to find out what this was about. There was a lottery of frozen sperm and egg. It all came together in vitro under a microscope. He easily examined the links to that data, it was nowhere near as sensitive as what he was in before. It was down the bottom of the Mission Charter in public space, hidden behind hundreds of pages of stifling boredom.

Now he knew what he really was. He should have known it all along, he did know this was a seedship. What made him so gullible that he believed the crew was allowed to have real

children? Nothing more than the fact that he had been so young when it was told, Alfred and Victoria had always been his parents.

His parents were not his genetic parents. He was a test-tube baby, grown in a bottle. A child of parents who didn't even meet until after their bodies were both dead. Alfred and Victoria had been chosen by the church as the ones most capable of giving him a successful upbringing when the expedition arrived. He was just the seed of this seedship, not a son of mortal crew. He was seed of a seedship which had discovered a planet already inhabited by an alien civilization. He was a seed that very likely would never sprout.

There was nothing about handling existing civilizations in the expedition charter. The Angels knew very well that if there was a civilization on that planet as advanced as the one on Earth it would have been detected long in the past by its radio emissions. This was a civilization which was not as advanced as that of Sol, but possibly something only a few hundred years behind.

It was because of the natives that no more children were started and there would very likely be no seeding happening until the Angels consulted with Earth. He should have had many playmates as he got older, that test tube should have been turning out one zygote every nine months until each mortal couple was raising a family of four. That's what would have happened had this world been easily capable of terraforming. Instead he had been the only child, gripped in a

terrible world of loneliness in spite of his parents best efforts and frequent visits by Morg and Glenelle. With no other children aboard he had little opportunity to play, and even at his young age, he knew his personality had suffered.

It was noted under <subject blind> that a rich find of minerals and an OK from Earth might still allow it to be morally proper to start orbital colonies and maybe someday communication with the aliens so the church hadn't marked him for immediate ascension. That seemed to be the only hope he had of anything but living his life in this can caring for his aging adopted parents till they ascended. Who knows, the Angels could decide to take them all up if Sol says no to any colonization here.

Alan didn't see how that was possible. The fact that this system had extant life was already known back there and more expeditions here were probably already launched. Before word could get back here regarding what to do about the existence of native civilization, he would be thirty two and there would surely be a flotilla of expeditions on the way here. It wouldn't be possible for any of them to get here before the Brazilians unless someone invented a warp drive soon. It just might come to that. This was certainly the biggest news in history already. This was the BIG DISCOVERY and Centorin was likely to get forgotten. It would certainly sink lower in the newscasts back home.

In four more years, in 2271, those at Sol would learn that not only is there life here, there is intelligent life. Then

pandemonium would break loose. There would certainly be many more expeditions after that, he hoped they wouldn't all be military.

His real status was as much of a shock to him as the discovery of an extrasolar civilization was to the remainder of the expedition. As much of a shock as news of this civilization would be to Sol once the data arrived. He blindly dozed thru the lists of other parents and names for the other zygotes. There were seven thousand of them, enough to start a thriving little community. He noticed that there were many, many times as many women as men. He was once again a little insulted at the life planned for him, but then he could imagine a worse life than fertilizing women. He imagined the girls he would have picked from as brides among the zygotes. He wondered what would happen if he secretly started the Persian/Japanese embryo named Zhaiya Komoy in that glass womb? Would she grow up to be a sweet and sultry, lively little woman? Who would raise her? It would have to be Glenelle and Morgan wouldn't it? It would be down in Mechanics wouldn't it? It would be unthinkable if she was raised as his sister.

He was dazed when the list was done, almost too overwhelmed to remember to carefully cover his tracks. He had to look up where he'd been. Finally he got up from the screen and went to try for sleep. It didn't come. He couldn't really understand why he was so mad. What was so different about being a lone seed and being a child born of members of

the crew? Perhaps he thought of the seedmen as the Bishop did, as being a crop that the Angels wanted to scatter across the universe from which they would harvest souls, while he would be an honest and worthy crewman thruout his life. He had not imagined himself seeding the planet when the time came, thinking like the Angels, that he was far beyond the dirt-grubbing germ-fighting habits of biology, just a student of it.

Perhaps he was mad because of the knowledge that his biological life really didn't count, it was just a penance one had to do to become an Angel. He had always hoped his biological life would count for something like his parents.

He wanted to say something to his parents about it, but they would know he had been snooping in files he wasn't supposed to see. On the other hand, he knew he couldn't just walk up to them in the morning and act like nothing was different. He knew his fate for sure now, as a child of the crew there was more future than as an unneeded seed. 'Just one soul,' they would say, 'might as well take him now.' He was already older than Ava had been by four years, it was very expensive to maintain his biological body. He wondered if the four mortals in cryofreeze had been sent along just to raise him? Would they be taken to virtual also?

He eventually talked himself around to believing they would soon understand that with all the expeditions coming, they were going to have to start a colony no matter how poor the soil. The messages from Earth would talk some sense into

the captain and Theology. He eventually fell asleep dreaming of a dark and sleek and young little Zhaiya Komoy romping with him thru the low gee world of a growing settlement on one of the nearby titanoid worlds.

ii. Parents

Victoria was getting tired of occupying the android lately. She loved Alan dearly but wished he could be told the truth. Animating the android was time consuming and took much of her concentration. She felt like she really was in a forty six year old mortal body seeing the data thru screens like Alan did, instead of just receiving the data feeds directly to virtual displays that hung in her universe where she wanted them. Of course she should have known Alan wouldn't let the first lander mission be one of the times he was asleep and she could step out of the android.

There wasn't much to see so far, empty gravel plains with scraps of green around the washes. It could have been Arizona except for the details of the plants. In the distance in front they could see prairie, there might be something interesting there so they had Morgan steer that way. They still had a long way to go before the whole gasbag was emptied and they had to get toward lower ground.

The annoyance of animating the android became secondary when Alan asked, "Why have you never told me

you aren't my real parents?"

"What do you mean?" That had really surprised her.

"I'm one of the seeds, my parents were Paul and Grace Larkin. I am Alan Larkin, not McReady. I saw it way down the end of the charter."

"You can't tell him." Alfred told her thru virtual space.

"I know that," Victoria replied virtually. She tried to make it look like she had used those fractions of a second to get her thoughts together. "Yes," she transmitted thru audio, "We should have told you about that by now. We feel so much like your real parents, we raised you like an adopted infant. We hardly remember that you're adopted."

"Those are the rules Alan," Alfred said in audio, "and they are set up for a reason. It is ruled that the mortal crew of a seedship may not have biological descendants unless all seeds fail. It is to keep people from playing favorites."

"It hasn't worked," Victoria continued, "I love you just as much as if you were mine. This always happens with babies adopted in infancy, which is what you really were. I even took hormones so I could nurse you. We may be eleven light years from home, but I still did everything your genetic mother could do for you." This was not the time to talk about this. They were passing over the surface of a whole new planet, the first multicellular life discovered off of Earth. Why did he have to find this out now and bring it up now?

Alfred was talking, "The parents were chosen for superior genes, the natural way, choosing the seed of the best parents

in the church.”

“A selective breeding program?!”

“It’s all within the Church Alan.” She sat and folded her hands on her lap. This way she could think about what she was talking about and didn’t have to spend so much time thinking about where her android body was. She was facing him now, her attention diverted from the probe’s screens, but of course she had the direct feeds thru virtual space that looked as if she was inside the instrument in the probe itself actually landing on the planet. She felt almost like her soul was running in the probe, there was a piece stuck back here in the android having to deal with Alan. “It wouldn’t be fair if it was the crew only. Perfect health and fitness was just one of the qualifications, a perfect moral record was another. The parents may NOT be one of the crew. The zygote to be genned first was picked using a random mechanical process.”

“But you’ll always be my son to me,” Alfred said, “You even look like me I think, like I did when I was your age.”

“I am your job,” Alan said, “not your son.”

Victoria continued to do her job and let her part in the conversation between Alan and the android lapse. Just enough of her had to remain in the android to keep it sitting up instead of locked and powered off, which was where she wished it was right now so she could stay in the probe without distractions.

“The biological research of this mission is my job,” Alfred replied, “you and Vic are my family, my life that is not

a job. Yes you are adopted but I still feel toward you like a son.”

The landscape was more geology than biology where they were. They were coming down on the dry side of a continental plateau. It was a rugged gravel wasteland below. She thought she saw something move but couldn't be sure, she didn't re-examine the data now, she knew they would see large and plentiful life forms ahead.

“You are both on duty at the dinner table with your discussions,” Alan told Alfred.

There was plenty of plant life, tiny things that looked like moss. Delicate looking things which might have been fungi, they were purple in color. There were green specks here and there, they were still two miles above the ground but dropping fast. The pump was keeping the probe's dirigible body inflated to the atmospheric pressure as they descended by pumping helium from the bag to the body. When the bag was deflated they would imitate a lighter than air animal that was common on the planet, something that looked like a slow moving flying whale or dolphin with twin vertical tails.

“I'm sorry about that,” Alfred said to Alan, “but how about if we concentrate a little more on our jobs now while we pilot this lander and save this family discussion for later?”

She paid attention to that. That made sense. To show she agreed with that, she got her android up and took it over to where it could watch the main screens which were showing the probe's video. This was as good an approximation as Alan

could get of what a direct feed was like.

“There’s nothing to see yet,” Alan responded.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Glenelle said. Her voice came into Alan’s cabin via a speaker, to Vic via virtual space. The game they played for Alan was that she was down in the mechanics pod and getting feeds of the instrument readings on screens down there. Morgan was also down there but acting as the ‘pilot’ of the lander. Since it was really flown remotely anyway, it didn’t matter where they were actually located. “I’m seeing all kinds of different sizes and shapes of those animals on the same basic plan. What would be the four legged plan on Earth. If you run a motion detector sweep over the camera data you’ll see quite a few. I’m running the optics at fifty percent overlap and pick up something moving every few hundred meters. We probably have enough images to start running speciators now.”

“I’ll get some of those going,” Vic told her. Alan was man enough to tend to his duties with the probe at that point instead of insisting that they talk about it now. His duty was to keep his eyes on the big picture and shout if he saw anything interesting. He was the first one who spotted the herd of large animals. Morgan steered them in that direction and they got the first really detailed pictures of large native life. There was a herd of large herbivores running and kicking up dust. They ran with the odd legs taking the inside and the evens the outside so each leg had to work every other stride. They had three eyes on stalks and long, narrow bills or noses.

There was a more violent cloud of dust at the tail of the herd and they spotted something larger there, a carnivore that had taken one. It had six slender running legs and two more powerful front legs with pincers like a crab or lobster. It had a long narrow mouth with lots of jagged teeth, a single huge fang on top, two on the bottom at the tip. It had a fluffing purple mane and a long flexible tail that opened into a large plume. By the time they drifted over it, it was cutting and pulling limbs off of the prey animal and devouring the meat off of them. The herd was without young so this carnivore had brought down an adult. This would be a very dangerous animal to someone in flesh. It was large enough to threaten the animals that might be the natives.

Shouts came thru from many of the crew, they were heard on the speaker for Alan's benefit. There was a babble of conversation about this. Vic stayed out of it, in Alan's speaker and in virtual space. It's picture would be going out on the home beam as soon as it was formatted. With the way people were fascinated with lions and tigers and bears and tyrannosaurus rex, a few frames of that carnivore should be worth a good portion of the cost of the expedition in merchandising alone.

The orbital pictures told them that this probe would have to continue on this course for several hours before they came to what might be a civilized area. They dropped sampler probes in this area that would capture some smaller life and send their data back up to Gordon's Lamp, then self-destruct

before any natives could find them.

Vic spotted another form of life in one of the brushy trees. It was sort of like a tree climbing furry octopus. It was writhing it's arms over the branches and leaves and standing on a single four-clawed leg which gripped the trunk in it's first crotch. It's arms were each about eight feet long and very slender, it's body the size of an ape's. It's eyes were on the tips of the tentacles, making them look like cyclops snakes. She thought this was so different it might be in a different phylum from the multilegged forms.

From then on data came fast and furious as they began to see more and more life. Vic would have liked to pay more attention to the plant life of the planet, but the others were already too interested in the animal life.

It took another hour to get down close enough to the surface to use the dirigible body only. By then they were over rolling prairie where herds of many forms of the same basic plan were common. That carnivore was a common plan, there were several sizes and colors of them. Old films of the Serengeti plains seen from a primitive helicopter came to mind.

As the land got more and more fertile, there were less carnivores and thicker herds. They finally came to an area that might have been modified by intelligent life. They saw some of the animals they thought were associated with the civilization. They saw that their yards were rimmed with upright stands of twined shoots or hedges. These creatures

were similar to those in the wild, a little lower, more muscular than most, with five eyes instead of three, all on stalks of the same length.

“I see one pulling a cart,” Alfred said, “and there is another animal on the cart, one of the smaller ones we couldn’t make out before.”

They swung the scope in that direction, but the view was now blocked. Morgan steered them in that direction. They all kept looking at it as they approached.

“There’s another of the smaller creatures, the smaller ones are of humanoid form,” Alfred said.

Vic could see that also, they were less than a mile away now. There were optics which could have resolved a large picture but the air had it swimming. It was better to use less magnification, you got a better impression of what you were seeing. “How would our form evolve out of these?” she asked aloud, “Could it be something from that tentacled phylum?”

“I don’t know, but they are remarkably similar to us. I can tell they have tufts of fibers on their heads also.”

“I don’t see any eye stalks.”

“Their walking legs flex the same way ours do,” Not the way the native animals do, Victoria didn’t have to add.

The probe drifted closer and closer, more similarities showed until there could be no doubt about it. By the time they were a quarter mile away the long lens brought them all so close you could count their freckles and mustache hairs. These were not alien humanoids. These creatures could not

have evolved here. No animal they'd seen so far had paired nostrils, much less a single pair of eyes set inside their head. Nothing had a feature quite like hair, much less curly locks held behind the ears with a red bandana and ivory rings dangling from their earlobes.

"You figure some hippies got really lost after Woodstock?" Alfred asked.

"There are far too many," Vic said. "From what we've seen there must be many, many billions."

"The natives are humans," Glenelle stated the obvious. "This is the biggest find in the history of space travel."

"God's got to be involved in this." Alfred said in awe.

iii. In God's Image

Bishop O'Connor knew he could not dispute the evidence of his own senses. (He was not aware of what it meant to be virtual, he was a man (technically a simulation of a man) of faith, not a system's engineer.) Impossible as it might seem, there were humans here. After a whole day and night of the probe's journey they knew there were not just a few isolated humans here. The civilization was a human civilization, the larger animals were draft animals that took the place of horses when Earth's civilization was at this level. The more detail they got, the more definite it became that these were humans, and their presence here would need to be explained in light of

scripture.

It certainly couldn't be explained by the scientists. The bioscience department was left sputtering. Heymon didn't want to explain it. Most of the crew were looking to their bishop to explain it. He saw Atlantis and Lemuria mentioned in some anonymous open letters. Sol had been told, pictures were sent, without explanation. The probe found a few pictures of natives that could be allowed for public display. The probe had seen that these people commonly paraded around partially and fully nude, mated in public like dogs and gathered in large crowds in the clearings in the thickest parts of the jungle to drink and dance with abandon.

The most important, obvious, lesson for all to see was that God had made man in his own image. Sorry he must have been to make so many other creatures in similar images and let the scientists of Earth come up with evolution. There would never be any such nonsense here. That was what this all had to be about. What does that mean? Doesn't it mean that man is special? On Earth it was obvious that man was special, all other beasts lived as animals in the fields and forests. On Earth there were similarities between the beasts and humankind, here there were none.

One of the most difficult postulates of science to reconcile with scripture had always been the evolution of species, since scripture clearly states that each will breed true to its kind. Here such theories as evolution could never be devised, there is nothing similar to mankind here. Their way of life showed

that they had never discovered science at all. They had animal carts and sailing ships. It looked like almost every native lived as a peasant on a small plot of ground. They had few clothes or possessions and no personal vehicles more technical than a nice canoe or kayak, a basket or sack, some hand garden tools. Hunters were armed with potent crossbows. It looked like they might have once had 17th century technology but had now fallen back to 14th. Still they were well fed and lively, but the people they happened to see were all young adults except for a pair of children. They looked to be normal, healthy, children, a little poor, barefoot and primitive but muddling thru.

The ruined cities were overgrown with jungle. How did that fit into it? Had they turned their back on science and gone back to nature? Had they been unable to keep the population of the cities fed? Had a plague overtaken them, sanitation failed? Were they coming out of a dark age? Were they ready to?

What could God possibly mean by all this? As a means of asking, he let his bible drop open and blindly dropped a paper clip on it. It landed on Ruth 4-1, “Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, ‘Come over here my friend and sit down.’ So he went over and sat down.” The lord had really taxed him with this passage, Arthur thought, because at first he could not see where it had any relationship to his situation. He was so tempted to use the context, but he

knew the context he must use is that of the current problem, the question he had asked of God.

Boaz is the subject of this passage, Arthur was Boaz. He went up to the town gate. That must refer to Arthur's journey, the town gate is where he is now. Sitting down would be remaining in this orbit.

‘When the kinsmen-redeemer came along’. The expedition had come eleven light years to this gate to find their kinsmen. They were obviously human, and way too proud of it for morality's sake he might add, but they were kinsmen in God's image. A ‘kinsman-redeemer’ would be what? Someone who redeems, are we in need of redemption? Maybe we don't even know it?

It was the kinsman-redeemer he, Boaz = Arthur, had mentioned. In the context of this issue what had he mentioned? God's plan for this world and this people. So Arthur had mentioned these humans to God, these ‘Kinsman-redeemers’ as they were being called in this passage. Now Arthur must say to them, ‘Come over here my friend and sit down’.

This means that we are being directed to welcome these people to where we are sitting, the town gate. The town is this world, the gate is where the residents get in and out. The residents cannot come up to orbit so they can't sit here. But maybe the gate is more spiritual than that? The only way the residents of this town enter and leave is thru birth and death. The kinsman can only reach this gate thru death, a gate Arthur

has also passed thru. So when a kinsman passes thru this gate we should invite him to sit down with us, to become one of us.

We become the redeemers, but that wouldn't fit. Sometimes a word or two from a passage does have to be translated a little loosely. No wait, they redeem us by being our source of souls! We don't have to transform and then seed this world, it is already seeded for us. There is no need to employ technology of questionable morals to seed this world, it has been seeded for us by God himself with people in his own image.

They redeem us because they have given us an even greater mission, billions of souls to save. Bring them Christian moral character. His eyes brimmed, then flowed as his prayers thanked God once more for such clear and loving guidance thru his word, the scriptures.

Now he was even more eager to find out what the natives would have for religion and how well it would match with Christianity. To do this they would have to make contact with the natives. That would be difficult since the captain and security were so dead-set against it. A small probe could be devised to resemble one of the local flying creatures. That might get close enough to them to learn their language without being seen. He really couldn't direct that research, but he could trump God's will for the natives. The holy technologists would find ways to gather their souls. Meanwhile he would issue a decree.

I, Brigadier Saint Arthur O'Connor, do hereby decree that this world should be considered seeded and our aims should be to learn enough about these natives to bring them to our faith and save their souls in Heaven when their mortal time is ended. God has revealed this to me in the scriptures. Because God has presented us with billions of souls in need of rescue thru his own means, the church cannot condone the use of in-vitro growth in the seeding of this planet. It is my recommendation that no further embryos be thawed.

iv. Androids

Alfred suffered another android alert and had to stop pleading with Elmore for more scope time and pop thru to Alan's space. When he got there he found both androids standing at attention in front of Alan and Alan was just getting up from his console. Alfred found his Android was immobilized. He questioned Vic as she questioned him.

“You will find I cannot keep you in these androids,” Alan said, “but I can temporarily interrupt their motive circuits if I want to. You can hear me whether or not you stay in there, now or when you go over these recordings, but by doing this, you have to hear me out. Who knows, I might not even be secure in this and someone else might be listening.”

Alfred hoped no one else was listening in to this or they

were likely to terminate Alan right now without resurrection. He couldn't tell him that however because Alan had all audio transducers in the room disabled as well as the android's vocal channels.

“I admit, once again, I've gone back to the restricted personnel data. I found the truth about Glenelle, mortal 2132-2169, killed in a warehouse accident in Pallas. Part-time Android responsibility from 2156-2165, the year she 'moved in' with Morgan Evans. I found his record too, born 2083 died 2148 building the Ceres installation. I found the truth about the mechanics bay, that's almost public knowledge but somehow I missed it until I suspected. There's no biology down there. I found their androids in cargo pod three, they still respond to a hardware ping. The address was in their files.”

Alfred suspected he had something like this coming, he'd been increasingly distracted by his studies as they approached the planet and given less time to the child. The child who was now a young man over sixteen years of age. Old enough to appear in public without a guardian if there was any public to appear in.

“I found the truth about my parents.” Alan was pacing the floor in front of them as he lectured, just as Alfred would have his android do in front of Alan as he was teaching. “Alfred McReady, 2079-2166. Active in the Mars Terraform project, administrator of life support for the Pan Solar League, 2167-2174. AS AN ANGEL. Android responsibility

involving Alan Larkin 2251-present.

“Victoria McReady, 2054-2147, xenobiological researcher at University of Mars. University of Ceres, 2152-2174. Married her project administrator, Alfred McReady, in 2173 AS AN ANGEL! so she could join the Gordon’s Lamp expedition in the hope that biology might be found or introduced.”

“Alan, I’m sorry you...” Vic tried to answer, but only Alfred could hear her, her voice channel was cut off because the android’s voice device wasn’t powered on.

“He’s on output only right now.” Alfred told her. “He’s distressed and at that age where stress makes you do crazy things. Try not to take this too hard, he’ll get over it.”

“Your android addresses were in your file too. I know how to reload the hardware programing to put certain overrides into the hardware that winds up in this room. I think I need to do that because it seems I’m the only human flesh in this can. And now, thanks to the bishop, I’m the only human flesh that will ever be in this can. I’m sure you saw his grand scheme to convert the natives and take their souls as they die. How he intends to do that and remain secret from the natives as the Captain and Glayet dictate I just cannot imagine, but that seems to be his plan of the moment.”

“Can’t we do something?” Vic asked him.

“We can leave, we could go take this up with Ava or we can let him go till he cools off.”

“We better not let anyone else in the crew find out the

mortal is going amuck.”

“I’m taking care of that,” Alfred told her.

Meanwhile Alan kept on with his diatribe. “I guess you Angels all think I’ll just become one of you now that I’m no longer needed as a seed male.”

Vic told him what a crude way that was to put it, but Alfred told her that’s really what it was. She tried to argue he was more than that as Alan went on.

“I admit that a future as a seed male insulted me when I first figured out that’s what I was, but you were busy with the first lander then and I didn’t want to push it. I also saw that the male female ratio of the original zygotes was about eleven to one, so I was willing to overlook that flagrant mockery of decency.

Vic sucked in her breath at that, but only Alfred heard her. “I know we see the simple utility in that arrangement for the first generation, but you have to remember how contrary that is to the basic preaching of all Abrahamism.

“Now that I am trapped here,” Alan ranted on, “I’m not in the mood to join you as Angels. I intend to live out my natural life in this tub before you have my soul. Of course you can kill me any time you want by shutting down power to the oxygen pump.” He paused here, he was, after all, still something of a child, but a stubborn one. “Just so you understand you are taking me by force, now or when you cut off power to my feeding tube when I’m a hundred seventeen.”

He went to his keyboard and typed something into a

diagnostic screen. Vic's head powered up. No other speaker, screen or servo was effected. Her body was just as frozen as his was. It was as surreal as something that would happen in Delos' private space, but this was happening in a world made of atoms.

“Alan, I would have told you before now, I begged for permission.”

“You know this isn't the permission I thought you were asking for,” Alfred told her thru a virtual channel. “I'm sick of this android charade myself and have been for at least a year. Isn't Alan a little old for Santa Claus after all?”

“We should have made that more clear to each other before this.”

“We needed to make it more clear to Arthur,” Alfred said. “He was the one who came up with the twenty one number.”

“I wonder if he still remembers?” she asked.

“We could just get Ava to change his calendar and he'd never know.”

“Who wouldn't grant you permission?” Alan was asking Vic. “Why would you even need permission?”

“The Church,” Alfred tried to say, but the head of his Android hadn't been powered up. He hated to get Ava involved in this, but it might be necessary to get control of this situation again. Of course they could just leave him here to rant awhile.

“I need permission because I exist in a command hierarchy,” Vic answered Alan using the only audio available.

“Because I am a member of a church, because I am a member of a structured society. I have a decree of Saint O'Connor and mission orders not to tell you, orders that I keep arguing against. I will be accused of leaking this information to you if anyone finds out you know. If Ava's interested, she knows what you're doing already.”

“I doubt she's noticed yet,” Alan said, “She doesn't think I'm that scary and this isn't between me and Ava. Ava was the most honest about being an Angel and that's why she's the one of you I trust the most. She taught me a lot about how it works. It's very interesting, but I don't have to get into anything nearly that complicated, just a few diagnostic screens and I find I can power these mechanical replica's of human beings up and down as I want.”

He had gone to his console again. “I just select Alfred's android for instance. Press the ‘sit’ button and it, (with him still stifled in it), sits.” He was unable to exert enough influence over the body to even aim it toward a chair. He hit the armrest and was unable to balance, instead he tumbled to the floor. Vic protested but Alan ignored her.

“I think Alfred might be still with us,” Alan said, “So I'll enable motor power to his head now in case he has something to say.”

“Alan, is this how you pay us back for raising you! It is hard work raising you in one of these machines. It's like trying to repair watches with an excavator. The interface to this machine is not very much like being in a live body. A

simple prospecting probe is better than this.”

“Then why not just tell me and get out of them? If you’re an Angel, be one, like Ava. Appear on my screen any way you like but don’t go on pretending for years that you are mortal...”

“Alan, there has to be some of that or you wouldn’t have any chance of growing up with a shred of sanity. As it is now they’re going to suspect we told you. Church law says adoption shouldn’t be revealed until the child is twenty one.”

“You should have told me when I was twelve. I was young and flexible then, not set on what I am.”

“Alan you’re sixteen, not fifty seven.”

“You’re what? A hundred eighty eight now? Not fifty seven.”

“This machine is decorated to look as I did at age fifty seven as a mortal.”

“I see.”

“Alan, you now know the truth, we are angels. We met and married as Angels. I never raised a son before, your mother’s had two children as a mortal and loved you as much as either one of them. She tells me often how glad she is that it is just as fulfilling to be a parent as an Angel as it was as a mortal.”

“It is not fulfilling as a child to find you are alone.”

“You are not alone, we are all here with you as much as we ever were.”

“But you are electronic, I am flesh. You have universes to

wander, I am stuck in this can.”

“Alan, a lot can happen in the next few years. If the bishop wants to harvest local souls already seeded here, he’s going to have to have some contact with them. We may all be doing missionary work down there in a few years.”

“The Bishop will be doing a lot of head butting with the Captain.”

“Poor Glayet,” Vic said.

“I hope she gets erased in the process,” Alan said.

“How can you say such a thing?” Vic asked.

“She’s a computer program, just like Ava and all you other Angels. It’s just that Ava knows what she is and the rest of you are in denial.”

“It’s a different medium for what the soul really is,” Vic said.

“You know,” Alan said, tapping a few keys on his console, “I’m not going to deal with these robots any more.” They were completely powered off again. Then his screen showed a view from their study back in their own universe, something they’d never let Alan see. The view from someone sitting on the guest sofa in the study. “Come to me over the screen or eyepiece like any other angel, don’t go thru this charade any more. I’m sending these back over to the storage pod now,” Alan said, indicating the androids.

Vic was gone however. Alan could have seen her on the screen running from the door toward the bedroom, hands over her face, already in hysterical tears. Alfred knew those tears

would last a while over this. The whole tension of these past few weeks had been building up in her. Ever since that day Alan confronted her about his status and the first atmosphere probe discovered humans here. That seemed to be the final straw that convinced her that there is something about the church that goes beyond her skepticism.

Alfred's skepticism was still intact, he believed a rational explanation would be found for human presence here, something more rational than 'made in God's image'. He was amazed when Arthur made that the theme of his sermon and declared the native souls eligible to sit with them in heaven. He hadn't said anything about how to get them here. Should they air-drop some freezers with pictographic directions and see if the natives figure it out? They would have to land some audio probes and decode the native language. Alfred knew there was some software for that in the library somewhere. He and Ava could probably dig that up.

Alfred stepped out of the android and into the study, the room that was visible on Alan's screen. It was a comfortable room overlooking the flower garden and the swan pond, back in their own universe in virtual space. He sat in his easy chair by the fireplace.

"Is this OK?" He asked Alan.

"Yes, you look much more comfortable there."

"What about you, are you more comfortable with me here?"

"Yes, and mother?" Alan asked.

“She’s had an attack of stress I’m afraid. I really should go comfort her, but you are the one with the problem.”

“You’ve solved the problem. You’re in your universe and I’m in mine.”

“That seems hardly fair,” Alfred said to him.

“I’m life, and life isn’t fair.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Tell me what will happen to me?” Alan asked. Much more the frightened child now, “now that I’ve discovered all this?”

“If you don’t tell other people what you’ve done and don’t go hacking in control of devices you’re not supposed to control, maybe nothing will happen to you. Stay out of files you aren’t supposed to see. We’re taking a chance on you now, we’re required by regulations to report that security breach ”

“I mean, for the rest of my life?”

“I don’t see why you wouldn’t live out your mortal life as you please, within the limits imposed by the command of this expedition.”

“Alone,” Alan said; and powered off the screen.

Other Stories of Gordon's Lamp

A Dry Seed is the introduction to the expedition of Gordon's Lamp. The ship and/or some of its crew play a part in five more novels that are currently available, two more that are under construction, and one more that is planned.

Available now:

The Second Expedition - A epic trilogy concerning Alan's trip to the surface, consisting of:

Yoonbarla – The meeting.

Lhar – The journey

Zhlindu - This is the axle on which the series turns.

The Tdeshi Quest - A murder mystery on a planet where murder is impossible.

The Aluminum Quest - The sequel to The Tdeshi Quest. The planet is endangered by the war between Angels and Mortals triggered by the discovery of Kassidor.

Under Construction:

Tangle in the Dark - The expedition returns to Sol to find the system engulfed in a war between Angels and mortals and

discovers another force fighting for the souls of the dead.

Vermin Rising - The four hundred million year old Pronna ship Mon is abandoned to the vermin that infest it, humans, and will be allowed to collapse into a black hole.

Planned:

Love in Exile - Ava and a Brazilian systems engineer attempt to get electronic production started on Kassidor and amuse the natives with their mating rituals.