

# **Alien Skies**



**Christine Berthel**

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Written by

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C. Bertel, J. Gouranton

European Journal of Cell Biology, Volume 25, Number 1

August 1981

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book as a gift to the Ancients and their advanced and beautiful civilization, so that they may return one day and teach us

I also give my deepest thanks to my husband Noël whose support helped me write this book

This tale is a reflection on time...

# Prologue

## The First Ones

The two lovers were clinging to each other, their tall silhouettes stark against the blazing, red sky. In the eerie light, his white and shining hair with its deep blue streaks, so typical for those of their race, was now tinted by the ominous glow. She knew that her braids reflected the same blush. She was weeping while she stroked his hair, then his face, wiping away the teardrops from his thin features.

The sky was burning.

The death of all they held dear was near. Their sun had given them heat and light for uncounted generations, but now it had turned against them. Its corona had been growing within hours to five times, six times, ten times its former size, while the magnetic field of their world had diminished. Huge filaments of plasma were moving like strands of hair, threatening them all, and the red braids were drawing nearer, ready to engulf their world.

They belonged to the race of the First Ones. He was the king of this world, and she was his wife, the queen. She had given him children and both had ruled this world wisely, for many lifetimes.

They had known for some time that their beautiful garden world was condemned. The white tree, their dwelling place, with the luminescent pearl-like fruit was no longer to be. The Great Karn with his underwater leaves draped like so many indigo

sheets would no longer sing, the melody of the Great Ones no longer be heard.

Prophecies had been sung, for theirs was a language of music. The light high notes falling like sparkling droplets had been replaced by dark and deep sounds, their song of joy becoming a chant of tragedy.

They all knew the cosmic science, and they had asked many times: Why? How?

They had implored their Creator to be spared, and they had even received an answer: It was not HIS will, the decision had been made in the Higher Order of the ever-becoming fractal of Creation, when the Great Shadow, the relentless one, had been passing above.

Nothing could be done. They had tried to stabilize their world's magnetic shield, and for what could have been an eon it even worked. But their small galaxy had been drawn into another, bigger one, then swallowed, and at one point the magnetic guide lines of their star group had fused with the bigger galaxy.

They had watched as the lines of cataclysmic events were converging towards their peaceful little planet, and they were terrified. The gigantic arcs of incandescent plasma now had reached their star system. Then, the terror turned into acceptance of their destiny, and they transcended.

What can you do when you know that your world is condemned? Some had moved to outer planets and moons, while others preferred to dissolve their body and leave for the realm of all souls. But the king and the queen choose to remain and to die with the spirit of their planet and with all the life forms which had been created, the trees, the plants the flowers, the insects, the little animals, the birds... The conscious and



sentient beings would help the lesser ones to reach the Spirit of the Creator

Others had taken the same option.

They remembered their chant that was greeting the sun at dawn, triumphant, multi-voiced.

She sang the clear notes of the pearl tree's name for one last time, and he joined.

Then the plasma reached out to them. A wall of fire hit them. No pain was felt, it was so fast, and in an instant, they were floating with the other souls, like soap bubbles dispersed.

Their souls drifted outside of Time, they met their Creator and became one with HIM for a duration. Here they existed in the realm of all where nothing was yet formed, but all became possible. They were cherished, held dear, and HE even sang with them in their minds.

The First Hour of the Cosmos passed.

When the Galactic Clockwork struck the end of the First Hour, they were sent into Time again. Down, down they went: deep, deep into matter. They felt the pull of Love, the binding force of all. Their Creator's will and His love were guiding them, towards their mission, the seeding of Life on other Worlds.

And they imprinted their Creator's likeness on life. Holy Purpose bestowing Holy Form.

# Olden World

## Ancient Evil

Something stirred in the Deep.

Several planets were spiralling around the small yellow sun, and one of them was a gas giant.

Deep down under domes of swirling fumes, which had become liquid under the enormous pressure, something stirred. Some kind of intelligence, intent on incorporating other parts of organized thinking. Eventually, only seven of these ravenous centres of information remained. It wanted to continue to eat and for that it had to go onto the surface, projecting itself outside.

On the blue watery planet, it found other forms of intelligence, encased in perishable matter, but their spirit seemed to survive whenever the encasing perished, and they appeared to be even in contact with some unknown principle from the Unseen.

Very carefully, the intelligence from the Deep explored and adapted its thinking to their thinking, taking over parts of their minds like a many-legged spider with a foothold on different specimens among its prey. Some of these could be influenced, others not.

It had no soul.

But the prey became aware of the intrusion in its mind, the beings of this world resented it tremendously and tried to rid themselves of the thing feeding on their minds.

They seemed to receive help from the Unseen, and they waged war on the seven-headed spider entity. They called it the "Over-mind".

In the end, only some minds could be influenced by it.

But that was sufficient to sabotage their ventures and to keep them from escaping elsewhere without the Over-mind predator knowing it.

## **Cradle World**

The Hum in the Heavens ceased. A hush fell on them all. It was a moment of utter silence

In an instant of overwhelming sensuality, twins had been born to one of them: a boy and a girl.

How was that possible? Theirs was a race of extreme longevity, perfectly formed, highly spiritual. However, with this longevity came a lack of fertility. You had to wait a very long time until you were able to have a son or a daughter. This unique child was then carefully tutored, taught and guided into adulthood and a meaningful life.

The world seemed to be perfect, ruled by a council of the twelve oldest and wisest of them all, the great souls who could even leave whenever they wanted and materialize back again, after a refreshing and insightful stay in the Abzu, the Realm of Soul-Spirit.

Perfection comes at a price, and it can mean stagnation. Some of them could not escape a slightly jaded feeling linked to a lack of vitality, although this was considered to be highly unspiritual in a world where spirituality and resonance with the cosmic forces were highly prized.

Now a son and a daughter were born at the same time to one of the princes, and, suddenly, the tablets of destiny they were all so busily writing in the Realm of Soul-Spirit lay dull and dark in their very hands, the shine of the words gone. With the life of the words gone, the primordial source did no longer sustain their decrees.

Destiny had been unwritten by the event. What did this mean?

The person concerned, one of the princes and a commander of their precious space shuttles, was equally astounded. His mate had left for the Abzu without explanation. Maybe she knew something he was not aware of.

He held the two small white bundles in his arms, careful not to damage them.

“You are so fragile!” he murmured. “I must protect you at all costs!”

He gazed into their faces, and he trembled with the emotions that were submerging him: excitement, love, but also worry. How would the others and the Watchers in the hierarchy react? A sense of foreboding filled him, and he knew that it would not be easy to keep them out of harm’s way.

Falling on his knees he started to sing his prayers to the Godhead.

“Please, Great AN, let them be safe, let them be protected. Let them have a beautiful destiny. May they be cherished by you.”

Many times, he sang these words. At the sound of his deep voice, they opened their eyes and looked at him, and his surprise was complete: “The girl has blue eyes!”

He was a scientist and well versed in the rules of genetic recombination: A girl with blue eyes was an anomaly in his line. Where did these come from?

“It must have been a mutation,” he muttered.

But his disquiet grew, because it seemed to be a sign from God Himself.

“What shall they make of this?” he asked under his breath.

As if on cue, someone entered his private space. Only those of the Inner Council could do that. A tall man stepped through

the doorway, a helmet on his head. This helmet with its magnetic spools stabilized and enhanced the intellectual pattern of its bearer. It also guaranteed privacy against possible eavesdroppers.

*"Shilim — Peace to you, Ea Anki,"* he said on entering.

*"Shilim* also to you, Councillor Neidbogħ Minn," the proud father answered.

"What have we here? The tablets of destiny are broken. Fate has been changed!" The Councillor was not hostile, he even seemed to share the joyful excitement, but his statement was ominous.

"What do I see? Twins! A boy and a girl! And she has blue eyes! They'll need protection. I shall be with you when you present them to the Council of the Twelve."

Anki knew that their hierarchy was established rigorously. Even the succession for the throne was regulated by law. The first-born son would be king, but if his father had a second son by a half-sister, the Crown would be placed on his head instead. This principle was kept also on the lower echelons. Military ranks were grouped by units of sixty and fifty, then forty. Rules existed for rank order, for commercial transactions, for poetry competitions, rules existed for professional choices, rules were multiple and many. Rules were even more important, now, since the problem of the Over-mind had been discovered.

Everything was ordered and thus stability ensured. But this sudden birth of not one but two children seemed to have provoked something like an annulment of the carefully written destinies. Could it have been God who had introduced a factor of randomness into the equation?

"Is all now unwritten or just part of it?" Anki asked.

“We do not know exactly. We have to observe and evaluate the consequences.”

Anki caressed the girl's little arms, very carefully and softly, using his finger like a feather. She opened her mouth like a tiny birdling and seemed to like the touch. He was overwhelmed, tears were forming in his eyes, and even the Councillor was moved.

“Ea Anki, the Council shall convene in ten days, on Kur Dilmun,” he only said and left.

Magnetic forces and electric fields are far stronger than the gravitational pull of planets. The ionosphere was used as a source for power. In this advanced society, floating cities were built in the air. These cities were swimming on magnetic cushions across the landscape which was kept mostly untouched, so as not to mar its beauty. On some selected areas, food was grown under transparent domes, because they did not wish to interfere with the weather patterns.

“Angad” their world was named. United with Heaven. Heaven's Junction.

It was on Kur Dilmun, the First Floating City, that Petyan, Anki's first son had been stationed as a very young officer. Petyan, whom he had taught all that he knew and who had volunteered for a mission where space vessels would be sent to other planetary systems in order to export life elsewhere.

Petyan had loved his world, he used to watch it from above for hours, and he had explored its mountains and forests thoroughly. His paintings had been noted by the Council for the exact and beautiful rendering of the planet's flora and fauna. But even more important was his ability to translocate into the Abzu, the Realm of Soul-Spirit, and come back with astonishing ease, just like the greatest among them. For this reason, it had been decided to grant him the leadership of the mission: he had been

selected as ship captain for the pioneers. He was the one who had been entrusted with the planetary seeds.

But someone did not want mankind to succeed in colonizing other planets. Yes, the Over-mind. And those it influenced had acted.

Petyan had been murdered. Not only the empathic link with his father had ceased all of a sudden, but also his Soul-Spirit had not been found after his death. It was as if his soul was no more. This was the real tragedy in a society where physical death did not mean much, for after very long life-spans practically everyone was able to ascend to the higher realms where one would find everyone else again.

But Petyan's death was different. His Soul-Spirit appeared to have been erased.

Anki had been grieving for a very long time. He had been incapable of feeling joy, and life seemed to be exclusively about the fulfilment of one's duty. Of course, he had demanded that be judged and executed those responsible. It was in the interest of all, he had argued, because they were carriers of a hitherto unknown parasite of the mind, and thus a danger to all. He had examined the pictures of their mind-patterns and found several anomalies in the display, as if another — alien! — mind covered it.

The tribunal was held in the E-Din, on She-to-An, the capital, better known as Kur Dilmun. The hearings were transmitted everywhere since the planned space flight had been prepared for years by their whole society. The materials had to be mined without spoiling the planet's resources, and the preservation chambers with the magnetic spools and the complicated composite fields had to be made more efficient. These Mu-chambers served to preserve the mind of those sent on the long



voyage while they slept. The human mind is a very complex ever-changing field, but certain patterns remain unchanged.

Now, it was all for nothing, the ship, its crew and the planet's seeds were all gone, the mission a failure.

The great hall was crowded. Cameras transmitted the proceedings to those standing outside and to the other cities. While the assassins were led into the audience hall of Angad's High Tribunal, everyone fell silent.

The known facts were stated again, the deed summarized, the consequences enumerated.

Ea Anki, the bereaved father and also the scientific expert for the control of the Mu-Chambers, reported what he knew.

"Petyan, my only son, is no more. You all know what this implies!" He paused and let this sink in.

Then he continued: "How do you keep someone from telling the names of his murderers in our race accustomed to teleportation into the Abzu? What was done to him was more than death!"

Petyan, he thought, my son, my only child, you could leave at will, and very easily. How did they imprison you in your body?

"Must I spell it out?

My son's soul is nowhere to be found. That can only mean that his Mu was damaged. I had personally checked the magnetic spools stabilizing his mind repeatedly, they were working and in perfect order. I had studied the interference patterns so often that I know them by heart!

Something had kept him from leaving his damaged body, there was sabotage! He suffered unending pain! He was tortured into oblivion!" He shouted the last sentence. "Therefore, his death was terrible, his spirit filled with agony until the end, until he was no more!"

Anki's voice broke. Silence hung in the room like a heavy cloud.

The three Great Judges listened carefully. The accused stood silently with sullen expressions on their faces.

"What can you say to your defence?" the saboteurs had been asked by the Great Judges.

But they never answered. They did not express regret for the aborted mission, nor did they forward an explanation, but when they realized that they would be condemned, their behaviour changed dramatically. They started to rave and rant, which had never been witnessed before. Like people possessed.

Everyone was shocked. All realized that something evil and foreign to their world had overtaken these men and women. Only one option remained now: the carriers of this evil force had to be executed, and their minds cleansed in the Abzu, the realm of spirit-soul. One day, it was hoped, they would be brought back into their world as children.

But after the execution, a message was sent from the Abzu. The criminals were not found any more, not in matter and not among the Soul-Spirits. Their being had disappeared totally! No trace was left! It was as if their very souls had been devoured!

This also came as a shock, for it meant that the culprits had not been themselves for quite a while. It also meant that the possessing spirit had expertly hidden its game, because no one had realized that it had become the main agent in this matter, with the murderers executing its will. Alas, at one point they must have invited it. Somewhere in their psyche, a grey area had allowed the mind-virus to establish itself.

Justice had in part been served by fate, for they all knew, when you write something against the soul of a fellow being you use a kind of double-edged stylus which engraves the same

pattern in your own soul. By wiping out Petyan's mind, they had programmed their own demise.

And Anki discovered what so many bereaved people eventually learn: the punishment of the murderers does not bring the loved ones back, and happiness eluded him for a very long time. He held himself apart from the others, for his grief had a dampening effect on any enthusiasm they might develop for this or that venture. They perceived him as aloof, a very tall dark-haired man with an even darker countenance, for he was hiding his sorrow behind a forbidding armour.

So, they left him alone, most of the time, and he arrived at a state of quiet satisfaction when he could pursue his scientific explorations of the magnetic spools and field generators for the preservation chambers of the mind, the Mu. They needed to be perfect in every way, so that never again anyone would be erased into non-existence like Petyan, his son.

The whole world took stock of their resources. They still planned to carry on with their space missions. After all, they had been preparing these for a very long time, and one of the possible candidates among the other-worldly planets had been thoroughly analysed, many life seeds planted, and three large way stations established.

Reflecting on all this, while he was humming softly to the little birdling children in his arms, Anki thought that maybe God had just wanted to compensate for the terrible tragedy of his first son's murder. Maybe there was no need to look for some supernatural significance at all. Maybe the divine plan had been to guarantee the continuation of his line. He had no other children, nor had he a mate now, since she had left and remained in the Realm of spirit-soul, with God, he hoped.

He knew it would not be easy to raise the two children alone.

“You are Ninti, my little Lady of Life,” he said to the baby girl. Her wide blue eyes seemed to fixate him, as if she already could focus on his face.

Then he looked at his sleepily blinking son. “I shall call you Akenor Dur-to-zi at the Presentation”.

The Presentation Day came faster than he would have liked, for he relished the quiet time alone with his children. He sang to them whenever he could, and he prayed to the Godhead many a time, begging that they be spared the fate of his firstborn son. Once or twice he even seemed to receive an answer from the realm beyond image and form.

For the great day he went to Kur Dilmun. Its original name had been She-to-An, From Heaven to Earth, for here the Watchers from the Abzu would sometimes manifest and even materialize. As always, he admired the graceful architecture of the central building, a soaring pyramid with light-reflecting panels on its outside, shining even in the night. It was the highest point of Kur Dilmun.

A large space with a flight of steps led to its entrance. It was on these steps that Petyan had read his poem of farewell to an assembly of one thousand people before he left to enter the process of preparation for his mission. It must have been immediately afterwards that he had been taken by his enemies.

Anki was holding the two precious bundles, each in one arm. Slowly he climbed the imposing stairway, marvelling how fast his grief had turned into exhilaration. But it was exhilaration mixed with apprehension. In his excitement, he even had forgotten to put the helmet with the magnetic enhancer-spools on his black hair.

The fact that the tablets of Destiny had lost their shine was worrisome. These little babies had caused an upheaval right upon their arrival. What would the Council decide? How were

these children to be received? Would the Council reserve the final decision to itself in all questions of their destiny? Would his role as a parent be diminished, did they plan to put him, Ea Anki, under tutelage?

He was determined to fight for his right. He would not accept to share. Not in this case.

Flustered, he stepped onto the high balcony with his two children. He was so intent on protecting them at all costs that he had not minded the order to appear as he was without his usual armour, the magnetized tunic that served to deflect any hostile endeavour. Thus, he was supposed to show in front of all citizens that he was able-bodied and the father of the twins.

"No helmet, no tunic, you are a sorry picture," he chided himself.

In the clear white space, he was clearly seen by everyone, while the cameras were transmitting the scene into the homes on the other cities. Behind him he felt the presence of First Councillor, a clear sign of the benevolent attitude of the Council in this matter.

He lifted the left arm with the little boy. "I name you Akenor Dur-to-Zi, my son and my heir," he declared.

Then he held up the baby girl: "I name you Ninti, the little Lady of Life, for Life has made a promise by giving you to me." He added with sudden knowledge of her real name: "You are Anta."

Now, where did that come from? He had known all of a sudden that this was her name as it was inscribed in Time: Lady of Life, coming from Heaven.

He turned, his cloak trailing behind him, and lifted the babies up towards the tall figure of the Councillor who performed a gesture of blessing with his hands. "None shall harm you here, Little Ones. May God protect you."

In the wide space rejoicing was heard. Many were smiling and talking excitedly to each other.

But there were those who held back, looking worried or outright gloomy, for they knew that something in the writings of fate had changed since the arrival of the twins, and they resented it.

## **The Council Meeting**

The Council of the Annuna of Angad was held immediately after the Presentation. The date and hour had been determined after communication with the Watchers, those who stayed in the Realm of Soul-Spirit and did not teleport back into matter. Some of those Watchers were ancient kings who even could communicate with the Godhead. They most certainly had made inquiries about the matter at hand.

The current Council was seated at the long table. Fruit and crystals filled with fresh and fragrant water were laid out, bright colours of yellow, orange and green against the white of the table, nothing heavy, because they needed to be finely attuned to those ready to descend for a while.

The tablets and screens and boxes containing the magnetic field generators were disposed as well. The whole space was shielded against intruders and possible unlicensed listeners.

Ea Anki was sitting close to his half-brothers Shin Nannar and Addad Iti. Side by side, the two brown-haired brothers and the black-haired one were facing the Council, which was composed of the mightiest Lords of their world. It was Iti who had been promised the kingship, although he was the younger brother; but his mother was a half-sister of the king, and the rules of succession were very clear about this.

To their right, several empty chairs were awaiting illustrious arrivals. Royalty was expected.

The little ones in Anki's arms grew restless, and he calmed them with a word of authority — gentle but firm — which they could not understand, of course, but which was quite effective.

The little boy fell asleep, not so the girl, but at least she kept quiet.

All of a sudden, the participants were enthralled by an otherworldly feeling. Something akin to a forcefield descended and an aura of might was felt. Several of the Watchers had teleported from the Abzu. They had arrived in full paraphernalia, clad in their protective armour, wearing helmets and magnetic tunics.

Then the King and the Queen for this time made their entrance: Anu, the King, and Antu, his spouse, both in regal attire and wearing their tiaras. Their homestead was not far from here at a choice spot on Kur Dilmun, from where they were able to overlook the city and even behold the landscape underneath.

They came through the door like normal people, for they did not believe in teleportation as the best means to arrive someplace when one had taken the option of life in the material universe. If you want to live your life fully, you must stay in it, they used to say. For these two rulers the journey was the most important part of the experience, to be made in awareness and certainly not just as a means to an end, which could be shortened or even abolished at the slightest whim.

At last, the three kings of the past age descended from the Beyond and a hush fell on the assembly. With light and might, they appeared, through the portal they stepped, tall hieratic figures, seeming even taller with their helmets worn like crowns.

At each new arrival presentations were made, for it was an official meeting and an important one. All inspected Anki's children closely and most smiled at them, even though they seemed very concerned about the implications of their birth.

As soon as all seats were taken, the question of the vanishing decrees was raised. The ground on which their society was built seemed to have shifted... The course of events as well as the



whole destiny of it had been changed by the children's arrival, but it was unclear why and in what way exactly.

Eventualities had been pondered and probabilities calculated. Anu and Antu had been consulted, their appreciation of the situation taken very seriously in the higher echelons.

"Do these children represent a danger?" That was Shin Nannar's question.

Anki was taken aback. 'Shin... always the careful one. You never know what he might be thinking.' He had expected support rather than suspicion from his half-brother. After all, he was the twins' uncle.

His tone was severe: "These little innocent ones should be a source of joy for the life brought to us. Their arrival is the best thing that ever happened to our stagnant society, where everyone is comfortably installed in a rigid setting. Have you seen any new scientific break-through recently? Have you read an astonishing piece of literature, these last ten years?"

He paused for effect. The Lords all looked at him, listening. He had touched upon a delicate problem.

Then he continued: "We are heading directly towards stagnation! We need renewal. If we refuse renewal, we are dead! And the fact that the tablets of destiny have been unwritten should be an opportunity for us to recreate our way of being and to see events in a fresh light. The arrival of these children has not been foretold, and our destiny has been changed, but that is a good thing."

His voice rang out through the council chamber. "In what way? I cannot say, but this I know: Renewal means life! Stagnation means death!"

There was a brief silence.

"We had written good destinies," one of the Lords objected and several made gestures of agreement. "Now, our future has been compromised."

"No! Our future has not been compromised!" Anki retorted heatedly. "We must see it as a chance to do better. Particularly in view of the danger our planet is facing. No, my children were not the cause of the changed destinies, they are the cure! The Over-mind means death. The cure to death is life."

The Lords looked at the two small bundles in Anki's arms. The little girl yawned and squeezed her eyes, but then, she blinked and seemed to look back at them.

"Why has she blue eyes? This genetic trait is inexistent in your line!"

"Why were two of them given to you at the same time? Some of us never had even one child!"

"Now, tell us what kind of manipulation you invented! Souls are not produced automatically just by sexual intercourse! Something else intervened!"

"Yes!" Anki was angry. "Someone intervened. God Himself!"

King Anu came to his defence. At the sound of his deep voice everyone grew quiet: "We rejoice over the birth of the little ones. They are a blessing."

Then he added: "The Over-mind, however, represents the greatest danger we have ever faced. We shall act accordingly."

That was the cue for the Watchers. They made their announcements calmly. Their voices rang out, certain voices clear, others sounding like brass.

"Mainly, these events lie far in the future. The possibilities for renewal of our People have been newly inscribed on the Tablets of Destiny, but we shall not see them unfold for a very long time."

“Renewal?” Someone asked. “Yes,” it was confirmed and it was good news.

“Before any renewal, another problem demands to be solved: The Over-mind must be eradicated completely from our world! Its spider-like intelligence seems to be part of a hive mind. Cut off one branch, it grows back elsewhere! You cannot easily affect the whole.

It shall be a relentless war, for they know us all too well. They have studied us for a long time before making their move. Now, all those infested are to be executed immediately, in order to be cleansed in the afterlife. We must not wait until their souls are completely incorporated into the Hive, for then, they are no more!”

Gasps were heard among the audience. This was a very harsh judgment.

When this announcement was made, Anki entered a state of mind that could only be described as a trance. It did not last, some moments only, but during this time he acquired the knowledge that the girl was destined for him, but at a very high price.

He knew with all his being that Anta had a key role to play in the war against the Over-mind. Only the very far future was concerned, much later, at the end of many life times and cycles. Time would pass, much time, and she would not agree to do as she was told, but maybe it was this her refusal to obey that brought the change about.

For one moment, Anki had this utter conviction, but then the moment passed and the certainty was gone. Maybe he had imagined it all for just a moment. You had to apply to the future the principle of uncertainty, for you could only foresee probabilities. One could never be sure until the present was observed by the Conscious Universe and became past.

Where do such convictions stem from? He answered his own thoughts immediately: of course, they come from the Highest. Only He could lay such foreknowledge into one's being without you even noticing it. It rose inside your heart and you grew aware of it gradually. No trumpet here, no great voice making impressive speeches, just a quiet thought. And then just the memory of a thought. But memories are fickle.

"This came from the Creator," he told himself. He did not share the thought.

The announcements of the re-written fates continued. "The space program for new missions is maintained, we shall bring seeds to other planets".

They already had sent space probes and even androids to a system not so far away and the seeding had already started. This system had been studied, the movements of its planets analysed; it would be further explored and then another mission sent, first to the way stations, then to the new planets.

Second Way Station, which had been named Ni-bi-ru, probably could not be maintained. The system consisted of two binary stars, a bright, yellow one, and another small star, which was lying at the edge of the magnetic guidelines of the star group in question. The smaller star was a red dwarf, which had not been ignited by the electric plasma in the magnetic lines and gave off mostly heat in the infrared spectrum of light. Three planets were circling it, but it was too difficult to maintain a presence there because of the lack of light in the visible spectrum.

Therefore, it was decided to transfer the settlement to the planets orbiting the brighter star.

These planets had been counted and visited. The first one to do it had been the exiled king Alalu who had ruled in the Beginning of their reckoning. After his exile, he had taken upon

himself to push his explorations further and beyond the great planetary gas giants, nearer to the other star. He acted with great bravery and the information he gathered was precious. The sixth and seventh planets counting from the arrival in the system had very promising features. The eighth and ninth were far too hot and would never be inhabited.

It was an imperative that extra precautions be taken in preparing the next missions and the transfer of the settlements. As much information as possible should be gathered before any other colony was established.

And of course, the Over-mind had to be eliminated at all costs, even if it meant to postpone all space flights for a while.

Passions ran high while they were discussing this threat and the meeting transformed into a war council. How could you trap an entity that used the minds of its victims only in part and was not easily differentiated from its host? How were they to eradicate something without soul? Where did it come from?

If they did not find any other means to fight this hitherto unknown evil, they had to execute anyone who displayed symptoms like murderous intent or hate, if only to keep his soul from being totally overtaken. Very rarely had they used this kind of ultimate punishment, but they realized the danger they were all in, if the hive mind was allowed to overtake more of their citizens unchecked.

When enough people give in to murderous excitement, peace cannot prevail, for hurt turns into hate and then into vengeance. Their beautiful world could be ruined.

Maybe they would be able in time to deflect the Over-mind's attention to what it liked most, and to lure it elsewhere, away from their own souls, but they had to find the means.

The worry weighed on them all.